

3. Be Perfect

Matthew 5:44-48 NLT - 44 But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! 45 In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. 46 If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. 47 If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. 48 But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

In the final verse of this chapter Jesus says, “be perfect.” When we hear that we think “that is impossible!” But perfect doesn’t mean never making a mistake. It is the word *teleios* which refers to being finished, mature and complete in virtue and integrity. In each of these examples of what the law says, Jesus is highlighting our relationships with others.

How would you summarize the difference in the way believers are to treat others compared to non-believers? What would you say creates barriers that hinder us from expressing this to others? What is one practical thing we can do to remove such barriers in our own lives?

Wrap Up

In the Kingdom of Heaven, where God rules and reigns, our righteousness is not measured by following the rules, it is measured by how we express God’s heart for others. All of the law and demands of the prophets point back to loving God and our neighbors. Even though we might follow every law perfectly, if our hearts are not changed, we have totally missed the point. Our spiritual journey will not be complete until we are a perfect reflection of our heavenly father for the world to see.

Memory Verse

... *"You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind." And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'* Luke 10:27b NLT

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life: _____

Pray for your group members’ needs. _____

Challenge- If you have social media accounts look back at what they contain. Do you see a reflection of God’s heart there? If not, how can you change that?

“You’ve heard it said...But I say” Upside Down Kingdom- #3

INTRODUCTION

Jesus announced that the Kingdom of Heaven had arrived, and, in the Beatitudes, he began to reveal just how different that is from the upside-down kingdoms of this world. But it would require even further explanation to clarify what it takes to live out His Kingdom in light of the law of Moses and the writings of the prophets. Just when they thought they knew how to follow God by keeping the Ten Commandments, Jesus steps in and reveals the true meaning behind God’s law. It’s not about our actions, it’s about our hearts.

Ice Breaker (Optional—8 min)

What is one regulation or law that is regularly pushed to the limit by most people?

STUDY QUESTIONS (45 MIN)

1. Following the Commandments

Many of Jesus followers were devout Jews. They did their best to know and to obey all of the Jewish laws and regulations. They must have been relieved to hear Jesus say, “I did not come to abolish the law of Moses and writings of the prophets.” So, it appeared that following the law was a good thing after all. In fact, in verse 19 Jesus encourages following the law.

Matthew 5:19 NLT - 19 So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God's laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

But if they thought they were doing good enough, Jesus’ next statement must have been a shocking revelation.

Matthew 5:20 NLT - 20 "But I warn you--unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!"

Surely no one could exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees!

How do you think the Jews gauged righteousness? What do we commonly use as indicators of righteousness?

The word used here for righteousness is *dikaiosynē* and essentially means “what a person contains that makes them good.” Jesus is redefining what a good person is. He gives us a new standard for humanity.

When Jesus calls us to follow, he isn’t measuring our outward actions.

Hebrews 10:16 NLT - 16 "This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says the LORD: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds."

What does God do that identifies us as his people (Heb 10:16)? How does that in turn affect our actions? Do you think it is possible to obey the law without changed hearts?

Later in his ministry Jesus would be asked what the greatest commandment was.

How did He reply to that question?

Matthew 22:37-40 NLT - 37 Jesus replied, "You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

On the surface these might seem easier to meet these two commandments rather than to comply with all of the myriad rules and regulations created subsequent to the Ten Commandments.

What, however, is the only way we can possibly meet these two commandments?

2. Following the letter versus the intent

Jesus was trying to move his audience out of the old way of operating by shifting their focus from their actions to their hearts. And so, He presents a series of contrasting statements concerning the commandments with

which they were so familiar; anger, adultery, oaths, revenge and love. (read Matthew 5:21-44 for more detail)

You have heard....	But I say...	Seen today in
'You must not murder	<i>if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment</i>	Social media
'You must not commit adultery	<i>anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart</i>	Fashion, entertainment
'A man can divorce his wife	<i>a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful, causes her to commit adultery</i>	Divorce rates
'You must not break your vows	<i>do not make any vows</i>	credit and loan defaults
'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.	<i>If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek</i>	Litigation for damages
'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy	<i>love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you</i>	Gang retaliations

These may have been written over 2,000 years ago, but they are timeless truths. Most of us would find it pretty easy to keep the letter of the law in the first column.

Discuss with your group where in today’s culture we see the greatest breakdown in keeping God’s intent for the law (second column). You may find the laws in the first column seem logical and justifiable. But the Kingdom of Heaven defies the world’s logic and uncovers the heart of God by what Jesus reveals in the second column.

Use the third column as a starting place for your discussion. For example- list some of the ways you commonly see anger being expressed through social media. How can Christians counter that trend? Which of these do you find the most difficult to follow in its intent?