

6. Simple commands, but struggles within

8/17/2003

We somehow think that if we make whatever we do complicated enough to others, we should get respect and admiration from them. If you don't agree with me, try to figure out some of the computer manuals or MicroSoft application manuals. We have to be computer geeks to figure out what it says. You still don't agree with me? How about contracts we sign when we buy a car or house? Who wrote them? Attorneys. What about doctors? Why do they still use the dead language latin?

However, Jesus who is God Himself covers all aspects of our daily lives with three chapter teaching that lasts about 20 minutes. I know, some of you are thinking, "Why can't you be like Jesus and make your sermon short?" Well, I ain't Him.

Few passages in the Bible are more misunderstood and misapplied than the Sermon on the Mount. Often people will take single verses or phrases from Matt. 5-7 and disregard the context. It's important that we have a total view of this important sermon before we attempt to study the various divisions of this passage.

By the way, the Sermon on the Mount is not for unbelievers, but it is for born again believers. Because they have to have the Holy Spirit in their hearts to understand what to follow.

Christ gives the theme in 5:17-20 - true righteousness as opposed to the false righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. It's important to remember that the people looked to the scribes and Pharisees as their models and teachers in the things of God. They set the rules and determined what was holy and unholy. One reason why the scribes and Pharisees hated Jesus is because He exposed their shallowness and deceit in this sermon.

Before Jesus teaches us about the problems of anger (v21-26), lust (v27-32), deception (v33-37) and retaliation (v38-48), He makes sure that all of us understand our inward thoughts are directly connected with our outward actions.

A. THE LAW AND TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS

Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

Jesus rejected the Pharisees' charge that He was nullifying the law.

There are a lot of people today who speak negatively concerning the law and declare, "We're no longer under law, we are under grace." It is true. But there's nothing wrong with the law of God, the law is holy, it is righteous, it is good. The only problem with the law is that we can't keep it. The law was never intended by God to make us righteous, but to show us what is righteous and to make us realize that we're sinners. It is by the law that we have the knowledge of sin.

There were the moral law, the judicial law, and the ceremonial law in the Law of Moses that was given to Moses from God. The moral law was the ten commandments - Man's relationship with God, and man's relationship with fellow man. The judicial law was the judgments by their judges for particular crimes. And there was a ceremonial law that showed them how to offer the sacrifices to God, the burnt offerings, the sin offerings, the guilt offerings, grain offerings and the peace offerings.

When Jesus said, "I didn't come to destroy the law," it's really from the Torah, the books that dealt with the moral, judicial and ceremonial law. As far as the ceremonial law, we find that Jesus was the fulfillment as the Atoning Sacrifice of the ceremonial law.

Matthew 5:18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

The relationship between the OT and the NT is very important. I have mentioned this for many times already. The OT prophesies the NT, the NT fulfills the OT. What are they fulfilling and prophesying? About Jesus and the things He does.

Jesus fulfilled the OT law as its explanation, as the Promised One of the messianic prophecy and the atoning sacrifice.

Jesus also tells us that the Scripture will remain over heaven and earth without any error.

The Pharisees were proud of their righteousness through the religious acts that goes beyond normality of any people's concepts. They put so much emphasis on the following of each letter that they could care less about the spirit of the Law of Moses.

Matthew 5:19 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.

Jesus was not coming against the law, nor correcting the law. He is not conflict with the law, but He was conflict with the Pharisees, because they added their own religious ways into the law of God. So, Jesus is dishing out their judgement to them.

Matthew 5:20 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.

Considering the incredible devotion to the law shown by the scribes and Pharisees, how can we ever hope to exceed their righteousness? Only by the righteousness of Jesus.

The heart of this devotion to their own law was shown by modern day Orthodox Jews. In early 1992, tenants let three apartments in an Orthodox neighborhood in Israel burn to the ground while they asked a rabbi whether a telephone call to the fire department on the Sabbath violated Jewish law. Observant Jews are forbidden to use the phone on the Sabbath, because doing so would break an electrical current, which is considered a form of work. In the half-hour it took the rabbi to decide "yes," the fire spread to two neighboring apartments.

No man's righteousness is good enough for God's sight.

Romans 7:18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

We often look at these Pharisees with our own judgement that we would not do the things they did if we were in their sandals. But we still do as they did. For example, how many denominations are there in this country? Why so many denominations?

