



World Christian Fellowship

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Attitude & Action.

Matthew 5:21-48 Introduction

Matthew 5:21-26, *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’²² But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.²³ Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.²⁵ Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.²⁶ Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.*

Attitude behind the act.

Most people evaluate their lives and the lives of other people on external appearance.

1 Samuel 16:7, *but the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."*

John 7:24, *Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."*

2 Corinthians 10:7, *Do you look at things according to the outward appearance? If anyone is convinced in himself that he is Christ's, let him again consider this in himself, that just as he is Christ's, even so we are Christ's.*

- There are people who commend themselves on the basis of their outward appearance.
- There are people who are satisfied with how they behave externally.
- There are people who evaluate others on the basis of what they see, visibly, on terms of religious behaviour.

Typical of fallen man. He is basically satisfied with externals.

God is not so concerned with the outside as He is with the inside.

The outside is only validated insofar as it is representative of what is on the inside.

In **Matthew 5:21-48**, as our Lord gives standards for living in His kingdom, as He redefines and reemphasizes the divine standard given in the law of God.

What Jesus wants to say here is the inside is infinitely more revealing, and important than the outside. What you are on the inside is what God is concerned with.

Matthew 5:20, *For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Now the scribes and the Pharisees had a righteousness that was external. What Jesus is saying is you must have one that exceeds that, which is internal.

God is concerned about what you really are, not what you appear to be. It is the internal that is infinitely more important than the external.

The righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees was an external, ceremonial, ritualistic, and hypocritical legalism. The righteousness that God demands is something internal.

It isn't anything new, but this has been the standard God required always. Jesus isn't articulating something never before known.

1 Kings 8:39, *then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men),*

God is to respond to men not on the basis of outward deeds, but on the basis of the heart, which God alone knows.

1 Chronicles 28:9, *“As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever.*

The same emphasis. God is concerned with the inside not the outside.

2 Chronicles 16:9, *For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars.”*

Psalm 7:9, *Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, But establish the just; For the righteous God tests the hearts and minds.*

Proverbs 16:2, *All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, But the Lord weighs the spirits.*

A man may justify his ways, but God will weigh his spirit.

Jeremiah 17:10, *I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.*

Revelation 2:23, *And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.*

Now the standard that God set is critical.

The standard that God sets to evaluate men and women is the standard of the heart. The message is clear.

God is concerned with external behaviour. Yes, absolutely! But it is only justified insofar as it is the outgrowth of internal righteousness, for God evaluates the heart.

In verses 21 to 48 will call us to examine our hearts repeatedly. Our Lord is describing the citizens of His kingdom here.

Jesus gives a description of the essential nature of a kingdom citizen in **Matthew 5:3-12**.

He described the character of a true believer.

- ✓ They are poor in spirit.
- ✓ They mourn over sin.
- ✓ They are meek.
- ✓ They hunger and thirst after righteousness.
- ✓ They are merciful.
- ✓ They are pure in heart.
- ✓ They are peacemakers.
- ✓ They will be persecuted.
- ✓ They will be reviled. But they will also rejoice.

Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus shows how people with that kind of character function in the world.

Two things.

They become salt in verse 13,

They become light in verse 14.

They are the only hope for society.

They are the only hope for the truth reaching lost man.

Jesus shows how such people living by such principles relate to the Old Testament law.

Why?

Because this is critical to the Jews listening to Him speak. Because so far, what He has said is revolutionary to them. Theirs is purely external religion, and He has laid down axioms that are not common to their understanding of religion.

Their question at that time is that,

How does it relate to the Old Testament?

How does it relate to Moses?

How does it relate to the rabbis have taught?

How does it relate to the system of traditional law that we charge to?

The Jews to whom Jesus was preaching would lean so totally on the teachings related to their own Judaistic law that our Lord couldn't bypass this section.

Jesus says that God's standard is higher than yours. What you now known as a righteous standard is unacceptable.

Matthew 5:17, *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil.*

Jesus spoke about the pre-eminence of the Law of God.

Matthew 5:18, *For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.*

Jesus affirms the permanence of the Law of God.

