

The Law of God and Your Brother

by Dick Woodward

Jesus teaches us to approach scripture with the spirit of the law, not just the letter of the law, and to prioritize our relationship with our brother through reconciliation.

Duration: 22:00

Scripture: Matthew 5:14-22, Matthew 5:27-28, Matthew 5:38-39, Matthew 5:43-44, Matthew 5:48

Topics: "Relationships"

Description

In this sermon on the Sermon on the Mount, the teacher emphasizes the importance of handling the Word of God in a better way, following Jesus' example. Jesus teaches that believers are the light of the world and should let their light shine through their good works, bringing glory to God. He also emphasizes the importance of having the right understanding of the Word of God, contrasting his approach with that of the scribes. Jesus teaches that it is not enough to simply follow the letter of the law, but one must also have the right attitudes and apply them in all relationships.

Transcript

Let's be honest, many of us have experienced having the Word of God shoved in our face as if trying to shove it down our throat or we have felt that we have been hit over the head with it, all because someone thought that was the way the Bible was to be applied to our life or circumstance. Hello and welcome to our special study on the Sermon on the Mount. In today's lesson, our teacher will show us a better way to handle the Word of God, Jesus' way.

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill. 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.

Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men to do 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. 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.

That's Matthew 5, verses 14-20. Someone has said that psychology, that leaves Christ out when you study it, is like looking in a dark room for a black bed. And philosophy that is not Christ-centered is like looking into a dark room for a black bed that is not there.

Agnosticism is like looking in a dark room for a black bed that is not there and shouting, we found it, we found it. Jesus is saying on the mountaintop, beginning at verse 14 of Matthew 5, that if you are one of my disciples and you are instructed in the things of the kingdom, you are not like somebody looking in a dark room for a black bed that is not there and shouting, we found it. No, you are the light of the world.

You are like a city strategically placed on a hill that cannot be hidden. You are like a candle that has been lit and then strategically placed on a candlestick that it might give light. You are to let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works.

But those good works will point to your heavenly Father who is the source of all these things that are happening in your life. He is the one who has lit up your life, lit your candle, and placed you on a candlestick, and you point to him when your light shines. The disciple of Jesus is the light of the world for several reasons.

First of all, he is the light of the world because he is in relationship with the one who is the light of the world. Jesus says in the Gospels, I am the light of the world, Matthew 5, verse 14. And like these disciples of Jesus, because you and I are in a vital relationship with him, then there is a sense in which we are the light of the world.

These disciples were, and the disciples of Christ today are, to be the light of the world because they and we have been instructed by him. They have continued in his word, and they have come to know the truth that has set them free. Then they can point others to the same truth.

In verses 17 through 20, there's another reason why the disciple of Jesus is the light of the world. It's because he has the right understanding of the word of God. In verses 17 through 20, Jesus is talking to these disciples who are on the mountaintop with him because they want to be part of the solution, part of the answer to all the problems those people have at the bottom of the mountain.

He is saying to them, look down the mountain. You see all those people there with all their problems? One of the reasons is because they're like sheep without a shepherd. They don't know their right hand from their left.

They don't know, and they have no light. Now, one of the ways in which you are to be the light of the world to them is that you should show them the proper use of the word of God. When Jesus said this about the scripture, which is what the law and the prophets mean, the Old Testament, he was saying several things.

He was saying, first of all, before you go down there and apply the word of God or the law of God to the lives of people, you must pass the law of God through the prism of the love of God and then apply the law of God to the lives of people. Because all the law of God came out of the heart of God's love for man. You need to understand the proper use of the scripture.

He was also challenging the religious establishment here. He said in this paragraph, verses 17 through 20, when he talked about his approach to the law and the prophets, everything I am teaching you and everything I'm going to teach you will agree absolutely with the law and the prophets. Not one stroke of the pen, not the smallest letter of the law and the prophets will go unfulfilled.