Because we come up with our own denominational doctrines over God's Word, then it brings separation within the body of Christ.

B. MURDER IN THE HEART

Matthew 5:21 "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.'

Did you notice that Jesus quotes them, "You have heard" Why? Because the Pharisees told people what to do, since the majority of people didn't have access to the scripture. But the Pharisees could not and would not do according to the Law of Moses from God. So what did they do? They started to change the law of God according to their opinions.

Until now, all the OT prophets used to say, "Thus say it the Lord," but Jesus says, "I say to you" with complete authority as God. That is why He was getting a lot of garbage from Pharisees.

Matthew 5:22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

According to what Jesus said, everyone in this auditorium is murderer, because one way or another we all murder others in our hearts with our anger and hatred. How can we not be a part of this? How can anyone be away from this charge of Jesus? No one. That is why Jesus came down to earth to die for our sins.

Some of you may have thought, "I've never murder anyone in my life." But the Master of the universe who knows that all of our thoughts and intentions says otherwise. In His sight, you've murdered your brother, sister, parent, children, spouse, your coworkers, your boss and many others. You might be in the process of murdering me, because I am talking about this. After all, you are not sinless. That means the law is right, you need the Savior just like any one of us. It is the time to come to God to make peace with Him through Jesus our Redeemer.

The Pharisees taught that murder is wrong against God's law. But they also taught that anything short or murder might be allowed. Jesus corrects this, and makes it clear that it is not only those who commit the act of murder who are in danger of judgment. But those who have a murderous intent in the heart are also in danger of the judgment.

Jesus exposes the essence of the scribes' heresy. To them, the law was really only a matter of external performance, never the heart. Jesus brings the law back to the matters of the heart.

Often severe anger leads a person to danger, because he or she doesn't handle it well.

There are places for righteous indignation. Jesus was angry when He saw the money changers and the merchants in the temple abusing the worshipers. He turned the money tables upside down and whipped the merchants out of the temple (John 2:15, Matthew 21:12). We see God getting angry at the wayward Israelites' idolatry in the OT. That is righteous indignation.

To call someone "Raca," it expresses contempt for their intelligence and character. "Raca" means 'empty head, mentally empty, or air head.' "You fool" comes from Greek word 'Moros,' we get a word 'Moron' from this. It means morally wasted person. Both broke the heart of the law against murder, even if it did not commit murder physically.

We may not have a lethal weapon in our hands but we have it in our mouths. Verbal murder comes from nursed anger of our hearts. We must remember that the difference between 'anger' and 'danger' is only one letter. It can go from anger to danger at no time, if we don't control our thoughts and mouths.

C. THE RIGHT ATTITUDE BEFORE THE ALTAR

Matthew 5:23-24 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Jesus tells us, "leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come to offer your gift." This is the only place in the whole Bible, God tells us to leave the altar which means worship of God and go do something before we offer our gift of sacrifice to God.

Here is when the closest distance between two points is not a straight line. We need to make things right with our fellow men and women. And then we can make things right with God.

We might say, "OK, I will go with that. But what about non-believers? How do we deal with them?" Jesus doesn't leave us with a guessing game.

Matthew 5:25-26 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

Jesus commands us to quickly settle anger and malice with another. When we ignore it or pass it off, it genuinely imprisons us.

Paul expresses the same idea in Ephesians 4:26-27.

Eph 4:26-27 "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.

Bitterness is the warden and anger and malice are the guards in the spiritual prison we can be locked in. It is a special prison where the prison inmates get to keep the key of the door. But more often than not, the inmates choose to stay inside of the prison rather than getting out. This spiritual prison is worse than the physical one we would see in Florence.

As long as bitterness continues in our hearts, the wall of the prison we are in, gets thicker, the door gets smaller. It will be harder to get out even though we have the key of the door. Let's not hold anger, malice or bitterness toward somebody in our hearts by making it right with the people and with God.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) The principles of Scripture goes deeper than external.

It demands our immediate obedience. Since we studied this subject, no one can say that we've never heard about this. We must make it right with fellow men and women.

2) The potential of anger is greater than words.

We can be killers without any weapon in our hands. We have it in our mouths. Yes, I am talking about that tongue that slice and dice people at its will. According to James, if anyone who tamed the tongue, he is a perfect man.

3) The power of reconciliation is stronger than revenge.

We are most like beasts when we kill. We are most like men when we judge. We are most like God when we forgive.