Matthew 5:19, *Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

Jesus spoke about the consequences of the Law of God.

Matthew 5:20, *For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Matthew chapters 5,6, and 7 are Jesus' explanation of what He said in **Matthew 5:17-20**.

How do these beatitudes relate to the Old Testament?

How do they relate to the Judaism extant at that time?

How do they relate to what these Jews knew as their system of religion?

V 21-22, *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' ²²But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of*

the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

Matthew 5:27-28, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Matthew 5:31-32, "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' ³²But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

Matthew 5:33-34, "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' ³⁴But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne;

Matthew 5:38-39, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

Matthew 5:43-44, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to

those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

Six specific illustrations.

1. Murder
2. Lust
3. Divorce
4. Oath
5. Vengeance
6. Loving enemies.

They are all practical.

They all follow a similar pattern.

Jesus is saying, “Your religion teaches you this, but I say unto you.”

What He’s doing is this that He is not comparing Himself with the Old Testament.

He is not raising the standard higher than the law of God.

He is not talking about what Moses said.

He is not talking about what the Old Testament said.

He is not talking about what God said.

He is talking about what their religious system taught them.

He is saying that your standard is too low.

You only worry about murder. God looks at the heart and says, 'If there is hate there, it's the same thing.'

You worry about fornication. God says, 'If there is lust in the heart, it's the same thing.'

God's standard is an attitudinal standard.

Yours is only dealing with action.

That is the difference.

What Jesus is doing is listing the law, stripping it of the traditional rabbinic confusion, elevating it to where it belongs.

You cannot get away with justification on the basis of externals because

you didn't murder, or

because you didn't commit adultery, or

because you didn't divorce, or

because you didn't perjure yourself, or

because you did what was just, or

because you loved your neighbour.

That is not enough.

Those are only the externals. The internals are what God is looking after.

Jesus takes on this principle with this in mind.

1. Individual
2. Family
3. Social

Jesus chooses two commands from Moses, from the ten commandments.

You shalt not murder.

You shalt not commit adultery.

Then, He chooses two other rather wider family commandments taken from other portions of the Mosaic writings about relationships.

He starts with the very firm ten commandments.

He broadens to family relationships, and

He broadens to discuss the whole subject of love.

An ascending thing here.

All begins at the foundation of life. Murder and marriage, the organism, the individual, the organization marriage. It all starts there.

One is the right of the individual, and the other is the basic definition of the social system. God has standards right there. They are not only behaviour standards in terms of what you do, but of what you think.

From those very basic things He moves to a wider set of social relationships, and He talks about things like truth, and justice, and honesty.

Finally, to the widest possible attitude, which is love.

There is a three-fold progress from the lower to a higher.

He starts with an individual dealing with an individual.

Then in a family with marriage.

Then expands to the whole category of truth, and love, and justice, and honesty.

Finally, to the category of love, which reaches as wide as not only your neighbour, but your enemy.

Jesus says in all human living, from the individual in his sanctity, to the family, to social relationships, to the wide world of our enemies, we should be characteristically righteous on the inside.

So, the Lord Jesus Christ did not come to set aside the law of God. He came to strip the rabbinic external law of God, to make it bare, naked, and pure as it was when God gave it, and lift it back to where it belongs.

God had always been concerned with attitudes, always. That isn't anything new. But the people of Israel had lowered the standard and then justified themselves by what they didn't do,

while their hearts were full of murder, full of lust, full of lies, full of hate, full of anger.

Yet they were self-righteous because they had lowered the standard to accommodate their abilities. Jesus lifted it right back where it belonged.

What our Lord is saying is this. Thoughts are just as important as deeds. That's why no man can be justified on his own. You may not do the deed, but if you thought the thought then you are condemned.

Jesus is literally devastating the Pharisees. He is saying, "I don't accept your externals. Your heart is rotten."

Matthew 23 later He says, "Outside you are whitewashed. Inside you are like a tomb full of dead men's bones."

