

The Attitude Behind the Act

Scripture: Matthew 5:21

Code: 2213

INTRODUCTION

A. Man's Evaluation of the Appearance

Most people evaluate their lives and the lives of other people on the basis of external appearance. First Samuel 16:7 says, "...for man looketh on the outward appearance...." Jesus said in John 7:24, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." In 2 Corinthians 10:7 and 12, Paul said, "Do ye look on things after the outward appearance?...For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves...." In other words, there are people who commend themselves on the basis of their outward appearance. There are people who are satisfied with how they behave externally. And there are people who evaluate others on the basis of what they see in terms of religious behavior. Such evaluation is rather typical of fallen man--he is basically satisfied with externals.

B. God's Emphasis of the Attitude

God is not so concerned with the outside as much as He is with the inside. The outside is only validated insofar as it is representative of what is on the inside. This principle is the basis of the text that we shall consider. Jesus emphasizes here in the Sermon on the Mount and throughout the rest of His ministry, that external ceremonies and religious rites are not the important issue, because God's primary concern is with the heart. That is precisely the thrust which is...

1. Identified in the Scriptures

a. Matthew 5:20 -- "For 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." The scribes and the Pharisees had a righteousness that was external, and Jesus was saying that you must have one which exceeds that...one 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. Whereas the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees was an external, ceremonial, ritualistic, hypocritical legalism, the righteousness that God demands is something internal. That has always been God's concern. Jesus was not articulating something never before known.b. 1 Kings 8:39 -- "Then hear Thou in heaven, Thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart Thou knowest (for Thou, even Thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men)." God is enjoined in that verse to respond to men not on the basis of outward deeds, but on the basis of the heart which He alone knows.c. 1 Chronicles 28:9a -- "And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts...." God is more concerned with the inside than the outside. The standard that God sets to evaluate men and women is the standard of the heart. The message is clear: Though God is concerned with external behavior, that behavior is only justified insofar as it is the outgrowth of internal righteousness, for God evaluates the heart. The need for the internal righteousness that God requires was...

2. Clarified by the Savior

At this point in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, Jesus shows how people living by such a principle relate to the Old Testament law, because such an understanding is critical to the Jews listening to Him speak. What He has been saying so far has been revolutionary to them, because

they have a purely external religion. Because the truths He has laid down are not common to their understanding of religion, they would have questions like, "This may be well and good, but how does it relate to the Old Testament, and to Moses, and to what the rabbis have taught? How does it relate to the system of traditional law that we adhere to?" The Jews to whom Jesus was preaching would lean so completely on the teachings related to their own Judaistic law, that our Lord couldn't bypass this section in verses 21 through 48. He has to show how this relates to their system. Verse 20 becomes the key as He says, "God's standard is higher than yours. What you now know as a righteous standard is unacceptable."

Now they're going to immediately say, "Wait a minute! We obey the law of God." But Jesus is saying, "Not at all. In fact, I have to redefine the law of God for you, because it's been lost in the midst of your tradition." The Judaism of the time was far from that true Old Testament law which God had given. This is how Jesus could say in verses 17 and 18, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets....Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the law...." In other words, "I'm not going to tolerate anybody who sets aside one of God's commands. What you have is not God's law; therefore, I must redefine it for you." And this is exactly what He does through the rest of chapters 5 through 7. They contain Jesus' explanation of what He said in verses 17 through 20 of Matthew 5.

Now, let's begin to see how Jesus goes about this in chapter 5:

I. THE PASSAGE EXAMINED

A. Its Illustrations Identified

Beginning in verse 21, we find a phrase that is repeated several times throughout the chapter: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old...but I say unto you...." Watch for it in the following verses. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old, Thou shalt not kill and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of judgment; but I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgment..." (vv. 21-22a). "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (vv. 27-28). "It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement; but I say unto you that whosoever shall put away his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery..." (vv. 31-32a). "Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old, Thou shalt not perjure thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths; but I say unto you, Swear not at all..." (vv. 33-34a). "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (vv. 38-39). "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, Love your enemies..." (vv. 43-44a).

