

# THE NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE

## Studies in the Sermon on the Mount

### Part Nineteen

#### “The Spiritual Nature Of God’s Law”

##### I. A Quick Review

###### A. The Sermon: A Picture of the Normal Christian Life

###### Context: Beatitudes, Similitudes

1. Jesus begins with the Beatitudes-8 descriptions of the character qualities of those truly born again (poor in spirit; meek; hungry and thirsty for righteousness)

2. He moves from the Beatitudes to the “Similitudes”-2 similes where Jesus tells us the impact we will have on the world: salt of the earth, light of the world

3. Then for the rest of Chapter 5, He teaches on the relationship of the Law to the New Testament believer...

###### B. Matthew 5:17-20: The Relationship of the Law to the Believer

1. In verse 17, Jesus assures them He did not to come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it.

2. In verse 18 and 19, He says that God’s Law can never pass away; it is still speaks to God’s people.

3. In verse 20, He gives a warning...

**Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 5:20)**

4. This is a *pivotal* verse in the Sermon because it introduces all that follows.

**“The whole of the remainder of this Sermon is nothing but an elaboration of this fundamental proposition, that our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees if we are indeed to be citizens of the kingdom of heaven.”**

**David Martyn Lloyd Jones**

5. The Jews of Jesus' day mishandled God's Law and commandments the same way some Christians do to this day; they were caught up in the *letter* of the Law and misunderstood its *spiritual* nature.

**“The fundamental error of the Jewish teachers was that the divine law prohibited only the sinful act, not the sinful thought; they were disposed to rest in the letter of the law, and they never enquired into the spiritual meaning of it.”**

**Matthew Henry**

6. This brings us to one of the most important sections of the Sermon on the Mount, (Matthew 5:21-48), where the Lord Jesus interprets Old Testament Law for New Testament believers.

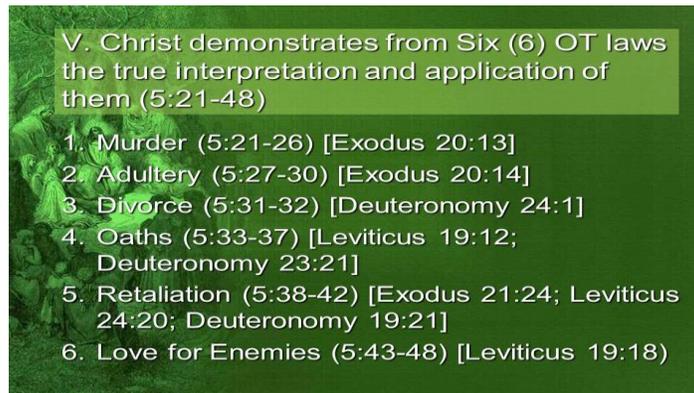
**Matthew 5:21-48**

7. He teaches us the spiritual nature of God's Law by using 6 statements from the Old Testament and showing how the Pharisees had misapplied them.

a. He wants to make sure that we understand that the true nature of God's Law and commandments is spiritual, not legal.

**Here our Lord is concerned mainly to give a true account of the law. He does this by putting forward a series of six particular statements and we should look at these very carefully.**  
**David Martyn Lloyd-Jones**

8. The Lord will quote the letter of 6 Old Testament Laws and then show us the spiritual nature behind each one. Here is an outline:



a. The 1<sup>st</sup> 2 examples are from the 10 Commandments: “Thou shalt not kill”; “thou shalt not commit adultery”.

b. Then He quotes 4 more commandments from the Law of Moses: other commandments from the Law of Divorce; the Law of retaliation, “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”

c. He will work His way through all 6 statements the same way, with a particular pattern...

**“You have heard it said...but I say unto you...”**

d. In each case, the Lord is...

## **II. Moving From the Letter of the Law to the Spirit of the Law**

### **A. Following A Formula**

1. Each of the 6 examples follow the same pattern:

- “You have heard it said” (meaning the way they had been taught)
- Then He quotes a Law from the Old Testament (all from Moses)
- Then He says, “But I say unto you”...and then takes them beyond the letter of each Law to show the spirit behind the Law

**Our Lord's chief desire was to show the true meaning and intent of the law, and to correct the erroneous conclusions which had been drawn from it by the Pharisees.**

**David Martyn Lloyd-Jones**

- To get their attention, He repeats the pattern 6 times!

### **Christ and the Law of Moses**

2. All 6 commandments are from the Law of Moses recorded in the first 5 books of the Bible.

a. Remember that the Pharisees *idolized* Moses; they memorized the first 5 books of the Bible and quoted Moses continually; but now Jesus quotes Moses and says, “But I say unto you...”, meaning He assumes a greater authority than Moses!

b. This is what the Pharisees hated most about Jesus; by quoting when He said, “But I say unto you”, He was pronouncing Himself as God, the One greater than Moses.

c. That’s why at the end of this Sermon on the Mount, it says...

**“And the multitudes were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”**

**Matthew 7:28-29**

3. All 6 of these examples reveal a “righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees”; in all 6 the Lord is teaching us the spiritual nature of God’s Law and His commandments.