A man is not to be judged by his deeds so much as by his desires. A woman not to be judged by her actions as much as her attitudes. This is different than the world's standards.

For the scribes and Pharisees, you see a man or woman was righteous if they never did the forbidden thing. They didn't care about their thoughts. They didn't care about attitudes.

But Jesus said, "A man is righteous if he never desires the forbidden things."

God is not saying, "You are a Christian. You are free. Do whatever you want." God is saying, "You are a child of the kingdom. Then the standard is raised for you, not lowered." The standards are still there. God hasn't changed. God examines the heart to see the attitudes.

Paul is talking about his ministry, about the fact that God has made him a servant, and a steward, and he knows that the Corinthians are critical of him.

1 Corinthians 4:3-4, *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ⁴For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.*

Whether you evaluate me positively or negatively I don't feel it is necessary to answer my critics. I don't even evaluate myself. Why?

Because you, whether you are critical or kind, me whether I am critical or kind, don't really know the secrets of the heart.

I know a little more than you, but I don't know the whole picture. Because even when I find myself justifying myself it's only because my report is incomplete.

I can see the externals. You can see them. You can say, “on the outside everything is good, wonderful, and fine.”

Or on the outside it may even look bad to you. You may say, “this is out of line. Look what they are doing on the outside.”

It is a small thing how you see the picture. It is a small thing, be it critical or positive.

1 Corinthians 4:5, *Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.*

When God judges' righteous judgment, He judges motive. He judges inside.

You may be one who goes through life, and you never struck a blow to anyone.

You have never killed anybody, you have never even fought with anybody, but you literally burn inside with anger.

You may be one who has never been unfaithful in your marriage, but you cultivate the thoughts of adultery repeatedly.

You may be one who's never perjured yourself in a court of law, and yet your word is not really your bond.

You don't always follow through, and in your heart, you say things you never mean to keep.

That is what God is looking at.

You may want so bad to do something and all your life never do it. God says it's as if you did it and God judges the evil desire.

Jesus is literally hitting these Pharisees right between the eyes. Their hearts were filthy while their deeds were religious. God looks at the heart.

The Scribes and Pharisees just dealt with externals. The state of the heart was not their concern, but it was Jesus' concern.

Look at our society. They do this all the time.

We hear someone is so good all the time. But only God knows what's going on inside. Only God knows what motives behind what we do.

In all the six incidents with slight variation we find this statement.

“You have heard that it was said to them of old.”

This indicates that it is NOT the Bible speaking to the people, but some ancient people speaking, “by them of old.”

Jesus isn't saying, “You have heard that it was said to them of old by Moses or by God, but I am saying this.”

If Jesus did that then He would be contradicting God and Moses.

Jesus would be contradicting the Old Testament.

Set aside the law.

Set aside the prophets.

That would be ridiculous because in verse 17 He just said He wouldn't do that. So, it isn't Moses and the law He's referring to.

Jesus said to Satan saying that it is written in Matthew chapter 4 three times when He referred to the Old Testament.

Matthew 8:4, *And Jesus said to him, “See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”*

“Moses said,” or, “It is written.” This statement is not used to refer to the Old Testament.

Rabbis were called “fathers of antiquity” or “men of long ago.” That was a common term for rabbis, and that is what our Lord is referring to. “You have heard that it was said by the rabbis of old.”

In other words, this is a designation related to their oral teaching that glossed over the true law of God, that added their own thoughts to the revelation of the Old Testament.

Jesus is not contrasting the New Testament with the Old Testament, not contrasting His Word with God’s Word, but with the word of the rabbis, and their traditional interpretation which had been given to the people.

In the days of the Reformation prior to the time when the Reformation really hit, the Scriptures were not translated into the peoples’ language, into English, for example.

When you went to the Catholic Church, for the Mass the whole thing was in Latin. When you went and sat there was no Bible to speak of in the hands of the people. What was read by the priests was read in Latin.

Nobody understood it.

Nobody read it.

Then the priest would expound upon this Latin text and the people would simply believe whatever the priest said because

they had no basis by which to evaluate. They couldn't read the Latin. They couldn't interpret it. So, they accepted what the priest said.

