

Who Is an Adulterer? Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 5:27

Code: 2215

INTRODUCTION

A. The Teaching of Our Savior

In the fifth chapter of Matthew, our Lord answered the question in the forefront of the minds of the people who had seen His miracles and heard His teaching: "Was this miracle worker the Messiah who would bring God's Kingdom?" There were certain elements in the teaching and ministry of Jesus that made them think He might be the One. They also wanted to know what the standards were for His Kingdom, and whether or not they conformed to the law of God and the teaching of Moses. Therefore, Jesus summarized His message to them in Matthew 5:17-20 with the following words: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever, 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. 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." In other words, He was saying, "I am the Messiah and My message is the same message that Moses gave you...not any different. I will not change or destroy it, because I came to fulfill it. However, the standards for My Kingdom must exceed the standards that you are now living by."

1. Reestablishing the Standard

Now, there was the basic standard that Jesus gave. He required a righteousness beyond that of the scribes and Pharisees, who supposedly were the most righteous people in the Jewish society. Jesus was demanding more than they asked, but not more than Moses asked. The standard of the law demanded more than even the most seemingly righteous Jews were giving. Consequently, this was a difficult statement for the Jews to understand. It did not make sense to them how He could accept the law and still require a higher righteousness than that of the scribes and Pharisees, who appeared as though they lived the law of Moses to the hilt. For this reason, the question in the minds of the people was, "If You believe in the law of Moses, how can You require a greater standard than the scribes and Pharisees who teach us that law?"

Though the scribes and the Pharisees sat in the seat of Moses, claiming to be the proponents of the law of Moses, in reality, they themselves had lowered the law of Moses to their own design and, as a result, were not even keeping that which God originally intended. This is why Jesus comes to lift the standard back to where it was in the beginning. In doing this, Jesus gives His listeners several illustrations of how the religious leaders and the people fell short on every aspect of God's absolute standard. He wants them to see that the people were not living up to God's standard, which they had lowered, and so He must raise it back to where it really should be. In effect, what He does here is to destroy any system of self- righteousness.

God, Created in the Image of Man

What man tends to do is this: If he doesn't want to come God's way, he creates his own god as well as a compatible religious system so that he can say, "This is what is required. Therefore, this is what

I'll accomplish so that I can be justified." Man drags the law of God down to something he can do, does it, and then convinces himself he's okay. A typical response today to the question, "What are you going to do when you die?" would be, "Well, I hope I'm going to heaven on the basis that I am a pretty good guy. God certainly will take me to heaven." In other words, man invents the kind of god he wants with the kind of standards he can keep so he can consider himself righteous. But what we can say to a person like that today is, "That's not the way it is. The standard of God is too high...you can't keep it." This is exactly what Jesus is saying.

2. Rebuking the Self-Righteous

The scribes and the Pharisees invented a standard lower than the divine one, figured out how they could keep it, and kept it the best they could, convincing themselves they were righteous. But Jesus says, "Not on your life! Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you'll never enter into My Kingdom. Rather than violating the law of Moses, in terms of adding to it or changing it, I am simply reiterating where Moses put it in the beginning. Let's get it back where it belongs!" So Jesus reestablishes God's original standard so that He might destroy the people's false sense of security in their own self-righteousness. Contrasting the righteousness they thought they had with the true, divine standard, He literally strips all men and women stark naked spiritually speaking, before God, until they realize that they have no claim of self-righteousness left. Let's see how He does this by briefly looking at the illustration in verses 27 to 30:

a. The Proclamation of the Illustration "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). In other words, Jesus is saying, "Your tradition taught you by the scribes and Pharisees says that if you just don't commit adultery, you are righteous. But that standard is too low...let's put it back where God intended it. God never was solely concerned about the act, but rather primarily the attitude behind it." Then, in verses 29-30, Jesus gives them a hyperbolic solution for meeting the divine standard: "And 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. And 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." In other words, you are a lot better off to cut off your arm or to pluck out your eye if it leads you to sin, which includes not simply what you do, but also what you feel and think in your heart.

b. The Purpose of the Illustration With this second illustration of adultery, Jesus is confronting the self-righteous, saying, "You can't say that because you didn't actually carry out the sin, that you are all right, for if you ever thought it, you have committed it in God's eyes. If you ever lusted, desiring to commit this sin, then you are a sinner who cannot claim to be righteous. It is no different than if you were angry with your brother: Even though you didn't actually murder him, you still would be guilty." Now, whereas His illustration in verses 21-22 dealt with the Sixth Commandment, the illustration in verses 27-28 deals with the Seventh Commandment, their underlying principles being the sacredness of life, and the sacredness of marriage, respectively. Using these two illustrations, Jesus says, "You are not righteous before God if you've ever been angry or if you've ever thought of committing adultery." He is trying to show them how really sinful they are, no matter what their outside behavior may be.

