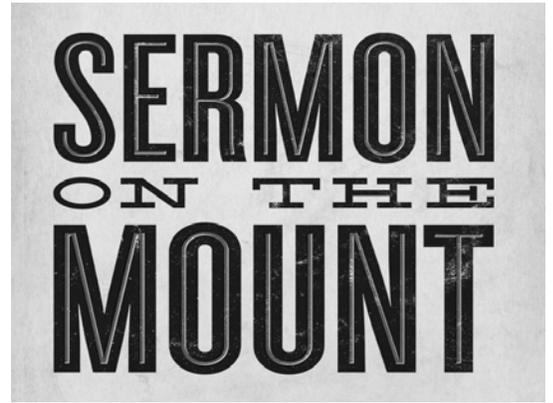


Week of September 30, 2012  
*High Expectations*



**Passage Outline:**

1. Affirm Scripture's Authority (Matt. 5:17-19)
2. Rise Above Mediocrity (Matt. 5:20,48)
3. Go Beyond Superficiality (Matt. 5:21-22,27-28,31-34,38-39,43-44)

**What's This About?**

This lesson explores the high standards Jesus set for His followers—standards that are met not by mere outward conformity to rules but as a result of a Christ-changed heart.

**How Can This Impact Your Life?**

This lesson can help you recognize that Jesus' expectations are exceedingly high yet, with God's help, commit to live by His standards.

**1. Affirm Scripture's Authority - Matthew 5:17-19**

**Matthew 5:17-20**

<sup>17</sup> "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup> I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

- A. How would you answer this question: "Because we're saved by grace and not by keeping the Law, are we expected to keep the Law?"
- B. Jesus said "He did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but rather to fulfill them."
- C. The primary message of the Old Testament Scriptures relates to humanity's sin and God's promise to send a Savior through Abraham's descendants.
  - i. Jesus *fulfilled* that promise by coming as the Savior.
  - ii. His atoning death and resurrection also *fulfilled* the laws associated with animal sacrifices and the priesthood, which simply foreshadowed Him (so we no longer need to sacrifice animals or have human priests to mediate between God and us).
  - iii. Furthermore, His teachings did not displace the Law but rather completed the Law or *filled* its intended meaning.
- D. So, is the Old Testament finished, over and done with? Should we ignore it? Not according to Jesus.
  - i. Jesus says that not even a dot over an *i* or a cross-mark of a *t* will be set aside until all things are accomplished.
  - ii. Jesus' words instruct us to take the Old Testament teachings seriously.
    - Those who dismiss them and encourage others to do so will miss blessings in this life and in the life to come—they will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.
    - Those who obey and teach the Law will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

## 2. Rise Above Mediocrity - Matt. 5:20 and 48

### Matthew 5:20 and 48

<sup>20</sup> For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.... <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

- A. Scribes and Pharisees were viewed as spiritual giants in Jesus' day. You can almost hear the audience murmuring, *We have to be more righteous than them?* Who could ever hope to top these groups on the righteousness chart?
- i. The righteousness Jesus is speaking about here is NOT that God given righteousness of Christ which He earned for us on the cross. We call that "imputed righteousness."
  - ii. The righteousness Jesus is talking about is doing right by others, saying the right words, making the right choices, doing the right things—all the attitudes and actions labeled *right* in Scriptures. We call this our "Good Works."
  - iii. Good works do not save us. The righteousness of Christ saves us. But once we are saved, we desire to do good works.

### Ephesians 2:8-10

<sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

- B. Scribes and Pharisees made the mistake of thinking their good works would save them. So they kept religious rules, traditions, and rituals.
- C. Besides that, their supposed righteousness was based on outward show of good deeds rather than inward devotion to God.

### Isaiah 29:13

<sup>13</sup> The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.

- D. Jesus is never satisfied with mediocre discipleship. He set the highest standard possible—"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

**Please read the articles "Perfect: A Word Study" and "The Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees" contained in your preparation packet you picked up last Sunday. If you missed it, additional copies are on the back table.**

- E. "But nobody is perfect." True! Even so, Jesus expects us to take this command seriously. He has given us His Spirit to guide and empower us for Christian living and service.
- F. While we may never in this life complete the journey toward godly perfection, we must, by the Spirit's power, give our best.