B. The Context Clarified

1. The Lowering of the Standard

These six specific illustrations all follow a similar pattern. Jesus is saying, "Your religion teaches you that, but I say that you should do this." Jesus is not comparing Himself with the Old Testament. He's not raising the standard higher than the law of God. He's not talking about what Moses said. Jesus is talking about what their religious system taught them. He's saying, "Your standard is too low. You only worry about murder, while God looks at the heart and says if there's hate there, it's the same thing. You only worry about fornication, while God says that if there's lust in the heart, it's the same thing. God's standard is an attitudinal standard--yours is only dealing with action. That's the difference. The internal things are what God is really looking for."

In selecting His illustrations, Jesus is very careful. First of all, He chooses two commands from the Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments, given by Moses: "Thou shalt not kill [murder]" (Ex. 20:13), and "thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14). Then, He chooses two other commandments, taken

from other portions of the Mosaic writings, which are more general and deal with social relationships. Finally, He broadens to discuss the whole subject of love. In effect, what Jesus is saying is that God has standards, such as those regarding murder and adultery, that affect the very foundation of a society--the individual and the family. Beyond those basic standards are ones that relate to a wider set of social relationships, involving the issues of truth and justice. And finally, Jesus says that God's standards extend to the attitude of love, which affects the widest possible category of society, including even enemies. In other words, in all aspects of life, from the individual, to the family, to social relationships, to the wider world of our enemies, we should be characteristically righteous on the inside--a righteousness that affects not only behavioral standards in terms of what we do, but also in terms of what we think.

2. The Lifting of the Standard

The religious system of that day didn't have that definition, because it was strictly external.

Therefore, when Jesus said that one's righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees to be pleasing to God, His listeners were immediately shocked. But don't think for a minute that Jesus Christ came to set aside the law of God. He came to strip the rabbinic barnacles off the law of God to make it as pure as it was when God gave it by lifting it back to where it belonged. God had always been concerned with attitudes--that wasn't anything new. It was just that the people of Israel had lowered the standard and consequently needed to be reminded of that. They were justifying themselves by what they didn't do, while their hearts were full of murder, lust, lies, hate, and anger. To appear righteous, they were forced to lower the standards to accommodate their sin. This is why Jesus lifted it right back where it belonged, emphasizing that thoughts are just as important as deeds.

Such a confrontation was literally devastating to the Pharisees, because Jesus saw through their externals and exposed their hearts as being rotten. In fact, later on in Matthew 23, He says, "Outside you're whitewashed, inside you're like a tomb full of dead men's bones" (v. 27). Jesus made it plain that men and women are not to be judged solely by their deeds and actions, but by their desires and attitudes as well. This is as different from the world's standards today as it was for the scribes and Pharisees, who saw a man or woman as righteous if they never did the forbidden thing. They didn't care about their thoughts or attitudes. In contrast, Jesus said that a man is righteous if he never desires the forbidden things.

Patrick Fairbairn has written some words that are worth noting: "In the revelation of law there was a substratum of grace, recognized in the words which prefaced the Ten Commandments, and promises of grace in blessing also intermingled with the stern prohibitions and injunctions of which they consist. And so, inversely in the Sermon on the Mount, while it gives grace the priority and the prominence, it is far from excluding the severer part of God's character and government. No sooner, indeed, had grace poured itself forth in a succession of beatitudes, than there appear the stern demands of righteousness and law...."

God is not saying that if you are a Christian, you're free to do whatever you want. He is saying that for a child of the Kingdom, the standard is raised rather than lowered. The standards are still there, because the God who examines the heart hasn't changed.

Who is qualified to judge?

A key passage which answers this question is 1 Corinthians 4:3-5, where Paul addresses the issue of the Corinthians' criticism of his ministry.

1. Refusing Human Evaluation (v. 3)

"But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self."

Paul is saying, "Look, I will not allow myself to settle for human evaluation. I won't do it. Not yours and not mine." I can identify with that, because I tend to be biased in my own favor, which is a rather

typical human response. Sometimes people will give me gracious compliments, and though I appreciate them, it is not really important to me how I am evaluated by others, especially critics. The reason that I don't readily accept human evaluation, including my own, is that whether it is critical or kind, neither of us really know the secrets of the heart. I may know a little more than you, but even I don't know the whole picture.