## B. The Spiritual Nature of the Law

1. At first glance, God's law only seems to be a list of do's and don'ts.
2. But **it is a great mistake to think that God's Law has only to do with behavior!**
3. This was the great error of the Pharisees: they had the letter of the Law, but not the Spirit of the Law.
  - a. They read "thou shall not kill" and thought they were righteous because they had not murdered anyone.
  - b. They read "thou shalt not commit adultery", and thought they were righteous because they had not done the deed
4. But now the Lord is revealing the spiritual nature of the Law in 6 example commandments; in each case He illustrates how the Law is not just about what we do; it also deals with our motives and attitudes of heart!

<b>Matthew 5:21-48</b>	
<u>OT Law/Interpretation</u> (Conduct)	<u>Gospel of Kingdom</u> (Cause, Motive of heart)
■ Do not murder	■ No anger w/o cause
■ Do not commit adultery	■ Do not lust in your heart
■ Divorce...give a certificate of divorce	■ The cause for putting away

- a. The letter says "thou shalt not kill"; but I say unto you, if you are even angry with your brother, you need to go fix it.
- b. The letter says, "thou shalt not commit adultery"; but I say unto you to look lustfully at a woman is to commit adultery in your heart.
- c. The letter says, "you can divorce your wife for any reason if you give her a bill of divorcement"; but I say unto you if you divorce your wife apart

from grounds of adultery, you cause her to commit adultery. He continues with 3 more examples...

<b>The Greater Righteousness: Six Antitheses (Matt 5:21-48)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No murder → actively seek reconciliation</li><li>• No adultery → refrain from inappropriate desires</li><li>• Procedures for divorce → divorce amounts to adultery</li><li>• Perform vows → no oaths</li><li>• Limits on retaliation → no retaliation (strategy of nonviolent resistance)</li><li>• Love near ones → love enemies</li></ul>

d. The letter says “Perform your vows”; but I say unto you to honor every word that comes out of your mouth!

e. The letter says “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”; retaliate for injury in proportion to the injury you received; but I say unto you, don’t retaliate at all! Turn the other cheek!

f. The letter says “love your neighbor, hate your enemy”; but I say unto you, love your enemies and do good to those who despitefully use you.

**“Our Lord’s purpose here is to lift our minds from the mere syllables to the spirit of the Law. His attitude toward the Old Testament, and His endorsement of it, are emphatic.”**

**J. Sidlow Baxter**

5. 2. The letter of the Law of God apart from having the Spirit of God is death!

a. Paul said God had made him an able minister of the New Testament not by the letter but by the Spirit, because...

**The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.**

**2 Corinthians 3:6**

6. We cannot take the Law out of the Gospel any more than we can take the Gospel out of the Law...

**The Gospel has both its letter and its spirit; and multitudes of professing Christians, by resting in the letter, do not receive the life it was designed to impart.**

**Adam Clarke**

7. How many people go to church every Sunday and do the deeds but their hearts are not right? Consider the sacraments:

a. Water Baptism: We have the letter of the Law in Jesus commandment to be baptized; and many are resting their salvation on the act of baptism. But baptism doesn't save us! Unless the heart is born again and made right with God, it's just an empty ritual!

b. Holy Communion: We have the letter of Jesus commandment about Holy Communion, and many are resting their salvation on the act of receiving the Table of the Lord or attending Catholic mass; but unless the spirit is born again, what value is it?

8. How many churchgoers think their outward observations of water baptism, church membership or receiving communion means they are righteous with God?

9. How many are modern Pharisees, who honor the letter of the Law and ignore the spiritual nature of the Law?

**It is the spirit not the letter that matters; it is the intent, object and purpose that are important. The one thing we have to avoid above everything else in our Christian lives is this fatal tendency to live the Christian life apart from a direct, living, and true relationship to God.**

**David Martyn Lloyd-Jones**

**III. Conclusion: Jesus' Question to the Church Today**

## **A. So What Have You Been Told?**

1. How much bad teaching have we heard?

- “I’m not under the Law, I’m under grace, so the Law has nothing to say to me”
- “I’ve kept the commandments; I haven’t killed anyone; I haven’t committed adultery; I’m not so bad”
- “I’ve been baptized; I go to church; I take communion; I’m OK”

2. These statements come from the modern Pharisees, those who don’t understand the *spiritual* nature of the Law...

**“They insisted much on the letter of the Law, but entered little into its real meaning. They did not seek out the true spiritual sense of the Old Testament; and hence, they rested on the mere literal observance of the rites and ceremonies of religion without understanding their true nature and design.”**

**Barnes’ Quotes**

3. The greatest mistake we can make is to think of God’s laws simply as “do’s” and “don’ts”!

**“It is the heart of man that matters. So we must not think of this law of God and of pleasing God merely in terms of what we do or do not do; it is the inward condition and attitude that God is always observing. `Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts’.”**

**David Martyn Lloyd Jones**

4. May God grant us revelation to see the spiritual nature of His Law!

**Altar Call and Communion**