If you understand my approach to the scripture, I have not come to take away anything from the scripture. You will discover that what I am teaching you will agree entirely with the scripture. But at the same time, he was saying, and this is the key to the rest of chapter five, but what I am teaching you will not agree with your religious teachers and the scribes or the Pharisees.

He is challenging the religious establishment here and he is preparing his disciples for the fact that the religious establishment will not respond to them favorably because he is saying what I am teaching you will not agree with what they teach. We also saw that in verse 20, he made a very important statement about the personal righteousness of his disciples. He said your righteousness, when you understand what I am teaching and when you understand my approach to the scripture, will far surpass the righteousness of these scribes and Pharisees.

We saw the reason for that in our last study. The righteousness of the religious establishment was hypocritical. The righteousness of his disciple was to be real.

The righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees was external, but the righteousness of the disciple of Jesus was to be internal. The righteousness of the religious establishment was horizontal. It was for all the appearance of things.

It was so that they would appear to be religious before men. It was a show that was put on for the benefit of men, that men might see them giving or praying and think they were generous or pious. But he is saying your righteousness will not be horizontal like that.

It must be vertical. It will be as unto God. When you understand what Jesus is saying about the scripture here in this paragraph, verses 17 through 20, you understand another reason why he was in conflict with these religious leaders.

He is saying your righteousness, if you understand me, will be scriptural, whereas their righteousness is largely traditional. It's not really based upon the scripture, at least not a proper understanding of the scripture. Now that, I believe, introduces us to the rest of chapter 5, which is considered the most difficult part of the Sermon on the Mount.

Beginning at verse 21 and all the way to verse 48, there are six paragraphs. These paragraphs will each begin with something like, You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, but I tell you, When he says this, and he says it at the beginning of each of these six paragraphs here in chapter 5, we need to understand that he is disagreeing with religious establishment. He is saying in so many words, the scribes and the Pharisees, the teachers of the law, have been telling you certain things, and I'm about to tell you how it really is.

For the most part, this is a matter of disagreeing with the scribes and the Pharisees about their approach to scripture. That is what that paragraph, verses 17 through 20, is all about, the approach to the scripture that Jesus has. It is so important that we know how to approach the scripture, because if our approach to the scripture, if our philosophy of scripture, you might say, is not as it should be, then we will never find in God's word what he wants us to find there in his word.

So here in verses 17 through 20, you have a paragraph that might be called, Jesus's philosophy of the scripture, or the approach to scripture by Jesus Christ. His approach to scripture simply was, and this was the big difference between Jesus and the religious establishment, to pass the law of God through the

prism of the love of God before you apply the law of God to the lives of people. The apostle Paul said the same thing when he used these expressions, the letter of the law and the spirit of the law.

The spirit of the law is love. The spirit of the law asked the question, what was on the heart of God when he wrote this particular scripture? What was the purpose of this particular law or teaching of scripture? What is the principle that you can get from this scripture? Anytime you approach the scripture, it should be done in this light, from the perspective of the spirit of the law, which is God's love for man and God's concern for man's well-being. That is why all the scripture was written.

Anytime you get to the spirit of the law, you will find it to be a life-giving force. But the letter of the law kills. The apostle Paul says the letter kills, but the spirit gives life.

2 Corinthians 3, verse 6. That's what we really have here in the largest section of Matthew 5 and the most difficult part of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is really saying, as he did in this paragraph, verses 17-20, they tell you this is the way they teach Moses, this is the way they teach the scripture, and sometimes it's not even scripture that they were teaching, it was their own tradition. But let me, Jesus, tell you how it really is.

Remember, you who have studied the Gospel of John with us or who have been through the Gospel of John, the emphasis is that Jesus is God in the flesh. He has the right to do this because as God in human flesh, he is the one who wrote the law. He is the one who wrote the scripture.

Scripture is given by inspiration of God. God is the author of all scripture. And so here you have God in the flesh saying, now these religious leaders do not have the right perspective on the scripture.

