

Lesson 5 – 29 August 2010

The Higher Law

Lesson Scope: [Matthew 5:17-48](#)

Lesson Focus

The Law had been given to the Israelites approximately fifteen hundred years earlier, and all the faithful Jews in the intervening time had diligently adhered to it. It was the standard for religious, ceremonial, moral, and civil life. The Law was also what they were judged by. This background made it hard to understand the changes that Jesus was introducing. Those who had diligently studied the Scriptures and had maintained their relationship with God, He was able to lead and bless!

"The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached" (Luke 16:16). John's preaching signaled that a change had come. Jesus' teaching further defined these changes. His life and death fulfilled the Law, and His resurrection gives power to live out this higher law.

The Gospel is the fulfilment of the things that the Law foreshadowed. The Old Testament primarily addressed outward expression: Jesus calls men into account for evil their thoughts and attitudes.

The Old Testament Law is fulfilled and no longer in effect. We no longer live by the Ten Commandments as such. All men are now commanded to live by the New Covenant, in which Jesus has given teachings that far supersede the Ten Commandments.

The New Covenant begins with a heart experience and issues into a holy life directed by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Old Covenant pointed men to Christ, and at the same time showed men their inability to fulfill the requirements contained in it. The New Covenant gives commandments and provides the power to perform.

Lesson Aim: To understand the higher standard of conduct that the Gospel requires.

Theme Verse: [Matthew 5:43-44](#). Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.

Lesson Text

Inner Righteousness

[Matthew 5:17-24](#)

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. ¹⁸For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. ¹⁹Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

²¹Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: ²²But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. ²³Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; ²⁴Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Elevated Morals

[Matthew 5:27-32](#)

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: ²⁸But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. ²⁹And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. ³⁰And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. ³¹It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give

her a writing of divorcement: ³²But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

Divine Love

Matthew 5:38-48

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: ³⁹But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. ⁴¹And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. ⁴²Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

⁴³Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. ⁴⁴But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; ⁴⁵That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? ⁴⁷And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? ⁴⁸Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Questions for Study

Inner Righteousness

1. Explain how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament with the requirements of the law.
2. In what ways are New Testament teachings a higher standard?
3. How do interpersonal relationships affect our relationship with God?

Elevated Morals

4. Explain the seriousness of thoughts that are not morally pure.
5. How does one cut off the occasion to sin?
6. Explain the Scriptural position on divorce.

Divine Love

7. Upon what principles are the doctrines of nonresistance and returning good for evil based?

8. How can mortal man be holy as God is holy?

Analyzing the Passage

The law and the prophets (Matthew 5:17) compose most of the Old Testament. Love for God and man is the foundational principle of both. The Golden Rule is the practical expression of love to man. It is good to meditate upon how this applies to each Old Testament law and to the higher applications of the New Testament, especially the teachings Jesus here expressed.

Fulfil (Matthew 5:17) speaks of making full or complete, nothing wanting, nothing so aptly expresses how Jesus perfectly and completely fulfilled the Old Testament Law. Jesus then commands and empowers His followers to live above the Law. The Old centered on the expression, while the New emphasizes the heart's condition, which, when filled with love and the power of God, will result in living by this higher standard.

The jot and tittle (Matthew 5:18) are small marks in the Hebrew alphabet. The jot is the smallest letter, and that very small indeed: the tittle is the small markings of letters in the Hebrew that differentiate one from another. This shows the importance and endurance of God's Word, the Law here being in focus.

"The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees" (Matthew 5:20) was many times an outward show. but the heart was full of "dead men's holies." It was therefore no righteousness at all.

Verses 23 and 24 teach the importance of clear interpersonal relationships and the urgency of mending strained relationships. We cannot have wrong interpersonal relationships and be right with God.

Principles and Applications

Inner Righteousness

1. Jesus completely fulfilled the Old Testament with its laws through His perfect life and sacrificial death (Matthew 5:17-18). There was no time or way in which Jesus did not completely obey the Law, and so He fulfilled it. He therefore has also shown us how we can live above the Law and meet the higher New Testament standard.

2. Jesus taught the need for righteousness that goes beyond the letter of the Law (Matthew 5:20). Jesus forthrightly condemned the scribes and Pharisees, not so much for their meticulous Law-keeping as for their neglecting

of the "weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." The "Christian" who lives freely after the flesh and flaunts his freedom from the bondage of the Law has totally missed the mark. Freedom from the Law is achieved as one by God's grace lives in victory over the sins of the flesh that the Law condemns.

3. Jesus taught that not only is murder wrong, but also that the thoughts and attitudes that precede it, such as anger, are just as wrong (Matthew 5:21-22). Negative thoughts, ill will, gossip, slander, and suchlike do not spring from a heart of love, but rather are fruits of a heart full of malice. We can be guilty of slaying a person without taking his physical life.

