

Sermon on Mount (20)  
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Sermon Text: Matthew 5:21-48 NKJV

Having this morning considered a summary lesson on the meaning of law and its relation to the Christian—I want to begin to consider vv21-48 by way of an introductory lesson on the entire section—I want to do three things—[1] briefly examine two very opposing ways in which this section has been understood, [2] offer several proofs in vindication of the historical view, and [3] suggest some summary thoughts on how the Ten Commandments are to be understood...

Having described His relation to the law as fulfilling it (vv17-18), our relation to the law in that we are to obey and teach it (v19), and the scribes and Pharisees relation to it in that they perverted it—our Savior begins to expound His law in six subsections beginning with some variation of the phrase—“you have heard that it was said...but I say to you (vv21, 27, 31, 33, 38, and 43)...”

- I. An Examination of Two Views
- II. A Vindication of the Latter View
- III. Five Summary Observations

- I. An Examination of Two Views

- A. The higher ethic view

- 1. This view claims that Christ is pitting himself in opposition to Moses or the OT moral law—who have heard Moses say, but I say unto you...
    - 2. It claims that the Ten Commandments, largely, if not exclusively, only had concern for the outer or external conduct...
    - 3. Thus Christ is here teaching a higher ethic than that of the OT—the OT moral law only concerned the actions while the NT ethic concerns the heart...
    - 4. John Reisinger—“Christ does, however, give the Church new and higher standards, or rules of conduct, than Moses ever gave, or could have given, under a covenant of law...”
    - 5. Thus when we read in v21—“you have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder...but I say to you...”—our Savior is contrasting His teaching with that of the Ten Commandments...
    - 6. The Ten Commandments, contends Mr. Reisinger, are only concerned with the external behavior while our Savior, in the NT, is concerned about internal behavior...
    - 7. John Reisinger—“The Law of Moses could not deal with the heart or with motives simply because that is beyond the ability of a purely objective law...”
    - 8. That is—those under the OT were never expected to live in harmony to the inner expectations of the NT law or ethic...
    - 9. Thus this view that I am here describing, proposes that there exists two levels of ethic—one for the OT and the other for the NT...

- B. The clarification view

- 1. This view, the historically accepted view, understands our Savior as merely clarifying the OT moral law from the perversions of the scribes and Pharisees...
    - 2. Pink—“Christ is not here [Mt 5:28-42] pitting Himself against the Mosaic law, nor is He instilling a superior spirituality. Instead He continues the same course as He had followed in the context, namely to define that righteousness demanded of His followers, which was more excellent than the one taught and practiced by the Scribes and Pharisees; and this He does by exposing their error and expounding the spirituality of the moral law....”

3. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones—“The contrast, therefore, is not between the law given through Moses and the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ; it is a contrast, rather, between the false interpretation of the law of Moses, and the true presentation of the law given by our Lord Himself...”
4. Notice [1] He is clarifying the law from the Pharisaical perversions—thus when He says—“you have heard...” He’s referring to the teaching of the Pharisees...
5. For example, v21—“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...”
6. Now obviously the phrase—“you shall not murder” is a quotation of the sixth commandment—but what follows—“whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment...” is the teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees...
7. Thus when our Savior says—“you have heard...”—he was talking about his contemporaries who would have heard the teaching of the Pharisees as they explained the sixth commandment...
8. Thus our Savior is not referring to the sixth commandment as given by God—but as it was taught and explained by the Pharisees...
9. Notice [2] He is expanding the true intent of the law’s application—thus there is a sense in which Christ adds to the law by way of elaboration...
10. For no one would deny that Christ opens up the commandments with a clarity, unmatched by any other portion of OT Scripture...
11. Furthermore, it is not denied that Christ applies these commandments with the authority of King, describing the law of His kingdom...
12. For example, it was prophesied of Christ in Isa.33:22—“the LORD is our Judge, the LORD is our Lawgiver, the LORD is our King; He will save us...”
13. Christ is the Lawgiver and King of His people—but [and this is the heart of the issue], the law He gives is no different law from that of the Ten Commandments...
14. Thus to accuse us of making Christ but a rubber stamp of Moses, fails to take into account that Moses never gave the Ten Commandments—God did...
15. Martyn Lloyd-Jones—“There is a suggestion [in the phrase ‘I say unto you’] that He is saying something like this: I who am speaking to you am the very One who was responsible for the law of Moses; it was I who gave it to Moses, and it is I alone, therefore, who can truly interpret it...”

## II. A Vindication of the Latter View

### A. The immediate context

1. Here I specifically refer to vv17-21—a passage that teaches two general truths—[a] that Christ is not at odds with the OT (v17), and [b] that Christ is at odds with the scribes and Pharisees (v20)...
2. Notice v20—“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...”
3. If you recall I mentioned last week that v20 serves as a bridge between what precedes and what follows—and is intended to teach that the righteous ethic of the kingdom is greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees...
4. Notice our Savior does not say—“Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Mosaic law...” but—“unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees...”
5. In other words—what our Savior proceeds to do, beginning with v21, is to elaborate upon the principle established in v20...
6. And in what way did the righteousness of the kingdom exceed that of the scribe and Pharisees, but by being an inward and not merely an outward righteousness...
7. The Pharisees had largely misinterpreted the law as concerning externals—as long as you didn’t commit actual murder you didn’t break the sixth commandment...
8. Matt.23:26—“blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also...v28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness...”
9. Thus our Savior here in His first public discourse, sets out to correct the perversions of the scribes and Pharisees...