They are applying it in the sense of the letter of the law. They are throwing the Bible at people. They have forgotten the spirit of the law, the principles of the law, the purpose of the law.

At this period of history, when Jesus came to these people in Israel, it was like the time that they had returned from the Babylonian captivity and few could understand the scripture because the scriptures were written in another language. Remember the Babylonians had conquered Jerusalem and the people were taken captive into Babylon for 70 years. Then Persia conquered Babylon, so Israel was then captive in media Persia.

During the times of Nehemiah, Ezra, Esther, Malachi and Haggai and Zechariah, there was a return from that captivity. Now while they were in captivity for 70 years, the people had learned to speak Aramaic and Aramaic had become the common language of the Jews. So from the time of the return from captivity and then throughout the 400 silent years between the Old and the New Testament up to the day when Jesus was here ministering to these people, the majority of them did not speak or read Hebrew, the language of the scriptures.

Most people were not literate at that time and the scriptures were kept in the temple or in the synagogue. People did not have their own Bibles like you and I do as it was before the Reformation when the Bible was in Hebrew, Greek, Latin and the common man could not read the scriptures and therefore had to accept the priest's explanations for what it said and what it meant. That is what you had during the time when Jesus was teaching these things.

The people had to believe the scribes. They had to take the Pharisees' word for it because the only people who could really get into the scripture were the people who understood Hebrew. There was a very small

elite group of people who understood Hebrew so the people were at the mercy of the scribes and the Pharisees.

If the scribes and the Pharisees said, this is what the word of God says, the people had to trust their word. Jesus is setting that record straight and is causing a kind of reformation as he does so. Look at this first paragraph where Jesus is showing the difference between the way he approaches the scripture and the way the scribes approach it.

Beginning at verse 21 when he says, 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. But I am saying to you, whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, Raka, shall be in danger of the council.

But whoever says, You fool, shall be in danger of hellfire. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.

Now to get perspective again on what Jesus is doing here in the Beatitudes at the beginning of this teaching, remember that we said he told us to look inward? To look into our heart of hearts where attitudes are born and see if we have the right attitudes? Jesus said to consider your attitudes. Many people of old age have not only hardening of the arteries, they also have hardening of the attitudes. Attitudes are so important.

In focusing at the beginning of this teaching upon attitudes, Jesus was telling us to look, to look inward. But when he finishes giving us these beautiful attitudes, he says to us in so many words, now if you look in and if you see by the grace of God that these attitudes are in you because God is putting them into you, he is building them into you, then when he gave us these four illustrations, you are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world, you are a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden, you are a candle on a candlestick, he was saying now look around. And throughout all of Matthew chapter 5, he is telling us to look around.

In other words, he is telling us to apply the attitudes in all of our relationships of life. Here Jesus begins to show how we ought to approach the scripture and get the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law from the scripture. He is applying the teaching he has already given, the beatitudes in relationships.

The first relationship to which we should apply this teaching is with our brother. The scripture uses the term brother frequently and I believe if you study all the usages of the word brother, the scripture means a fellow brother, not only a blood brother, not simply someone who is a part of your family and with whom you grew up. Of course it is also used that way, but primarily it is anybody who is in Christ.

You are in Christ by the grace of God and anyone else who is in Christ is your brother. The apostle Paul refers to people very carefully in terms of the degree of relationship he has with them. To Paul, a brother was a fellow believer and then he uses the expression a companion in labor.

That's a brother with whom he agrees and they can work together. And then a fellow brother to Paul was somebody who risked his life along with Paul for Christ. But these expressions are used very carefully in the scripture.

In the first chapter of John, we are told that the miracle of the new birth happened to us so that we might have the authority to call ourselves the sons of God. We are not all sons of God simply because we are human beings. And everybody is not our brother because they are fellow human beings according to the scripture.