c. The Power of the Illustration Anger and sex are two very powerful elements that really reach deep down into human experience. They aptly illustrate the sinfulness of man, cutting to the very core of the issue. We've all experienced the common temptations of anger and lust, which reach deep into the basic sinfulness of man. And those Jews who were sitting on the hillside in Galilee hearing the Lord Jesus Christ confront them about the anger and lust in their hearts, would have to admit by virtue of their own consciences that they were indeed sinners. The fact that they never killed anybody or committed the act of adultery didn't exonerate them from the sinfulness which reigned in their hearts. Jesus wants to go right to the heart

of man and show them that no matter what they have or haven't done, they can't fit into His Kingdom, thereby exhibiting God's unattainable standard.

Are sexual temptations worse in our society?

The fact that Jesus says that anybody who looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart, is a tremendous statement to somebody living in our society today, when the temptations are so vast. Temptation has always been around...it didn't matter whether a woman was covered from head to foot in a long robe and a veil, the temptation would still be there. There have always been those things which the devil would use to generate lust and which the flesh would pounce upon to initiate the temptation. However, it seems to me that in the day in which we live, the temptations are so much more rampant and so much more visible around us, because of the virtueless society that we live in.

B. The Trends of Our Society

1. The Evaluation of Its Sexual Preoccupation

I believe that sex in marriage, in the beauty of which God has designed it, was meant to be a very personal discovery--not something plastered all over billboards and taught in classes and presented in books. I think it's something very private, special, and unique. The fact that we incessantly teach and talk about sex only serves to elicit evil responses out of the hearts of evil men and evil women. It doesn't do anything to help the situation. For example, we find explicit sex seminars and books. There are people constantly preaching on the subject, advocating this and that. I have even heard the strangest kind of counseling coming from men of God that boggles my mind. I heard one man who is a minister saying that couples ought to take a shower together before they get married so that they will know what they're getting into. That kind of counsel is just exactly the thing that Jesus is saying is so wrong and is nothing more than a manifestation of sinfulness. I don't think ever in the history of the western world since the death of Greek and Roman paganism have we seen the unbridled indulgence of sexual passion so encouraged and so elicited and so praised as we do today. You might be interested to know that the American Civil Liberties Union, which takes up all kinds of civil rights causes, was seeking to remove restrictions on X-rated movies so that children can attend them.

It won't be long until you're going to have to take your television and put your foot through it, frankly. Mass media lures with sex to sell its products and glamorizes illicit pleasure. Sex crimes are at an all-time high. Divorce, infidelity, and perversion are being praised and are subjects for humor in our society. The "pleasure first" philosophy of hedonism is rampant and in full force. Monogamous marriage is threatened, and marital fidelity is ridiculed and mocked. We could cite numerous examples of the decline of morality in our society, but that is not necessary, because you can clearly see its effects all around you. I even have to avoid looking at a magazine rack, because I don't even want to bombard my mind with what is there on the cover, let alone on the inside.

A new morality has been espoused by church men such as Bishop Robinson in England and such philosophers as Joseph Fletcher and Harvey Cox with their situation ethics, which basically says that right is relative, and whatever feels good you ought to do as long as it doesn't hurt anybody else. Our whole society is so preoccupied with sex that it's just beyond belief. An illustration by C.S. Lewis shows how ludicrous it is: He says that you can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act--that is, to watch a girl undress on a stage. And if that doesn't indicate how warped our view of sex and womanhood is, imagine if you went to a country where you could fill a theater by bringing in a covered plate on the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let everyone see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a piece of bacon. Wouldn't you think that something had gone wrong with their appetite for food? Should we not think that it's just as ridiculous for our society to be so infatuated with somebody taking off their clothes? The playboy philosophy is

nothing but a mutton chop mentality--it's a perversion. Hugh Hefner comes along and says that we shouldn't get all upset about sex, because it's only "a biological necessity like eating, drinking and sleeping." That kind of philosophy is not new, though, because it comes right out of Greek and Roman paganism.