2. Recognizing Honest Justification (v. 4)

"For I know nothing against myself, yet am I not hereby justified; but He that judgeth me is the Lord." In other words, Paul is saying, "Though there's nothing in my life I can see that is wrong, that doesn't justify me. That's the Lord's job." We may be able to see the externals, but they are not always good indicators of what's going on inside. A "good" action may be interpreted as being bad or just the reverse, as the following incident shows.

I'll never forget one time when I was in college at a school where they had so many rules that you couldn't even read them in a whole year. It was possible to break rules you didn't even know existed. On one occasion, a guy was called to the high tribunal of this school and was told, "You have broken the cardinal rule: We saw you leaving the campus with a blonde in a blue dress sitting next to you in your car. Where were you going?" Now in this particular school, you couldn't go anywhere with a girl, let alone leave the campus in your car. So, this was a horrendous crime of the first order. To this accusation, the young man replied, "That was my blue laundry bag and hanging out of it was a yellow towel!" Unfortunately, by that time, the rumor was already spread far and wide: This dissolute young man had been seen driving around with a blonde in a blue dress.

3. Revealing Hidden Motivation (v. 5)

"Therefore, judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels [motives] of the hearts...."

When God judges righteous judgment, He judges motives. You may be one who goes through life and never strikes a blow to anyone. You may have never killed anybody or even fought with anybody, but you may literally burn inside with anger. You may be one who's 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 with the things you have promised. These inner things cannot escape the scrutiny of God. You may want so badly to commit a sin, and though you never actually do it, God still holds you accountable as if you had. God judges the evil desire.

Jesus was literally hitting these Pharisees right between the eyes. Their hearts were filthy, while their deeds were religious. As Patrick Fairbairn has well said, "The scribes and Pharisees of that age had completely inverted the order of things. Their carnality and self-righteousness had led them to exalt the precepts respecting ceremonial observances to the highest place, and to throw the duties inculcated in the Ten Commandments comparatively into the background." They just dealt with externals. But though the state of the heart was not their concern, it was Jesus' concern. Look at our own society, they do this very thing all the time: "Oh, so-and-so is such a good person. He's so charitable." Yet God knows what's going on inside--only He knows the motives behind what we do.

C. Its Authority Amplified

1. The Possibilities Explained

There is a slight variation in the form of the phrase that's repeated in this passage, but it is basically the same in each of the six incidents. There are two possibilities with regard to how the phrase could be translated. It could read, "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old" or, "by them of old." The Greek could be translated either way. If the phrase used the word to, it would probably refer to the Old Testament. But if the word by was used, this would indicate that it isn't the Bible speaking to the people, but some ancient people speaking.

2. The Preference Explained

I believe that the proper rendering is "by them of old" for several reasons: I don't think the law of Moses is in view, because Jesus isn't saying, "You have heard that it was said to them of old by Moses or by God, but I'm saying this," or He would be contradicting the words of Moses from God in the Old Testament. Furthermore, if Jesus had said that, He would be setting aside the law and the prophets, which would be a direct contradiction of what He had just said in verse 17. Another reason I don't think that Moses was the one doing the speaking is that Jesus did not say, "You have heard that Moses commanded" or, "You have heard that it is written," which is precisely what He said three times in Matthew 4 when He referred to the Old Testament. And in chapter 8, when He referred to the Old Testament, He said, "Moses commanded." The last reason for not accepting "to" as the best translation is the fact that famous rabbis were called "fathers of antiquity" or "men of long ago." Hence, I believe this 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, as they added their own thoughts to the revelation of the Old Testament. So Jesus is not contrasting the Old Testament with the New Testament nor His word with God's word, but the word of the rabbis and their traditional interpretation which had been given to the people. Let me give you two illustrations of this that Martyn Lloyd-Jones has used:

3. The Practice Exemplified

a. By the Roman Catholic Church Before the Reformation The condition of the Jew at the time of Christ was remarkably like that of the people in the Reformation. Prior to the Reformation, the Scriptures were not translated into the people's language. When you went to church for the mass, the whole thing was done in Latin. There was no Bible to speak of in the hands of the people. The only contact the people had with the Bible was from what was read by the priests in Latin. Consequently, nobody understood it and nobody read it, except for the priests, who would expound upon this Latin text. The people would simply believe whatever the priest said because they had no basis by which to evaluate: They couldn't read the Latin, let alone interpret it. So they accepted what the priest said. Century after century went by in this way with the Roman Catholic Church having developed a system which was never really investigated by the people, mainly because they didn't have the Bible in their own language. The people had unquestioningly 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 people's hands. When they began to read the Scripture, then many began to see the false teaching and the misrepresentation of the gospel which had been given to them for centuries. It was the truth of the gospel that helped to shatter the Dark Ages, and Protestant Christianity as we know it today was born out of that. And today, we have the Bible in our own languages and are therefore able to evaluate the validity of any religious system by the Bible's divine standard. This was the kind of thing that was going on in our Lord's day. Another similar illustration can be found...

b. By the Jews After the Babylonian Captivity When Israel went into captivity for seventy years, historians tell us that they essentially lost the Hebrew language, acquiring instead a language known as Aramaic. Consequently, when they came back from captivity, the Jews were still speaking Aramaic up to, and beyond, the time of Jesus. Because the Jewish people spoke Aramaic and were, for the most part, completely unfamiliar with Hebrew, the people were dependent upon the rabbis to read and interpret the Hebrew language, which the people didn't understand. Thus, the rabbis began to build an entire system based upon the ignorance of the people regarding the Hebrew text. As a result of this situation, the Lord is best understood as having said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old..." In this case, He would be describing the religion of the Jews at that time as a product of the oral tradition of the rabbis, rather than from the written Word of God. Their religious system had departed from its biblical base with all of the embellishments, traditions, and interpretations of the Mishnah (the codification of oral law) and the rest of the Talmud, which, in effect, pushed the truth of God into obscurity. Just as the Roman Catholic Church obliterated the truth by keeping the people ignorant of the Scriptures, so the

Jews were ignorant of the Scriptures in the time of the rabbis. Partly for this reason, our Lord came along and said, "I am here to loose the law of God from the shackles of rabbinic mishmash." Most significantly, He attacked their emphasis upon external works for righteousness, saying, "You have heard it said by them of old, but I say unto you...."

4. The Perplexity Expressed

a. The Respect of the Lord With this phrase, Jesus established Himself as the authority. When He said, "I will tell you what God's law really is," the people were shocked. In fact, they said of Him that "He taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes" (Mk. 1:22b). Similarly, in Matthew 7, as He concluded His sermon, "...the people were astonished at His doctrine; for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (vv. 28b-29).

b. The Reverence of the Law They were shocked for someone to set himself as equal to the law of God, because the Jews believed that this traditional law that they assumed to be the law of God was sacred. For example, Philo said, "Only Moses' decrees are everlasting, unchangable, unshakable...." The rabbis said, "Those who deny that the law is from heaven have no part in the world to come." They believed this was the only law and that eternal destiny was dependent upon it. But here came along Jesus and He spoke without ever quoting a rabbi. When He gave His own authoritative statement, the people were literally shocked, for He was claiming equal authority to the law they so greatly revered. Whereas the prophets always said, "Thus saith the Lord," and the rabbis said, "There is a teaching that says...", Jesus said, "I say unto you." Rightly did William Barclay remark, "Clearly one of two things must be true--either Jesus was mad, or He was unique; either He was a megalomaniac or else He was the Son of God." No ordinary person would dare to claim what He claimed. Jesus clearly claimed the authority of God, stripping away the layers of tradition that concealed God's true law, and lifting it back to where it belonged. Now, let me close the introduction to this passage by summarizing the key principles Jesus is teaching here.