Century went by after century, and the Roman Catholic Church developed the system which was never really investigated by the people. All because they didn't have the Bible in their own language. So, they accepted the priestly interpretations and conformity to the system of Rome.

What the Reformation did more than anything else was give the Bible to the people. It put the Word of God in the peoples' hands.

When they began to read the Scripture, then they began to see the false system, the false teaching, the misrepresentation of the gospel, which had been given to them for centuries.

The truth of the gospel shattered the Dark Ages, and Christianity was born out of that. Today, we have the Bible we can check any false system because we, too, can understand it.

Exactly that is what was going on in our Lord's Day.

When Israel had gone into captivity in Babylon, they remained there seventy years. During that time historians tell us for the

most part they lost the Hebrew language. They ceased to speak Hebrew. They picked up a language known as Aramaic.

When they came back from captivity, they spoke in Aramaic. In Jesus time, they spoke Aramaic. Jesus taught, probably, in Aramaic.

Of course, the New Testament was written down in Greek. But the people, the Jewish people spoke Aramaic. They were for the most part completely unfamiliar with Hebrew, as Jewish people are for the most part today.

So, the rabbis would come along. The rabbis would read the Hebrew, which the people didn't understand. The rabbis would interpret it. The people couldn't argue because they didn't know what it said, either. So, they begin to build an entire system based upon the ignorance of the people regarding the Hebrew text.

When the Lord says, "You have heard that it was said by them of old," He is saying, "The religion you have is the oral tradition of the rabbis, not the written Word of God."

Very critical.

The embellishments, traditions, interpretations, deletions, additions, and all the things that was added which became the

Mishnah, the codification of oral law, the Talmud, which padded the truth of God into obscurity.

Jesus says that this is what you have been hearing.

Just as the Roman Catholic Church obliterated the truth by keeping the people ignorant of the Scriptures, so the people were ignorant of the Scriptures in the time of the rabbis.

Because they couldn't speak Hebrew, they couldn't verify what they were getting.

Jesus attacks their emphasis on external works righteousness.

Jesus says that "You have heard it said by them of old," and "but I say unto you."

Jesus sets Himself up as the authority.

Jesus says, "I tell you what God's law is."

They were shocked.

Mark 1:22, *And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

Matthew 7:28-29, *And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, ²⁹for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

They couldn't believe that He would stand up and say that. They were shocked for someone to set himself as equal to the law of God.

The Jews felt that this traditional law, which they believed to be the law of God was so sacred.

The rabbis said, "Those who deny that the law is from heaven have no part in the world to come." So, they believed this was the only law, and that eternal destiny was dependent upon this law.

Jesus comes along and He says, "I say this," and He never quoted a rabbi, and He never quoted a group of rabbis, and He never quoted anything but His own authoritative statement, and they were literally shocked.

Synagogue.

If you were to go to a synagogue in Jesus' time to worship on the Sabbath. First thing a service would do, you would come in and sit-down men on one side, women on the other.

A man would go up to the front and he would take up all the scrolls Of the Old Testament, and he would walk all the way around the synagogue, all the way around the synagogue in

silence, so that the congregation would reverence the law of God.

Jesus stands up and says, "I say unto you - " and they were devastated.

Who are You?

The prophets always said, "Thus saith the Lord."

The rabbis said, "There is a teaching that says."

But Jesus said, "I say to you."

Clearly one of two things must be true.

Either Jesus is mad, or unique.

Either He is a megalomaniac, or else He is the Son of God.

No ordinary person would claim what He claimed.

Jesus claims the authority of God.

1. The spirit of the law is the priority, not the letter.

It is the spirit of the law that is the priority, not the letter.

The law is not mechanical.

It is not simply functional. It is the inside that God is concerned about. You can be all white on the outside and a

wretched, vile grave on the inside. It is not the letter. The letter kills. It is the Spirit that gives life.

God is not looking for externals. God is looking for changed hearts.

The scribes and Pharisees thought that because they didn't murder, they were all right, but they hated.