## B. The harmony of Scripture

1. Here I refer to the fact that the Scripture teaches a continuity of ethic that would be broken if Christ came to teach a higher ethic than that of the OT...
2. Matt.22:34-40—"but when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. 35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked *Him a question*, testing Him, and saying, 36 "Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?" 37 Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 "This is *the* first and great commandment. 39 "And *the* second *is* like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets [cp.Jer.31:31-34]..."
3. I want to say a few words about this familiar passage as it illustrates the harmony of the law within Scripture...
4. Notice [1] a summary of OT moral law, v40—"on these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets..."
5. That is—the entire OT can be summarized into these two—love God, and love your neighbor—these are the sum of OT moral and abiding law...
6. Notice [2] a summary of NT moral law—here I want to remind you who it is who summarizes this law—it is non other than Christ—the Judge, Lawgiver, and King of His people...
7. Christ came to bring in His kingdom—and here we find the King summarizing the moral expectation of His kingdom—love God with all your being and your neighbor as yourself...
8. Thus Christ carries the same moral law of the OT into the NT—taking nothing from it, nor adding anything to it...
9. But I want to notice that this summary of God’s moral law, as found in both testaments, was spiritual, and had to do with the heart and well as conduct...
10. V37—"Jesus said to him, You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind..."
11. Whatever was expected of OT saints, nothing more or less is expected from NT saints—our Savior brings together both testaments with a single moral ethic...

## C. The spiritual nature of OT law

1. Here I want to briefly show, that throughout the OT Scriptures, we find that God was always concerned with the inner man of the heart...
2. MacArthur—"Contrary to the external, superficial, and hypocritical righteousness that typified the scribes and Pharisees, the righteousness God requires is first of all internal. If it does not exist in the heart, it does not exist at all. Though it had been long forgotten or neglected by most Jews of Jesus’ day, that truth was presented to them throughout the Old Testament..."
3. 1Chron.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..."
4. These are the final words of David to Solomon—they comprise his final counsels to his beloved and dear son...
5. Notice [a] what he was to do, v9a—"know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heat and with a willing mind..."
6. Notice [b] why he was to do it, v9b—"for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts..."
7. Prov.16:2—"all the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirits [that is the motives]..."
8. The Hebrew word translated “spirits” by the old and new King James, is rightly translated “motives” by the NAS...
9. Literally the word means “spirits” but it here refers to motives—man has the tendency to be concerned merely with externals...

10. Ps.119:96—"I have seen the consummation of all perfection, but your commandment is exceedingly broad..."

### III. Five Summary Observations

#### A. The law concerns thoughts as well as actions

1. This is clear from our Savior's exposition of the sixth and seventh commandments—where inward anger and lust are violations of the commandments...
2. The way that the Pharisees interpreted the law is common to all men by nature—we are only concerned with the letter of the law and not the spirit...
3. John Bunyan—"Q. How many ways are there to sin against this law [the ten commandments]. A. Three: by sinful thoughts, by sinful words, and also by sinful actions..."
4. This is illustrated in Matt.5:27-28—"you have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart..."
5. Thus the law has to do with the intents and motives of the heart—why do we do what we do and fail to do what we don't do...

#### B. The law concerns all related sins or commands

1. For example—the fifth commandment—"honor your father and mother..."—includes the honoring of all God-given authority...
2. Calvin—"The purpose of the fifth commandment is that honor ought to be paid to those to whom God has assigned it. This, then, is the substance of the commandment: that it is right and pleasing to God for us to honor those on whom he has bestowed some excellence; and that he abhors contempt and stubbornness against them..."

#### C. The law concerns positives as well as negatives

1. For example—while the third commandment forbids us to take the name of God in vain, it also commands us to use His name in reverence...
2. Or again—as the seventh commandments forbids adultery, it also commands us to promote marital fidelity and love...
3. This is clear from vv21-26—where having dealt with the negative in vv21-22—"you shall not murder" our Savior deals with the positive in vv23-26...
4. In other words—the sixth commandment not only forbids us to murder [or hate without a cause], it also expects us to promote unity among brethren...
5. Eph.4:28—"let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need..."

#### D. The law concerns the lesser as well as the greater

1. For example—while the sixth commandment forbids murder it also by way of inference forbids physical harm of any kind...
2. Thomas Watson—"Where greater sins are forbidden, lesser sins are also forbidden. Though no sin in its own nature is little, yet one may be comparatively less than another. Where idolatry is forbidden, superstition is forbidden, or bringing any innovation into God's worship, which he has not appointed..."

#### E. The law concerns all moral expectation in Scripture

1. By this I mean every moral commandment found in Scripture, Old or NT, can be traced back to one of the Ten Commandments...
2. Let me illustrate—we could liken the law to a huge tree with 10 large branches which represent the Ten Commandments...

3. Growing out from these branches are smaller limbs that divide into small twigs—all of which can be traced back to the large branch and related to a single tree...
4. Thus “the law” is singular in that it comprises a single unit—yet, it comes with ten branches, which find their way throughout the whole of Scripture...
5. May God give us eyes to see the exceedingly broad nature of God’s commandments, and that we might say with Paul—“I delight in the law of God in the inward man...”