2. The Evaluation from a Scriptural Perspective

a. The Perversions of Sex Condemned (1 Cor. 6:13-18)¹ The Explanation of Paul The Apostle Paul reiterates that philosophy as he confronts the Corinthians about their preoccupation with the wrong perspective of sex. Essentially, they were saying, "Foods for the body, and the body for foods..." (v. 13a). In other words, the Corinthians used this proverbial response to prove that sex is only a biological thing, like eating, sleeping, or drinking. However, Paul responds to their indifference, saying, "...but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body" (v. 13). Because the body belongs to God, you can't just give it over to indulgence and say, "It's only biology." That's the mutton chop- playboy philosophy. Continuing his rebuke, Paul says, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I, then, take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? Know ye not that he who is joined to an harlot is one body?...But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (vv. 15-16a, 17). In other words, if you enter into an adulterous situation, you join the Lord to that sin. There are spiritual implications with what the Christian does with his body. This is why Paul so adamantly says in verse 18, "Flee fornication... [Gk. *porneia* = 'evil sexual behavior']".²

The Effects of Perversion The view that sex is only a biological urge and you need to live it up and enjoy the present regardless of the consequences is the logical result of situation ethics: "Don't be restrained and inhibited--live it up with whoever you want. It's just biology anyway." That philosophy is drowning our society in a sea of sexual perversion. It has bombarded us with a barrage of propaganda that is shattering families and ruining individual lives, by destroying the capability of an individual to do what is right unless he has completely committed himself to Jesus Christ. Relationships have been replaced with perversions, concern with concupiscence, and love with lechery. That's the way it is in our society. On the other hand, whenever you talk about sex, you not only have the people who sit up in their chair because it's their favorite subject, you also have the people who grab their Bible and head for the door. The latter are considered rather prudish because they hold the Victorian view, which goes to the opposite extreme of saying that sex is shameful and less than holy. Such a reactionary view has been practiced in the present as well as in the past. But that's not the answer either. You can't go to the extreme of saying that sex is purely a biological function, and you can't go to the other extreme and say that castration will solve the problem. One is just as much a perversion as the other, because God has wonderfully designed sex as a part of human life.

b. The Purpose of Sex Confirmed (1 Cor. 7:3-5) The Apostle Paul discusses God's design of a physical relationship, saying, "Let the husband render unto the wife her due; and likewise also, the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not [or 'stop depriving'] one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency [or 'lack of self control']". In other words, he says that you have every right and responsibility to give your body to your husband or wife in the fulfillment of sexual desire. God has designed the physical relationship and has sanctified and blessed it, as is apparent from the Song of Solomon, which describes the beauty of human love in a marital situation. So it is that sex is pure and right, but our world has made a mutton chop mentality out of it. It has been degenerated into a twisted, jaded, and lecherous perversion that appeals to the hearts of sinful, evil men. Now, as we come to this passage in Matthew 5:27-32, we need to recognize that it is a very fitting word for the society in which we live. Let us discover what it is teaching about...

I. THE STANDARD OF GOD'S LAW

A. Lowered by the Jews

Now the Pharisees had their own viewpoint about not committing adultery: They felt that because they didn't do it they were righteous; they thought they'd go right into the Kingdom and have the chief seats. Maybe you're like that. Maybe you say to yourself, "I'm not so bad. I've never actually gone out on my wife and committed adultery." But Jesus says if you ever look on a woman to lust after her you've done it in your heart, and that's enough to damn you to hell forever. That is the implication of verses 29-30. Your self-confidence is shattered here, because the external system of law is unable to meet God's standard, which takes your attitude into account.

Jesus wants to show His listeners that they can't help themselves, in spite of the fact that they can control their actions. They could avoid committing adultery, but they couldn't do anything with the inside about which they were essentially powerless to change. This realization should have driven them in desperation to seek God, who alone can change the heart. They desperately wanted to believe they were okay, but Jesus shows them they weren't.

Now, because the standard of God's law had been lowered by the Jews, it had to be...

B. Lifted Back Up by Jesus

Notice the contrast between the beginning of verses 27 and 28: "Ye have heard...but I say...." This same formula is used in verses 21 and 22, 31 and 32, 33 and 34, 38 and 39, and 43 and 44. It points to the Jews' misunderstanding of God's law, which Jesus addressed in this fashion: "You have heard from the rabbis, who interpreted the law; but I'm telling you the truth of the law--the standard you have is not right, nor is it sufficient. Your teachers of tradition have reduced the law of God to a simple external, and consequently, they haven't given you the whole story. They have told you that if you don't commit adultery, then you're okay; but I'm telling you there's more to this than just that. You have merely invented a system that you can live up to and then convinced yourself that you are righteous."

The self-righteous who were listening to Jesus teach could avoid committing adultery, but they couldn't do anything about their secret life. They had missed the whole point of the Old Testament, where God had said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14). And when God gave any other precept in the Old Testament, He was talking about far more than the deed itself, which is what Jesus wants them to understand. Let me show you what I mean by discussing...