When you have been born again and have the authority to call yourself a son of God, anyone else who has been born again and has the authority to be called a son of God is your brother. It is very important that we should relate to our brother properly. Someone has said, we can never win the world if we lose each other.

I saw a book once on a table at a conference that was kind of a trick book. The title on the outside cover of the book was The Greatest Problem of Missionaries. And when you opened up the book, inside it said, Other Missionaries.

Very often the problem is other missionaries. It's in relating to their brother missionary who is perhaps a companion in labor and a fellow soldier. Someone has said, to live above with the saints we have loved, oh, that will be glory.

But to live below with those we know, that's another story. Jesus gives us an awesome teaching here. What he is saying is he begins to apply this teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, verses 21-48, where he is giving this application to what he has taught in the first part of chapter 5 and where he is elaborating on his statement.

There is a difference between the way I approach the scripture and the way your religious leaders approach the scripture. His first illustration is this. What the scribes and Pharisees had taught concerning a brother and our relationship to a brother was do not murder because if you murder, you'll be in danger of judgment.

This word judgment does not mean the eternal judgment. It means do not murder your brother because you'll end up in jail. You'll spend the rest of your life in jail if you murder your brother.

And with their very literal letter of law approach to this great commandment from the Ten Commandments, they seem to be saying as long as you do not murder your brother, then your relationship to your brother is right. Jesus is saying, listen, let me tell you what the spirit of this law is. The spirit of this law is that your relationship to your brother is vitally important.

And why is it that people would actually murder one another? It's because of what is in their heart. In their heart, when they have things like anger or if they refer to their brother as raka or you fool. Now these are expressions in those days that would be comparable to our expressions like you jerk or you meathead.

Think of any term that is very derogatory in your language and in your culture. That is what these words raka and you fool really represent. In other words, what he is saying is that if you have anger in your heart towards your brother, your relationship to your brother is not right.

And if you find yourself speaking ill of your brother, if you are speaking down to him and using terms of contentment towards your brother, your relationship with your brother is not right. Here Jesus gives us an awesome teaching. He says, listen, if you go to pray and as you're about to pray, if you realize that your relationship with your brother is not right, here it's because the brother has something against you and in other parts of the Gospels, it's because you have something against your brother.

But the point is, if your relationship with your brother is not right, he says, first go and be reconciled to your brother. Then come and offer your gift or come and pray. Throughout the scripture, again and again, the teaching comes down to two words and those two words are God first.

That's not easy. But it's not complicated either. We complicate it because we do not want to put him first.

But really, again and again, you have these teachings like Matthew chapter 6 verse 33. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you. Matthew chapter 6 verse 33.

That is the way chapter 6 will end. Again and again, the scriptures come down to that. God first.

If God is at all, then God is absolutely. And God is absolutely the most important thing in our life. So God must be first.

But here is a place where it says that your brother is first. First go, be reconciled to your brother. Then come and pray to God.

That's an amazing teaching. But what it's saying is this. Your relationship to God and your relationship to your brother are interrelated.

If a man says that he loves God and he does not love his brother, first John chapter 4 says that he is a liar. If someone says, I love God and hates his brother, he's a liar. That's because these two relationships, the vertical and the horizontal are interrelated.

And that's why in the instructions about the communion table, we are told that there should be confession and getting right with a brother before we come to the communion table. We cannot win the world if we lose each other. And so as Jesus applies the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and shows us at the same time his approach to the scripture, he says, listen, the spirit of this commandment is not do not kill your brother.

The spirit of the commandment is be right with your brother. Make sure your relationship to your brother is what it ought to be. So if you find anger or if you're thinking of your brother in terms of contempt, do not even pray until you get that relationship with your brother right.

First go be reconciled to your brother. Then come and pray. God bless you all.

Until next time. May our Lord give you encouragement and joy as you see God working in and through you as you apply his word to your life and as you follow the truth at every level that we are discovering in Jesus Christ's teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. I trust you will plan to join us next time when we will continue this very valuable study here in the Mini-Bible College.

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