II. THE PRINCIPLES EXPRESSED

A. Regarding the Law

1. Its Priority

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

a. Explained The law is not mechanical, or simply functional. However, when it is misused in this way, it is possible to be all white on the outside and a wretched, vile grave on the inside. Knowing that it is the letter of the law which kills and the Spirit which gives life (2 Cor. 3:6), we must realize that God is not looking for externals--He's looking for changed hearts. The scribes and Pharisees thought that because they didn't murder or commit adultery, they were all right...but they were hateful and harbored lustful thoughts. Their religion was a legalistic hypocrisy of the worst kind that damned the soul. It failed to teach that conformity to God's law is a matter of the heart and not simply a matter of the outside.

b. Exemplified Oh, what a lesson this is to us who tend to justify ourselves! In Luke 16:15 Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Ye are they who justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." Men and God judge differently. You can come to Grace Church, or even your own church, and you can play the game, talk the talk, do the works in the energy of the flesh, justifying yourself in your own eyes and in the eyes of others, and at the same time be an abomination to God because your heart is full of corruption. That's what Jesus was saying. Truly it is the spirit of the law that is the priority, not the letter.

2. Its Positiveness

The law is not just negative, it is also 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. The Pharisees were concerned with what they didn't do. God was concerned with what they did do inside. Did they hunger and 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...the development of spiritual character.

3. Its Purpose

The law is not an end in itself. It had a purpose. What is the goal of the law? The Pharisees said that it was to glorify me when I keep the law so that people could see how righteous I am. But the true end of the law is to glorify God. It's not a question of asking yourself, "Have I kept all the laws today?" but rather one of, "Have I glorified God in my spirit today? Have I been free from phoniness? Have I had a pure heart that had no thought of evil, anger, hatred, bitterness, lust, or unrighteousness...to the glory of God?"

John Calvin made this tremendous statement in his Institutes: "First, let us agree that through the law man's life is molded not only to outward honesty but to inward and spiritual righteousness. Although no one can deny this, very few duly note it. This happens because they do not look to the Lawgiver, by whose character the nature of the law is to be appraised. If some king by edict forbids fornication, murder or theft, I admit that a man who does not commit such acts will not be bound by the penalty. That is because the mortal lawgiver's jurisdiction extends only to the outward political order....But God, whose eye nothing escapes, and who is concerned not so much with outward appearance as with purity of heart, forbids not only fornication, murder, theft--but lust, anger, hatred, coveting...deceit.... For since He is a spiritual lawgiver, He speaks no less to the soul than to the body..." (Library of Christian Classics [Pa.: Westminster Press, 1967], vol. 1, p. 372). What Calvin means is if you think God's laws are only external, then you don't know the character of God.

Next, we come to the first of two principles...

B. Regarding the Lawgiver

1. His Discernment

God alone can judge men. He alone sees the secrets of the heart. He knows you...and He knows if you're really a Christian or if you're playing a religious game. He knows if you're carnal or spiritual as a believer. He knows whether it's just a matter of acts or really of attitudes. He knows whether or not the heart matches the outside. Hebrews 4:12-13 says, "For the word of God is living, and powerful...and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." But though God knows everything, we can find comfort in the fact that we have a faithful, sympathetic high priest: "let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (v. 16). Isn't it great? God knows our hearts. He knows if they're rotten, but He stands with His arms open, ready to give us grace and mercy. God alone can judge the heart. Though many a man and woman can stand the judgment of men, they will fall before the discerning eye of God. You had better examine your own heart.

2. His Demands

Every person is commanded to live up to divine standards.

a. In the Words of Jesus "For 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....Be ye, therefore, perfect, even as your Father, who is in heaven, is perfect" (Mt. 5:20, 48). Every person in the world is required to live up to that standard. You say, "You've got to be kidding!" No, I'm not. You are obligated to live up to that standard with a pure inside as well as a right outside. But you say, "I can't!" You are absolutely right. That's why we are given the solution...b. In the Words of Paul "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.... But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe..." (Rom. 3:10, 21-22a). Though you can't obtain on your own the righteous standard Christ set, you can receive His righteousness if you are one of those who believe. Isn't that great? God set the holy

standard. And when you acknowledge that you can't live up to it, He says, "My Son is not only the Lawgiver, but He is the Redeemer as well, who makes it possible for you to live on that level." Beloved, it's a fantastic thing! The standard is so high we can't obtain it. But Christ met that standard and imputes to us His righteousness. Oh, what a blessed thing!

