

Since the law of the Lord not only applies to outward behavior but also to inward thoughts and desires, how ridiculous for any of us to think that we could keep the law and live a life free from sin. All are guilty of an infinite number of sins and desperately need forgiveness of sin and need a righteousness with which God Himself is pleased and in which He can find no flaw. While none can produce that which God demands, mercifully, Christ Jesus our Lord has borne the penalty for the sins of His people and established righteousness for them whereby He gives them spiritual life and gives them faith to believe in Him unto righteousness (2 Cor. 5:20-21; Jer. 23:6; Rom. 10:4-10). Having been freed from the law by the obedience unto death of Christ, the Lord's children are free from the law's curse, condemnation, and controlling power (Rom. 6:14-16; Gal. 5:18). This does not mean, however, that we are free to break God's law, but that we now have a higher motivating power for obedience to God's commandments - God's love for us in Christ, our love to Him, His grace and our gratitude (2 Cor. 5:14; 1 Cor. 13:1-13).

Nothing constrains a child of God to submit to God's Word quite like a remembrance of God's covenant love, substitutionary death, and intercessory work for us (Eph. 3:19; 1 John 3:16; Rom. 7:4-6; 8:34). We are not slaves serving a cruel master; we are sons serving a loving Father and Redeemer Who has delivered us from our sins and provided for us a perfect righteousness in which we are eternally and unchangeably accepted before God in Christ (Eph. 1:6). And even though, as justified and born-again saints, we still retain the corruptions and contaminations of the flesh against which we must fight daily, God's commandments to believe, worship, and serve Him and to love one another are not burdensome (1 John 5:3; Matt. 11:28-30; John 13:34; 15:12; Rom. 13:8). In the following verses, the Lord continues to emphasize how the law demands inward as well as outward obedience. Having been taught wrongly by the religious leaders, the people needed to understand that as God's Word calls for external conformity to the letter of the law, it also requires perfection in the heart. This shows how that we are all sinners in need of a righteousness we cannot produce but one that could only be found in Christ - His obedience unto death as Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of God's chosen people (Rom. 10:4).

**(Matt. 5:29-30)** - We must not take these words literally. The Lord would never require us to maim or disfigure our bodies as if this could cure the problem of sin within us. Gouging out our eyes or cutting off our hands would not get us any closer to the righteousness of the law. Even if we gouged out both our eyes, we would still sin in our mind's eye. Certainly, the wandering eye and the outstretched hand must be controlled and kept in check, lest they cause us to stumble into open sin and bring reproach upon our testimony, the Lord's church, and His name. But the Lord is simply stressing that if we are seeking righteousness and holiness by our works of the law, we had better be willing to go as far as we can go, and it still will not be far enough. He is also stressing the truth that we must be made willing to sacrifice everything to be obedient to God, and any part of our lives that would hinder this must be avoided, even removed. Anything that hinders us from resting in Christ must be removed (i.e. repented of). We must be willing to part with anything or anybody that would hinder us from faith in Christ, from worshipping the true and living God, and from obedience to God's Word. It would certainly be better to part with earthly relationships and desires than to suffer the judgment of God forever (Col. 3:5; Matt. 18:8-9; 1 Cor. 9:27; Luke 9:24-25). Christ must be our all. He will have no rival!

**(Matt. 5:31-32)** - The original law of divorce is found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. We need to be clear on this matter - Divorce is sinful, and there is no way to make it any less sinful in the

eyes of God. In God's eyes, the only way one who is married can be freed to marry another is the death of one of the spouses (Rom. 7:1-3). However, under the civil laws of the Old Covenant, because of man's sinfulness (hardness of heart - Matt. 19:3-9; Mark 10:1-12), divorce was allowed in cases where one spouse commits adultery (or some other blatant act of immorality) or one abandons the other. And even then, in God's eyes, if either one remarried, he or she was in adultery. Does this mean that they could not be saved? NO! Remember what the Lord said in Matthew 5:27-30. We are ALL adulterers in that since. But if we are saved by God's grace, we are forgiven adulterers, forgiven of all our sins by the blood of Christ.

Here, the Lord is correcting a perversion of the law of divorce that would allow men and women to think that they had done nothing wrong and could, therefore, claim they were still righteous in God's sight. They taught that if a man wanted a divorce, for no good reason, he just filled out the necessary paperwork and his wife was put away, making divorce a simple matter, easily attained. Christ, however, taught that marriage vows are to be respected and honored and not set aside for no good reason. The law of marriage was established by God when He brought Adam and Eve together and joined them as one (Gen. 2:23-24). Marriage is a God-honored and God-sanctioned bond (Heb. 13:4). It was intended to be for life and to represent the spiritual and eternal marriage union of Christ and His church (Eph. 5:25-33; 2 Cor. 11:2). The blessed Son of God, the Savior, is the Bridegroom (Isa. 54:5), and all those chosen in Him unto salvation (2 Thess. 2:13-14) comprise His bride (John 3:28-29; Rev. 21:9). Our Savior would never divorce or separate Himself from His bride nor allow His bride to ever leave Him (Heb. 13:5; John 6:39). The bride of Christ is adorned in His righteousness which has been freely imputed to her (Isa. 61:10; Rev. 19:7-9). And, unlike sinful human beings, Christ gives His bride a heart that loves Him forever and ever, and she cannot leave Him (1 John 3:9).

**(Matt. 5:33-37)** - The Lord refers to Leviticus 19:12 which deals with perjury (cf. Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21). These passages were correctly interpreted by the Pharisees to mean that if one makes a vow in the name of the Lord, he or she must keep that vow. They, however, had concocted a way to subvert that commandment by simply swearing an oath in the name of someone or something lesser than God. Thus, they reasoned that in this way they could break their oaths without breaking God's law. They would swear oaths in the name of heaven, the earth, Jerusalem, or their own lives, and then justify breaking their promises. But Christ showed the people that to swear by these things is the same as swearing in the name of God as God is the sovereign Creator, Governor, and Proprietor of all these things. The lesson here, as it pertains to the law of God, is simply tell the truth and keep your word at all times, no matter how you swear the oath. He shows them that the righteousness of the law demands perfect honesty without any hint of deception. The law forbids, as one writer put it, "flippant, profane, uncalled for, and hypothetical oaths, used in order to make an impression." He also shows that an honest and trustworthy person does not need to take an oath to tell the truth.

Again, the Lord shows the strictness of God's law to require a perfect righteousness that no sinner can produce. None of us can measure up to this standard, and this is why we need God's free and sovereign grace in Christ Jesus to be free from the law's condemnation. We have all lied at one time or another, and we all may have sworn oaths that we either were not able or simply refused to keep. We are all sinners. The Bible says, "*let God be true, but every man a liar*" (Rom. 3:4). This certainly holds true in the matter of salvation. By nature, we are all deceived into believing and telling a lie as we believe and preach that salvation is conditioned on sinners. But God's truth is the Gospel that tells us that all of salvation was (and is) conditioned on Christ, and all righteousness can only be found in Him and Him alone. Here, we are given a right view of God's law.