II. THE SUMMARY OF GOD'S LAW

The basic revelation of God's message to man came through Moses in the form of the Pentateuch, which essentially is the core of the Old Testament. The Prophets and the Writings that follow the Mosaic writings are simply explanations, commentaries, or elaborations of what is contained in the law of Moses. Many times as you read through the Prophets, you find the various prophets indicting the people because they had failed to keep the law of Moses. It is the Pentateuch that sets the pace and contains, as it were, the gospel of God given through Moses. The rest of the Old Testament elaborates on that law of God laid down through Moses. God revealed His basic requirements through Moses, elaborated on them in the Prophets and the Writings, and consummated them in Jesus Christ, who came not to change anything, but to clear up the issue that the law of Moses hadn't changed.

Now, the essence of the law of Moses is...

A. Expressed in Deuteronomy

In Deuteronomy, the fifth and last of the five books of Moses, we have a summary of the law of God. I believe that Deuteronomy is the most important book in the Old Testament. It was the reiteration of the law (hence, its Greek name which means "second law") given by God to Israel as the nation was about to enter and take possession of the land He had promised them. It served as a summarization of all the standards for living in God's Kingdom. The centrality of the book of Deuteronomy is supported by the facts that the Ten Commandments are repeated in the fifth chapter, and that Jesus

and the New Testament writers quoted this book more than any other from the Old Testament. This critical book is the summarization of the entire Old Testament, because essentially all that follows it comments upon the Pentateuch, of which Deuteronomy is the key. In fact, I believe that the summary of the entire Bible is contained in Deuteronomy, which stresses the importance of...

1. The Relationship of Love

a. Emphasized Deuteronomy 6:5 says, "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." That principle, which is the pinnacle of the whole Bible, is complemented with a secondary principle also conveyed in Deuteronomy, though more explicitly stated in Leviticus 19:18: "...thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself...." Now there you have the consummation of all of God's truth. Jesus verified this when He said, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Mt. 22:37-40). b. Explained The Old Testament is not building a relationship on law; it is building a relationship on love. So many people do not understand this. They think the Old Testament economy was an economy of law--it is not. It is an economy of love. It is a relationship that God is after. Love is the key to a relationship with God, which is made clear all throughout Deuteronomy, where God continues to say, "I want you to love Me. I want a wholehearted commitment of true devotion." Besides the relationship of a man to God, Deuteronomy also stresses...

2. The Response to Love

a. Stated Throughout Deuteronomy, Moses says to Israel over and over again as they prepare to enter the land, "You must love the Lord, because it is a relationship of love that God has always sought with man." Before God ever gave the law to Israel in the form of the Ten Commandments and all the other statutes and regulations, He established a relationship with them. He first loved Israel, delivering them out of Egypt. It was only after establishing a loving relationship with them and accomplishing redemption that He gave them the law. Therefore, the law was not the cause of the relationship; it was the result of it. In other words, God first freed Israel from Egypt, made them His people, and after that, said, "This is how you are to live." b. Supported The New Testament confirms these words of Moses, whether it is Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, or John who is speaking. For example, John said, "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:19). God loved Israel--that's how it all began. Similarly, we were first brought into a relationship of love with God, and then we had a response of obedience to His law. It is the attitude that God has always been after. It is not that God wanted them to keep a bunch of external laws, it is that He wanted them to be self-motivated to love Him. That's why Jesus says, "It isn't an issue of whether you don't murder or commit adultery. The issue is what is in your heart." It's always been that way. This isn't anything unique to the New Testament, as Deuteronomy 10 shows. Rather than starting with the requirement to keep the Ten Commandments, notice what Moses says: "And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, [and then] to keep the commandments of the LORD, and His statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?" (vv. 12- 13). That's no different than what the New Testament teaches, when it says that if you profess to know and love God, and yet you don't keep His commandments, you are a liar (1 Jn. 2:4). The love comes first, and then the obedience. Deuteronomy 10 even sets forth the second dimension, that of loving one's neighbor, which finds its source in loving God first: "Love ye, therefore, the sojourner; for ye were sojourners in the land of Egypt. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; Him shalt thou serve, and to Him shalt thou cleave.... Therefore, thou shalt love the LORD thy God, and keep His charge, and His statutes, and His ordinances, and His commandments, always" (10:19-20a; 11:1). Can you see that it is reciprocating love of a heart relationship that God desires from man? This is why Moses says in 10:16, "Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart...." God has always sought the attitude of the

heart. Never has He been satisfied with merely an external response. This is evident from the main theme of the first eleven chapters of Deuteronomy, which can be summarized in the statement, "Love God, and love your neighbor." That's what God requires of you, and is exactly what Jesus and the Epistles repeat in the New Testament.

c. Surveyed

1) The Application Then, in Deuteronomy 12-25, Moses interprets and applies these two basic principles of loving God and loving your neighbor to every daily situation, giving them various statutes which implement these principles in every kind of living situation.