CONCLUSION

You may look at yourself and say, "The outside is not bad, but the inside is rotten." And if God did what was right, He would consume you in a blast of His fury. But because He's a merciful and gracious God, He makes His Lawgiver not just a lawgiver, but a Redeemer, too. Jesus, who perfectly kept the law, imputes His righteousness to us so that when God looks at those of us who are believers, He sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ covering us. 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 behavior, you will never come to the desperation that reaches out and accepts the gift of righteousness.

The great preacher of many years ago, Henry Ward Beecher, had a clock in his church that didn't keep good time. It was always too fast or too slow.

Month after month he fiddled with it, trying to rectify the problem. Soon it became a standard topic of conversation in the church, until 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. And until you deal with the deeper trouble of the spiritual realm, there will be no way to set the hands aright permanently.

Focusing on the Facts

1. On what basis do most people evaluate their own lives as well as the lives of others?
2. With what is God primarily concerned?
3. The _____ is only validated insofar as it is representative of what is on the _____.
4. Compare the righteousness that the Pharisees had to the kind that God demands.
5. Why did Jesus have to redefine the law to the Judaism of His day?
6. What is the phrase that Jesus repeats from verses 21-44 of Matthew 5?
7. What is the significance of the variety of illustrations that Jesus selected in Matthew 5:21-44 with regard to the degree that we should be characteristically righteous on the inside?
8. Why did Jesus have to lift the standard of God up?
9. Why did Paul refuse to accept human evaluation regarding his motives?
10. Why are externals not always good indicators of what is going on inside?
11. Who alone knows the motives behind what we do?
12. If the phrase of Jesus were to be translated "it was said to them of old," what would the source of authority be identified as? If the word "by" were used, who would be identified as the ones speaking? What are some reasons that the latter choice is preferred?
13. Rather than contrasting His word with what God had already revealed in the Old Testament, what was Jesus really comparing His teaching to?
14. How were the situations of the people before the Reformation and the Jews after the Babylonian Captivity similar with regard to the teaching from the Bible?
15. What was the people's reaction to the teaching of Jesus, according to Mark 1:22?
16. To what was Jesus claiming equal authority, that shocked the people?
17. What did the Judaism of Christ's day fail to teach with regard to conformity to God's law?
18. Rather than just to prevent us from doing certain things, what is the real object of the law, from a positive perspective?
19. What was the true purpose of the law, as opposed to how the Pharisees used it?

20. Who is commanded to live up to divine standards? What is the only way that righteous standard can be attributed to us?

Pondering the Principles

1. What standards do you regulate your life by? Do you accept the Bible as the authoritative Word of God? Or, have you lowered your standards

to the degree that anything you do can be justified in your own eyes? If Jesus were to come to you and evaluate your religious activity, would He say that you had maintained His standards, lowered them, or even raised them higher than what He expects? As you read the Bible, do you discover things in your life that don't match up to the biblical mandates? If so, do you just assume that the Bible doesn't match your standard because you are part of a different culture or because of some other reason? Or, do you try to find ways that you can adjust your life to match Scripture? Make a point of finding answers to any discrepancies between what the Bible says and what believers actually do, by consulting Bible teachers and commentaries. You just may find that you or your church might have to begin doing things a little differently.

2. How's your thought life? Knowing that "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13b), and that God's judgment goes behind the action to the attitude, do you consciously make an effort to control the content of your thoughts? Identify those desires you cherish which are not glorifying to God, and, after you have confessed them, ask God to strengthen you in "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5b).

3. This week, keep a mental note of how many times you judge the motives of others that you have no way of really verifying, as well as the times that you perform an action with the wrong attitude. You may find that God still needs to do some refining in your life in these areas. If you catch yourself judging the motives of others, think the best of them with the kind of love that "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (1 Cor. 13:7).

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