Because they didn't commit adultery, they were all right, but they had evil thoughts.

Their religion was legalistic, phony, hypocrisy of the worst kind that damns the soul. Conformity to God's law is a matter of the heart, not simply a matter of the outside.

Luke 16:15, *And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.*

Men and God judge differently about you.

You can justify yourself in your own eyes, and in the eyes of others in our church, and be an abomination to God because your heart is full of corruption.

2. The law is not just negative but positive.

The law of God is not just to prevent us from doing certain things, its real object is to lead us to right attitudes.

It is a positive thing.

You are not justified by not doing certain things, but you are justified by thinking certain ways, positive righteousness.

- They were concerned with what they didn't do.
- God was concerned with what they did do inside.

Did they hunger after righteousness?

Did they thirst after righteousness?

Did they seek to be merciful?

Were they pure in heart?

Did they mourn over their sin?

Were they poor in terms of spirit?

Were they peacemakers?

That's what God was concerned with.

This is spiritual character.

Positive, not just negative.

3. Law has a purpose.

What is the goal of the law?

It isn't just an end to itself.

The Pharisees said, "The goal of the law is to glorify me when I keep the law." Look at me, see how righteous I am.

But the end of the law was to glorify God.

Don't ask yourself, "Have I kept all the laws today?"

Ask yourself, "Have I glorified God in my spirit today?"

Have I glorified God in my desires today?

Have I glorified God in my wants and wishes today?

Have I been free from acting?

The end of the law is not to justify me. That is the way the Pharisees saw it. It's to glorify God.

If you think God's laws are only external, then you don't know the character of God.

4. God alone can judge men.

God alone sees the secrets of the heart.

God knows if you are really a Christian or if playing a game.

God knows if you are really carnal or spiritual as a believer.

God knows whether it's just a matter of acts or attitudes.

God knows whether the heart matches the outside.

Only God knows the secrets of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12-13, *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. ¹³And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*

God knows everything.

God knows our hearts. He knows if they are rotten, but He stands with His arms open as a sympathetic high priest ready to give us grace and mercy.

Hebrews 4:14-16, *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

God alone can judge the heart.

Many a man and woman can stand the judgment of men but will fall before the discerning eye of God.

Better examine your own heart.

5. Commanded to live up to divine standards.

Every person is commanded to live up to divine standards.

V 20, *Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will in no way enter the kingdom of heaven.*"

Matthew 5:48, *Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*

Every person in the world is required to live up to that standard.

Do I have to live to that standard with a pure inside as well as a right outside?

Yes.

You say, "But I can't."

You are right.

That is why the apostle Paul gave the solution in Romans.

Romans 3:10, *As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one;*

Romans 3:21-22, *But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;*

You can't be that righteous.

Christ is that righteous, and He gives His righteousness to those who believe.

God sets the standard. You can't live up to it.

God says, "My son is not only the lawgiver, but He is the Redeemer who makes it possible for you to live on that level."

The standard is so high we can't obtain it. Christ met the standard and imputes to us his righteousness.

You look at your heart and you say the outside not bad. The inside is rotten. If God did what was right, He would consume you in a blast of His fury. But because He is a merciful and gracious God, He makes His lawgiver not just a lawgiver, but a Redeemer.

Jesus perfectly kept the law, and He imputes His righteousness to us, so that when God looks at believers, He sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ covering that person. And I stand before God as righteous as Christ.

But, beloved, you can't even have that gift of righteousness unless you recognize that what you need is that gift of righteousness.

As long as you live your life justifying yourself on your external behaviour, you will never come to the desperation that reaches out and accepts the gift of righteousness.

A clock in this church that didn't keep good time. It was always too fast or too slow. He fiddled with it month, after month, trying to get it right, and it became kind of a standard topic of conversation in the church. Finally, in desperation, he put a sign over the clock that said, "Don't blame the hands, the trouble lies deeper."

That's how it is in life, isn't it?

Don't blame the hands, the trouble lies deeper.

Until you deal with the deeper trouble, it isn't going to change the hands.