4. Good interpersonal relationships are necessary to have fellowship with God (Matthew 5:23-24). We must do all in our power to maintain right relationships with our fellow men. This is only possible as we are willing to sacrifice ourselves for Christ and others.

Elevated Morals

5. God equates the lustful look with adultery (Matthew 5:27-28). Lustful looks and thoughts are sin and bear fruit that results in a bitter harvest. The next two verses stress the importance of victory. They also bring into focus the necessity of cutting off the occasion to sin.

6. The higher standard of the New Testament requires actively cutting off the occasion to sin (Matthew 5:29-30). The spiritually-minded person will avoid circumstances in which it is convenient to do or think wrong. The Gospel also calls us to appear and conduct ourselves in such ways that would not cause another to do or think wrongly, thereby committing sin.

7. The putting away of marriage partners is unscriptural and gives occasion for adultery (Matthew 5:31-32). Christ restored marriage to its original standard as God gave it in Genesis. Divorce breaks the type of Christ and the church. It also may cause temptation for those involved.

Divine Love

8. Nonresistance and returning good for evil are New Testament commands (Matthew 5:38-44). The love of God in our heart is the basis for our treatment of others. When we love, we will not resist evil with evil, but rather, as Christ gave example on the cross, return good for evil and at all times express forgiveness. We will also seek the good of others at all times, especially their spiritual welfare.

9. The Gospel provides power to be holy as God is holy (Matthew 5:45-48). Holiness is a requirement for God's children (1 Peter 1:15-16). What

God requires, He also gives divine enablement to perform. He also will judge those who fail. Holiness is not merely an option for the Christian. Rather it is a way of life, paved with self-denial that begins at the cross. Holy thinking finds expression in our daily choices, which in turn affect our holiness.

Important Teachings

1. Jesus completely fulfilled the Old Testament with its laws through His perfect life and sacrificial death (Matthew 5:17-18).
2. Jesus taught the need for righteousness that goes beyond the letter of the Law (Matthew 5:20).
3. Jesus taught that not only is murder wrong, but also that the thoughts and attitudes that precede it, such as anger, are just as wrong (Matthew 5:21-22).
4. Good interpersonal relationships are necessary to have fellowship with God (Matthew 5:23-24).
5. God equates the lustful look with adultery (Matthew 5:27-28).
6. The higher standard of the New Testament requires actively cutting off the occasion to sin (Matthew 5:29-30).
7. The putting away of marriage partners is unscriptural and gives occasion for adultery (Matthew 5:31-32).
8. Nonresistance and returning good for evil are New Testament commands (Matthew 5:38-44).
9. The Gospel provides power to be holy as God is holy (Matthew 5:45-48).

Answers to Questions

1. Explain how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament with the requirements of the Law.

Jesus in no way violated any law or principle, but rather fulfilled all. He lived the laws of love for God and man.

2. In what ways are New Testament teachings a higher standard?

The New Testament teaches that not only is one's action right or wrong, but the thoughts and attitudes of the heart are judged as well.

3. How do interpersonal relationships affect our relationship with God?

The New Testament teaches that one who does not love his brother cannot love God. Less than ideal interpersonal relationships indicate a failure to

appropriate God's grace. They may also indicate pride and insubordination, which God condemns.

4. Explain the seriousness of thoughts that are not morally pure. God equates lustful thoughts and looks with adultery. They also will lead to sinful acts if not repented of.

5. How does one cut off the occasion to sin?

We must avoid temptation wherever possible and maintain a close relationship with God and His people. We also must conduct ourselves in such ways that we do not tempt others to sin.

6. Explain the Scriptural position on divorce.

God in creation made no such provision. It was allowed under the Old Testament Law under certain circumstances, but Jesus restored the original plan of God. Divorce is a violation of God's law. We do realize that if an unsaved partner divorces one who is a Christian, it does not cause the Christian to lose his salvation, but that person must remain single.

7. Upon what principles are the doctrines of nonresistance and returning good for evil based?

They are based upon God's love for all mankind, which must flow through the Christian to all those around him. He has commanded us to love and to return good for evil. We are to express our forgiveness to others just as we have been forgiven.

8. How can mortal man be holy as God is holy?

Man can be holy as he follows God's commands. He lives a life of self-denial that begins at the foot of the cross and is paved by daily choices that glorify God

Summarizing the Lesson

The higher law of the New Covenant requires a right condition of the heart to meet God's approval. This is only possible as we fully surrender to God and employ His power for victory.

Research Guide

1. Read the chapters titled "Purity" and "Nonresistance" in *Doctrines of the Bible*.

2. Read in *Doctrines of the Bible*, page 295, #2.