2) The Affirmation When it comes to chapter 26, he gathers everybody together for a service of dedication, where the people confess their sins and rededicate their lives as an affirmation of their love for God. It is a time for their hearts to be committed to the Lord and a time of great praise and worship as Moses challenges them to serve God from their hearts in obedience: "This day the LORD thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and ordinances; thou shalt, therefore, keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul" (v. 16). In chapter 27, Moses tells them, "Joshua is going to take you into the land, because I have forfeited that privilege. And when you get there, the first thing I want you to do is renew this same commitment that you will love the Lord and each other."

3) The Alternatives Then, in chapter 28, he says to them, "Now you have two choices: You can be blessed or you can be cursed." He delineates the blessings in verses 3-13, and the curses throughout the rest of the chapter. In other words, he is saying, "When you get into the land, if you choose to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and to love your neighbor, you will be blessed. But if you choose not to love the Lord and your neighbor, you will be cursed."

4) The Appeal In chapters 29-30, Moses appeals to the people to make a decision about what they will do: "For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very near unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it" (30:11-14). In other words, "You have a choice to make and the information is sufficient to make a wise decision. You can choose blessing for loving God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself, or you can choose cursing for not doing that. But don't complain that you didn't have the information, because it's available here."

"See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil, in that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances, that thou mayest live and multiply; and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land to which thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them, I declare unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, to which thou passest over the Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live, that thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey His voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him; for He is thy life, and the length of thy days; that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them" (vv. 15-20).

So, this is the sum of the whole Old Testament: love God. God has always wanted a heart relationship. He didn't approve of anyone in the Old Testament who just mechanically kept the Ten Commandments. That didn't fulfill the plan of God. The Ten Commandments were only given to regulate a relationship that was based on love, and if the love relationship wasn't there, the regulation didn't mean anything. That's the point. The centrality of God's concern is the heart, not the externals. Though the Pharisees were satisfied with the externals, they had really missed the point, which is the reason Jesus said, "Ye have heard that it was said...but I say unto you...." "You're preoccupied with the outside and God is concerned with the inside." It is a relationship of love that God wants and the law only regulates it, just as the standards of the New Testament regulate a New Covenant relationship with the Lord.

When you come to Matthew 22:34-40, you find our Lord

reiterating the same thing that comes out of Deuteronomy, which He identifies as the two greatest commandments. He says, in effect, "I don't care what your functions are or what performances you make; if you don't love God and your neighbor, you've missed the point." That's why Jesus could say to the rich young ruler, "It's wonderful that you've kept all the commandments from your youth, but you know what you haven't done? You haven't manifested a right heart attitude, because you haven't demonstrated your love for your neighbor by being willing to sell all you have and giving it to the poor." This merely betrayed the fact that while there was an external behavior, there was nothing going on inside. It was hypocritical.

The Final Fulfillment for the Frustration and Futility Through Failure

1. The Purpose of the Standard

There is a reason for love being God's internal standard that no one can keep. In the Old Testament, God established this standard: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." But the people in the Old Testament would admit that they were unable to keep God's standard, which is exactly what God wanted them to recognize. When they couldn't keep it, they experienced the guilt of sin. However, God didn't just leave them helpless and frustrated in their conviction; He gave them the sacrificial system to deal with their inability to keep His perfect standard. When a man or a woman admitted, "I can't keep the law of God, and I'm overwhelmed with my sin," God said, "Then confess your sin to Me and prove the genuineness of that confession by an act of sacrifice." The sacrificial system didn't make men right with God; it simply pointed out that only God could make them right with Him. It pointed out they needed a sacrifice, because of their inability to keep God's standard regarding a relationship of love. When men couldn't fulfill all which that standard required, they became guilty and convicted of sin. But in order to deal with guilt, God provided a sacrificial system, which, in and of itself, never gave a lasting peace and relief from guilt. Yet, in its futility, the system pointed to the fact that someday, someplace, in some way, there had to be an ultimate sacrifice that would do away with sin once and for all.

2. The Provision of a Savior

The whole sacrificial system pointed to Jesus Christ. Therefore, the gospel of Moses was the gospel of Christ. Moses had presented a standard of a loving relationship that a man in his evil heart couldn't fulfill. But even making a sacrifice out of contrition was futile, because the process never ended nor fully accomplished complete forgiveness. It pointed to Jesus Christ as the final sacrifice and fruition of everything Moses ever taught. The whole sequence pointed to the Savior, because He is the only One who could deal with man on the inside.