## How Perfect Are You?

We often wonder how the scribes and Pharisees were so slow to understand Jesus' teachings. But don't be too quick to smirk at them. Have you ever "done your duty" as a Christian when your heart wasn't in it? Have you merely gone through the motions when attending worship, or praying the Lord's Prayer in rout memory?

Did any of that so-called obedience please God? No. Have I repented? Yes. Am I seeking to do better? Yes. Join me in seeking more consistently to obey the greatest commandment—to love God, which includes obeying Him from our hearts. This is the only way our righteousness can exceed that of the Pharisees.

If "0" on the scale below represents mediocrity, place an "X" on the line at the standard for your life.

-5-----0-----+5

### 3. Go Beyond Superficiality - Matthew 5:21-22,27-28,31-34a, 37-39,43-44

#### Matthew 5:21-44

<sup>21</sup> "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'<sup>22</sup> But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment....<sup>27</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'<sup>28</sup> But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart....<sup>31</sup> "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'<sup>32</sup> But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.<sup>33</sup> "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.'<sup>34</sup> But I tell you, Do not swear at all...<sup>37</sup> Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.<sup>38</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'<sup>39</sup> But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also....<sup>43</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'<sup>44</sup> But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...

- A. Jesus, the Master Teacher, gave six examples that help us see how to move beyond the Pharisees' kind of righteousness.
  - i. In each example, He set forth a common religious teaching, and
  - ii. Then added what obedience to that law actually involved. He did not refute biblical teachings, but He pointed out how superficially those teachings were being understood and practiced.
- B. Jesus' first example was the law against murder. He showed that obeying this law meant not having murderous hearts as well as not having murderous hands. That makes keeping this law a lot tougher.

**Please read the articles "You Have Heard It Said" Jewish Laws Behind Jesus' Teachings" and "Raca: The Meaning" contained in your preparation packet you picked up last Sunday. If you missed it, additional copies are on the back table.**

- C. Jesus next cited the command against adultery. This command means to remain faithful to one's spouse. Keeping the spirit of this law includes avoiding adultery in one's heart by lusting for a non-spouse.
  - i. Jesus does not mean the attraction we have toward members of the opposite sex. That is a God-given

attraction, part of our creation.

- ii. But when we dwell on that attraction, however, and allow it to lead us into immoral fantasies, we commit adultery in our hearts.

D. Jesus next takes up the matter of divorce. The Pharisees had long allowed divorce for legitimate causes.

- i. Jesus explained the permission for divorce was a concession made by Moses because of the hardness of men's hearts.
- ii. God's intention was that marriage should be a permanent union.

**Please read the article "Divorce in the First Century" contained in your preparation packet you picked up last Sunday. If you missed it, additional copies are on the back table.**

E. Jesus takes up oaths.

- i. Jesus is saying that taking an oath, for the believer is really unnecessary.
- ii. We are to tell the truth and whole truth and nothing but the truth all the time.
- iii. Only in a court of law are we to take an oath.

F. Have you heard the saying, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth?" This law was intended as a guide for judges to use in legal settlements, not as a license measured for personal revenge

- i. In personal relationships, the spirit of the law teaches to exercise grace rather than retaliation.
- ii. We must hold to the principle of non-retaliation, exemplified by Jesus as He was vilified, tortured, and crucified.

G. Jesus' final example of common teachings is, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy."

- i. Scribes and Pharisees endorsed loving one's neighbor, meaning fellow Jews, but not Gentiles, and certainly not enemies.
- ii. While they narrowed the scope of love, Jesus broadened it to include even one's enemies.
- iii. To pray for those who persecute us, as Jesus did on the cross, demonstrates we are "sons of your Father in heaven."

### **Biblical Truths in Focus**

1. All Scripture points to Jesus, who fulfills it.
2. Truly righteous actions are rooted in heartfelt devotion to God.
3. Discern the principles behind God's commands; apply them as broadly as possible.
4. Practice mercy rather than murder, faithfulness to spouses in thought and deed, and marriage building rather than marriage breaking.
5. Be known for truthfulness rather than deception, forgiveness rather than retaliation, and love rather than hate.