

**MT. 5:19-48 THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT (Continued)**



In the last study, we covered a key scripture: Mt. 5:17-18, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets, (the O.T.). I did not come to destroy but to fulfill (Gk. *pleroo*). Remember, "fulfill" means literally to cram a net, to fill to the fullest" (*Strong's Dictionary*). Christ, as the Messiah, did this in every way—theologically, spiritually and prophetically. This is vital since many Protestants try to explain this scripture by saying that "fulfill" actually means He kept it for us so we no longer need to obey it.

Notice, though, one of the best ways to refute this wrong interpretation is to continue reading the next two verses: "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. 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" (Mt. 5:18-19).

So Christ uses the term "therefore" to connect two thoughts--that to "destroy" the Law and to "break" God's commandments are things to be rejected now as it will be in God's kingdom.

Also, when Jesus says he who teaches to break the least of the commandments will be called "least" in the kingdom, it's actually a Semitism or a phrase (usually an idiom) originally in Hebrew or Aramaic that was translated into the Greek and shouldn't be taken *literally*. In this case, it is likely an *exclusion-inclusion duality*—or placing two things in opposite ends—with one being *excluded* and the other *included*. It aptly fits the description of the 'lawless' preachers in Mt. 7:21-23.

Next, what did Christ mean by having to be more righteous than the Pharisees? *Gill's Commentary* says about the Pharisees: "They were the strictest sect among the Jews for outward religion and righteousness and yet...their righteousness was *very defective*. It lay only in an *external* observance of the law and did *not* arise from a *purified* heart, or the principles of *grace*; nor was it performed *sincerely*, and with a view to the glory of God; but for their own *applause*....Besides, they neglected the *weightier*

matters of the law [Mt. 23:23], and contented themselves with the lesser ones. They were deficient in their practice and were very lax in their doctrines as the foregoing verses show."

So Christ will contrast six *teachings* of the scribes and Pharisees with the *right way* to view God's law, which requires a spiritual dimension that the Pharisees lacked. Remember, they were as a whole, still carnal and unconverted. In this manner, he would "fill to the full" the real meaning of God's laws—not only in the letter, as the Pharisees emphasized, but in its *spiritual intent*.

As *Expositor's* mentions, "The first part of Matthew's formulas means something like 'you have understood' or 'you have literally understood.' That is, Jesus is *not* criticizing the O.T. but the *understanding of the O.T. many of his hearers adopted*. This is especially true of verses 22 and 43, where part of what was 'heard' certainly does not come from the O.T."

*The Bible Knowledge Commentary* adds: "Jesus rejected the *traditions* of the Pharisees (see Mt. 5:21-48) and their *practices* (see Mt. 6:1-7:6). Six times Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said....But I tell you." These words make it clear that Jesus was presenting (a) what the Pharisees and teachers of the Law were saying to the people and, by contrast, (b) what God's *true intent* of the Law was. This spelled out His statement that Pharisaic righteousness is *not enough* to gain entrance into the coming kingdom."

### **1. The Sixth Commandment's true meaning**

He starts by *contrasting* the Pharisaic teaching and the real intent of the Sixth Commandment. He said, "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" (Mt. 5:21).

The Jews were taught as long as you didn't commit the act, you were safe. But Christ went on to explain that you can 'commit' murder in anger by 'murdering' the person in your mind (see 1 Jn. 3:15). He added, "But I say to you [in contrast with the Pharisees] that whoever is *angry* with his brother *without a cause* shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' [imbecile or idiot] shall be in danger of the council.

But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire (Gehenna)." *The Good News Bible* says, "But now I tell you: if you are angry with your brother you will be brought to trial, if you call your brother 'You good-for-nothing!' you will be brought before the Council, and if you call your brother a worthless fool you will be in danger of going to the fire of hell." Christ urged he who is angry to quickly reconcile with the offended party.

*The Bible Knowledge Commentary* adds, "The Pharisees taught that murder consists of taking someone's life. But the Lord said the commandment extended not only to the act itself but also to the *internal attitude* behind the act. Of course, murder is wrong, but the anger prompting the act is also as wrong as plunging in a knife. Furthermore, becoming angry and assuming a position of *superiority* over another by calling him a *derogatory* name (such as the Aramaic Raca or You fool!) demonstrates *sinfulness* of the heart."

## 2. The 7<sup>th</sup> commandment's true meaning

Next, Christ explains the **true teaching about adultery**: "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. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you: for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell" (Mt. 5:27-30).

*The Bible Knowledge Commentary* says: "Once again the Pharisees' teaching was concerned *only* with the outward act. They said the only way one could commit adultery was through an act of sexual union. They correctly quoted the commandment, but they *missed* its point. Adultery begins within one's heart (looking lustfully) and follows in the act. The lustful desire, in the heart, as wrong as the act, indicates that one is not rightly related to God.

"Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 5:29-30 have often been misunderstood [it is another Semitism—an exaggeration for effect]. Obviously Jesus was not teaching physical mutilation, for a

blind man could have as much of a problem with lust as a sighted person, and a man with only one hand might use it also to sin. Jesus was advocating the removal of *the inward cause* of offense. Since a lustful heart would ultimately lead to adultery, one's heart must be changed. Only by such a change of heart can one escape hell (Gehenna)."

It is important to note here that Jesus picked two of the Ten Commandments to exemplify their true intent—He could easily have done it with the rest of the commandments and does so throughout the Gospels. But some critics insist since He didn't use the Sabbath commandment, it can't be applied here. Yet, the burden of proof is on them to exclude it from the rest—why would that be so? In fact, later, Jesus repeatedly does show how the true intent of the Sabbath commandment in contrast with the Pharisaic teaching (Mt. 12:1-14; Mk. 3:2-4; Lk. 13:10-17).

## 3. The true meaning of the law of divorce

Now Christ proceeds to show the true intent of **the law of divorce**, found in Dt. 24:1 and how it had been distorted by the Pharisees.

He said, "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But 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" (Mt. 5:31-32).

Again, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* explains it well: "Among the Jewish leaders were two schools of thought regarding the matter of divorce. Those who followed Hillel said it was permissible for a husband to divorce his wife *for any reason at all* [even for burning a toast!], but the other group (those following Shammai) said divorce was permissible only for a major offense. In His response, the Lord strongly taught that marriage is viewed by God as an indissoluble unit and that marriages should not be terminated by divorce. The 'exception clause,' except for marital unfaithfulness (*porneias*), is understood in several ways by Bible scholars. Four of these ways are: (a) a single act of adultery, (b) unfaithfulness during the period of betrothal (Matt. 1:19), (c) marriage between near relatives (Lev. 18:6-18), or (d) continued promiscuity." We also teach the same.

#### 4. The true meaning of the law of oaths

Next, Christ explains the true intent of **the law of oaths** found in Numbers 30:1-13. He said, '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.' But I say to you, do not swear at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' be 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" (Mt. 5:33-37).

The same commentary as before mentions, "The Pharisees were notorious for their oaths, which were made on the least provocation. Yet they made allowances for mental reservations within their oaths. If they wanted to be relieved of oaths they had made by heaven...by the earth...by Jerusalem, or by one's own head, they could argue that since God Himself had not been involved their oaths were not binding. But Jesus said oaths should not even be necessary: 'Do not swear at all.' The fact that oaths were used at all emphasized the wickedness of man's heart" (see James 5:12).

#### 5. The true intent of the Law an Eye for an Eye

Next, Christ focuses on a **law to administer justice**: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two."

The same commentary above says, "The words, 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth come from several Old Testament passages' (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21) they are called the *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation. This law was given to *protect* the innocent and to make sure retaliation did *not* occur beyond the offense. Jesus pointed out, however, that while the rights of the innocent were protected by the Law, the righteous need not necessarily claim their rights. A righteous man would be characterized by humility and selflessness. Instead he might go 'the extra mile' to maintain peace. When wronged by being struck on a cheek, or sued for his tunic, or forced to travel

with someone a mile, [a Roman soldier had that right] he would not strike back, demand repayment, or refuse to comply. Instead of retaliating he would do the opposite, and would also commit his case to the Lord who will one day set all things in order (Rom. 12:17-21). This was seen to its greatest extent in the life of the Lord Jesus Himself, as Peter explained (1 Peter 2:23)."

#### 6. The true intent of treating an adversary

Christ finally says about a Pharisaic law, "You have heard that it was said, '**You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.**' But 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,' that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust" (5:43-45).

The same source above says, "The Pharisees taught that one should love those near and dear to him (Lev. 19:18), but that Israel's enemies should be hated. The Pharisees thus implied that their hatred was God's means of judging their enemies. But Jesus stated that Israel should demonstrate God's love even to her enemies—a practice not even commanded in the Old Testament! God loves them; He causes His sun to rise on them and He sends rain to produce their crops. Since His love extends to everyone, Israel too should be a channel of His love by loving all. Such love demonstrates that they are God's sons (Matt. 5:16). Loving only those who love you and greeting only your brothers is no more than the tax collectors and pagans do—a cutting remark for Pharisees!

"Jesus concludes by saying, '**Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**' His message demonstrated God's righteous standard, for God Himself truly is the 'standard' of righteousness. If these individuals are to be righteous, they must be as God is, 'perfect,' that is, [spiritually] mature (*teleioi*) or holy. Murder, lust, hate, deception, and retaliation obviously do not characterize God. He did not lower His standard to accommodate humans; instead He set forth His absolute holiness as the standard. Though this standard can never be perfectly met by man himself, a person who by faith trusts in God enjoys His righteousness being reproduced in his life."