The Old Testament sacrificial system served to frustrate man, to show him his desperation, and to show him that he couldn't save himself no matter what he did. If the heart relationship wasn't right, he wasn't right.

So, by the time you get to Jesus' day, the Jews had lowered the standard, disregarding the necessity of having a heart relationship. The very fact that they asked Him what the greatest commandment was implies they had forgotten what God's internal standard required: "...Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God..." (Mk. 12:29b- 30a). For centuries the standard had slipped by their own choice. They had done away with the part they couldn't keep and stuck with the externals.

Furthermore, the summary of God's internal law was...

B. Expressed in the Decalogue

1. Its Purpose

Now you ask, "How do the Ten Commandments fit in?" That's easy. The Ten Commandments were simply a way to regulate love, that's all. Did you know the Ten Commandments are just a definition of love? You say, "I've heard the Ten Commandments are law: 'Thou shalt not do this or that....'" No,

they are simply a way to regulate the expression of love. First of all, redemption preceded the giving of the Ten Commandments: Israel was first called out of Egypt and redeemed and ordained as God's people. Then, after God had set His affection upon them, came the code of ethics. Once the relationship was established, the principles of behavior were laid out. But never forget it-- redemption preceded law, because God is always concerned with relationship. The relationship preceded the law or the Ten Commandments. The law did not establish the covenant...love established the covenant. The law merely regulated behavior within that covenant.

2. Its Particulars

So, the Ten Commandments are essentially nothing more than instructions about how to love God, and how to love your neighbor. Did you know that the first four commandments relate to our love for God, and the last six commandments relate to our love for our neighbor? In Exodus 20, we find the initial listing of the Ten Commandments...

a. Affecting Our Relationship with God 1) Love Is Loyal (v. 3) "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." If I say to my wife, "Honey, I love you," and then I tell her I also have three or four others that I love too, she is not going to be interested in that kind of love. Loving God means loyally worshiping Him alone. You don't say, "Oh boy, I am really mad I only have one God and everybody else in the world gets a whole bunch." No, there are some people who worship one God because they feel that they are right in doing it. There are others who worship one God because they love Him so much. I don't worship the Lord just because I'm trying to fulfill some legal obligation. I worship the one God because He's the only One I love. 2) Love Is Faithful (vv. 4-6) "Thou shalt not make unto thee any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I, the LORD thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments." Do you see it there? Again it's love. In other words, the point is that love will be faithful, love will not make a carved replica of some nonexistent god. Love is loyal and its loyalty extends into the future and thus becomes faithfulness. If we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, we'll love only Him, and we'll love Him faithfully. Third, the next commandment teaches that... 3) Love Is Reverent (v. 7) "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain." If you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, would you curse His name? No, because love is reverent. 4) Love Is Set Apart (vv. 8-11) "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore, the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." If I love somebody totally, I am set apart to that person only, right? If I say I love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, but I'm going to take the one day I'm supposed to spend worshiping Him and go do something else, that doesn't say much for my love, does it? Love separates itself totally to its object. When a man loves a woman, he will ultimately say, "I want you to be my wife. I love you so much I just want to separate myself to you. I'm not interested in any other woman, it's you that matters." That's love. So, the Decalogue isn't some legalistic code of externals. It is merely a way to define love toward God and love... b. Affecting Our Relationships with Others 1) Love Is Respectful (v. 12) "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee." In a sense, when you come into the world, your first neighbors are your parents. And the Bible simply says you are to love them with respect and honor. Love is never lawless or disorderly, but always respectful. 2) Love Is Humane (v. 13) "Thou shalt not kill." If you love somebody, are you going to kill them? No. If you love your neighbor you won't do that because, as Paul said, "...love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10b). 3)

Love Is Pure (v. 14)"Thou shalt not commit adultery."If you really love your spouse, you're not going to do that, because love is pure. Love doesn't defile. When a guy says to a girl, "I love you," and then tries to shove her in bed when she's not his wife, that isn't love--love seeks purity. Don't tell your wife you love her and then go off and shack up with somebody else. If you do that, you don't love your wife--you're lying. True love is pure. It doesn't defile; it only exalts and maintains one's purity.4) Love Is Unselfish (v. 15)"Thou shalt not steal."If you love somebody, are you going to take what they have? No, you're not going to steal from somebody if you love them.5) Love Is Truthful (v. 16)"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."Are you going to tell lies or gossip about people if you love them? Of course not.6) Love Is Contented (v. 17)"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's."When you really love people, you don't covet what belongs to them, because you are glad they have it. Now do you see the point of the Ten Commandments? They are merely a regulation of love...that's all. Once God established a relationship with His people, the law was provided as a way to define how that love worked, both toward God and toward one's neighbor. This outworking of the law in love was the epitome of the Old Testament in the book of Deuteronomy, which is no different than what Jesus and the Epistles in the New Testament teach: The whole law is to love God and love your neighbor. Love toward God is loyal, faithful, reverent, and set apart; and love expressed toward one's neighbor is respectful of authority, respectful of life made in His image, pure, unselfish, truthful, and contented. And notice that every single one of those is rooted in a heart attitude, isn't it? Commandments like, "Thou shalt not kill" and, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" are much deeper and broader statements than the scribes and the Pharisees ever allowed for. They were simply statements of law regulating a heart attitude. And the sad thing that happened in Israel was that the Jews began to focus only on the external ritual and their religious observance, so that morality became a matter of what one did rather than a relationship of love. Thus they missed the whole point of the law. Now, if you understand this, then you also understand the background of the Sermon on the Mount as it relates to...

III. THE SATISFACTION OF GOD'S LAW

In Matthew 5:21, when Jesus said, "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," He revealed the Jews' superficial approach to the law. They merely said that if one didn't kill, he was all right. But Jesus carried the intent of the law beyond the action to the attitude: "If you're angry with your brother, you are in danger of hell, because you don't love your brother, and that's the major issue with God. Similarly, you have heard them say that you shouldn't commit adultery; but I'm telling you that if you lust in your heart, you are guilty, because your attitude toward your brother is wrong. You are not pure and you're coveting something that isn't yours." Now this is the whole background of what Jesus was saying. He drives the Jews down deep to the matter of the heart, forcing them to recognize...

A. The Prominence of Sin

The tradition of the Jews had obscured the original message of God and corrupted it. Their reaction to the law that Jesus was reiterating was just the same as the Jews of old would say: "We can't keep that law. It can't be done...we're not that good. We can't love like that all the time. We need help, we can't maintain that standard of God's." And that is exactly what He wants them to say. In the Old Testament, when they couldn't maintain it, they participated in the sacrificial system.

B. The Provision of a Sacrifice

Ultimately, the sacrificial system consummated in Jesus Christ, who was slain as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). Of Him, the writer of Hebrews says, "For by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). Jesus did what the blood of bulls and goats could never do--take away sin. That is why after He died on the cross and paid the final penalty, judgment was brought upon the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The Romans came into the city

of Jerusalem and literally destroyed the Temple, thus fully destroying the sacrificial system, which had been symbolically ended with the ripping of the veil when Jesus died (Mt. 27:51). Since that time, there has never been a sacrificial system in Israel, because that to which it pointed had arrived...Jesus Christ. It was the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ that took away the sin that all the system of sacrifices could never take away, but simply pointed to.

C. The Plan of Salvation

You say, "Well, then, how would that person in the Old Testament be saved?" The efficacy of Christ's death went forward to us and backward to them. If they believed God when they lived, looking forward to the fact that God would take away their sin by His power, and realizing they couldn't become righteous on their own, then they would be saved through the sacrifice of Christ, even though He had not been offered yet. As for us, we are on this end of the sacrifice of Christ, and though He died two thousand years ago, His sacrifice is applied to us today if we believe and accept Him. In frustration, we must recognize our inability to keep the exalted law of God and run for mercy to Jesus Christ, who alone can grant us a righteousness we cannot obtain on our own. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul sums it up in these words: "For He [God] hath made Him [Christ], who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." In other words, we couldn't be righteous because we were sinful. It was necessary for Him to bear our sins that we might be declared righteous.

CONCLUSION

The words of this covenant that cemented the relationship in the Old Testament were not legalistic, they simply established a standard by which a loving relationship to God and your neighbor could be directed. There had to be the relationship first, or all the law keeping that went on meant absolutely nothing. This is true today, too. There are people in our society who live by New Testament ethics, who are good fathers and mothers and neighbors, who give to charity, go to church, don't kill people, don't commit adultery, and who keep the outward law, but who don't have a love relationship with God. In their cases, the law means nothing, because it isn't the outworking of love. It is the inner attitude that has always been the issue with God, whether it's the Old or the New Testament that is in view. That's why Jesus could say, "I didn't come to destroy the prophets or to set Moses aside. I didn't come to change one single thing...only to put the law back where it belongs. And unless you get up to that level, which is higher than the scribes and Pharisees, you will never under any circumstances enter My Kingdom." Of course, we realize we can't fully attain God's standard and that forces us to Christ. In like manner, Moses was pointing the Israelites to Jesus just as Jesus was pointing them to Himself. In fact, in Luke 16:15, Jesus said to the Pharisees who were so covetous in their hearts, "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." It is an abomination to God to keep an external law without a heart relationship. God knows your hearts.

So our Lord simply redefines the original standard, and in so doing, He defines righteousness and sin in true biblical terms. This is so important. If you don't understand sin, you'll never understand anything else in the Scripture. It was a subject that Jesus spent a tremendous amount of time dealing with. And it was a reality that John Newton never forgot: When he was an old man and his memory was nearly gone, this great saint still remembered this: One, that he was a great sinner, and two, that Jesus Christ is a greater Savior. That's the issue. That's what Jesus wanted the Pharisees to see, and that is what He wants you to see...you were so great a sinner in God's eyes that you couldn't atone for your sin. Therefore, He did it for you.

I read once about a child, who was bitten by a poisonous snake. Because the mother was there when the child was bitten, she desperately placed her lips over the wound to suck the poison out. However, though she succeeded in saving the child's life, she lost her own because the poison entered into her through a cut on her lip. So it was with Jesus Christ, who drained out of us, as it

were, the poison of the serpent, and in so doing, died in our place. We are great sinners, but He is a great Savior.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Who were supposedly the most righteous people in the Jewish society? What kind of righteousness did Jesus require in relation to them?
2. Though the scribes and Pharisees claimed to be the proponents of the law of Moses, what had they actually done to that law?
3. Explain why man tries to create God in his own image.
4. What was Jesus trying to destroy by reestablishing God's original standard?
5. God was never solely concerned about the _____, but rather primarily the _____ behind it.
6. What is a similar trend between Greek and Roman paganism and our society today?
7. Identify and describe the new morality that has been espoused by some church men and philosophers.
8. Describe the Corinthians' wrong perspective on sex that Paul confronted.
9. Why are viewing sex as shameful and as purely a biological function both equally perverted perspectives?
10. What realization should have driven Jesus' audience into desperation to seek God?
11. Essentially, what is the core of the Old Testament? Why?
12. What Old Testament book contains a summary of the law of God and even the entire Bible?
13. Identify the principle that is the pinnacle of the whole Bible.
14. Rather than building a relationship on law, on what does the Old Testament build it?
15. Before God ever gave the law to Israel, what did He establish?
16. What should characterize the response of one brought into a relationship of love with God?
17. What were the two alternatives that Moses offered Israel?
18. What were the Ten Commandments given to regulate?
19. What does God want people to recognize about His standard?
20. What did God provide for those in the Old Testament as a way of dealing with their inability to keep His standard?
21. To whom did the sacrificial system point? Why?
22. Which of the Ten Commandments relate to our love for God and which relate to our love for our neighbor?
23. Express each of the Ten Commandments in positive terms of love.
24. When the Jews began to focus only on the external ritual and their religious observance, what did morality become?
25. In the Old Testament, when the people couldn't maintain God's standard, what did they do?
26. What two events following the death of Christ showed that His death had replaced the sacrificial system for taking away sin?
27. How were people in the Old Testament saved?

Pondering the Principles

1. Meditate upon Matthew 5:29-30. In one short sentence, explain what Jesus is trying to teach in this hyperbole. Though sin has serious consequences and we are exhorted to deal with it in drastic measures, do you find yourself toying with it to see how far you can get without being caught? Does your own response to sin in your life reflect what Jesus says about it? If not, what changes do you need to make so that you could say with Paul, "...How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer in it?" (Rom. 6:2).
2. Do you agree that sexual temptation is getting worse in our society? With the constant visual bombardment of sexual temptation through the media, what steps could you take to avoid

unnecessary enticement? For some suggestions, read the following: Genesis 39:7-12; Philippians 4:4-8; and 1 Corinthians 6:18-7:5.

3. Is your relationship with God legalistic, or loving? Do you see God more as a Judge, or as a Father? In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, which son do you think loved his father more from the standpoint of legal obedience? Which one loved out of gratefulness? If someone asked you why you loved God, what would you say? If you have never done so, memorize Matthew 22:37-40 and recite it each day for a week before you go to sleep and as you wake up.

4. Those who believe in life after death generally look forward to some form of heaven. However, like the Pharisees, their requirements for entrance are far lower than God's. Rehearse in your own mind what you would say to someone who told you they were going to go to heaven because they had been pretty good. For some verses to stimulate your thinking, read the following: Psalm 143:2; Proverbs 20:9; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:9-28; 5:12-13; Galatians 2:16; and Ephesians 2:1-10. Who are some people in your sphere of influence who are religious, yet don't really seem to know God? Pray that God would give you some opportunities to share with them some of the truths and principles that you have learned or that have been reinforced in this study.

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