

# **“AHA! Righteousness”**

Matthew 5:20 – 28:20

May 4, 2025

**INTRO:** When was your greatest AHA! moment?

## **CULTURALLY:**

- These people are SERIOUS... they mean what they say...
- We really are living in Sodom & Gomorrah 2.0...
- Ignorance & evil are fighting for culture's #1

## **BIBLICALLY:**

- *In the beginning... God blessed them... Now the serpent...*
- ***and he ate... Cursed are you... pain in pregnancy...***
- *thorns and thistles... He drove out! Cain killed Abel...*
- Feasts & festivals; The suffering servant; All have sinned!*
- *Grace thru faith.... Truth IN love... Repent & believe!*
- ***Jesus, not dead! He is risen! Jesus is LORD!***
- *Go make disciples! BE The Church! No matter what!*

## **PERSONALLY:**

What is your relationship to/with righteousness?

- We've seen righteousness's relationship to Christ...
- We've seen righteousness's relationship to eternity...
- We're about to see righteousness's relationship to you!
  - Last time: Righteousness puts you at a FORK...
  - This time: Righteousness WALKS with you...
    - *Step by step, every minute of every day...*
    - *OR it doesn't & exposes your unrighteousness.*

## PRAYER

**THANK YOU LORD... FOR EMPOWERING SOME OF US TO  
LEARN, LOVE, AND LIVE YOUR RESURRECTION  
RIGHTEOUSNESS...**

**T/S:** With that prayer... the first thing we need to do is define biblical righteousness... biblically.

### CONTEXT:

- Matthew's Gospel on THE Gospel of Jesus Christ
- We've begun Christ's famous Sermon On The Mount
- We are at a defining & transitional point... Jesus on:
  - Jesus (and)
  - Righteousness

### BIG IDEA:

Christ's resurrection righteousness is God's biblical, eternal, & missional PLAN, GUIDE, & TEST for one's journey with Jesus from here to heaven... EVERY step is to be taken IN resurrection-righteousness... BY resurrection-righteousness... and FOR resurrection-righteousness... no more, no less,  
**NO MATTER WHAT!**

## VIDEO:

*Bible Project/Sermon On The Mount*

**T/S:** **How does the Bible define righteousness?**

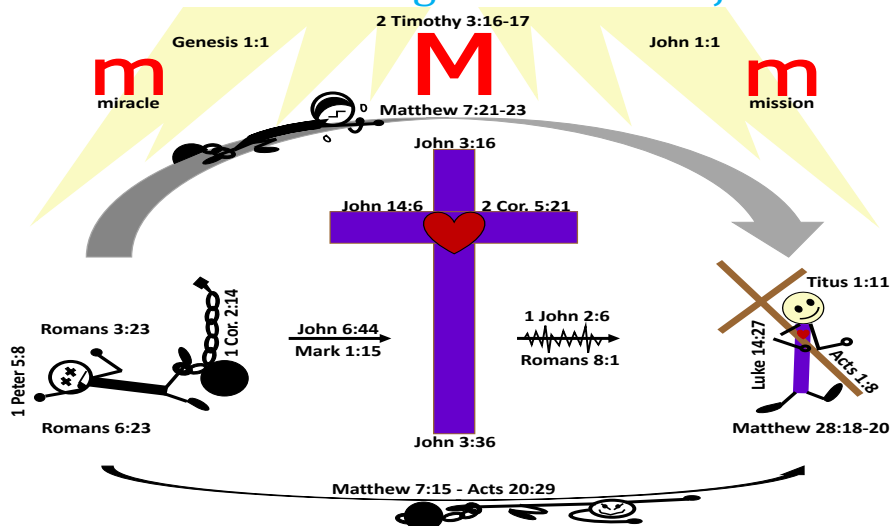
➤ Right-standing relationship with God.



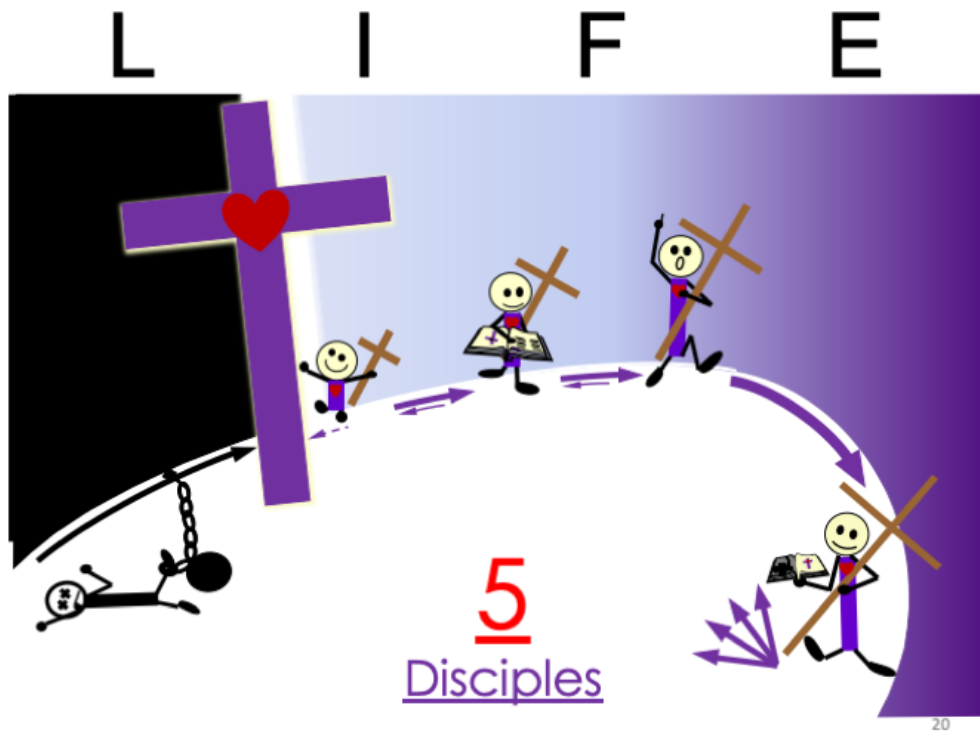
### John 3:16 & Romans 10:4

*For Christ is the end/fulfillment of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

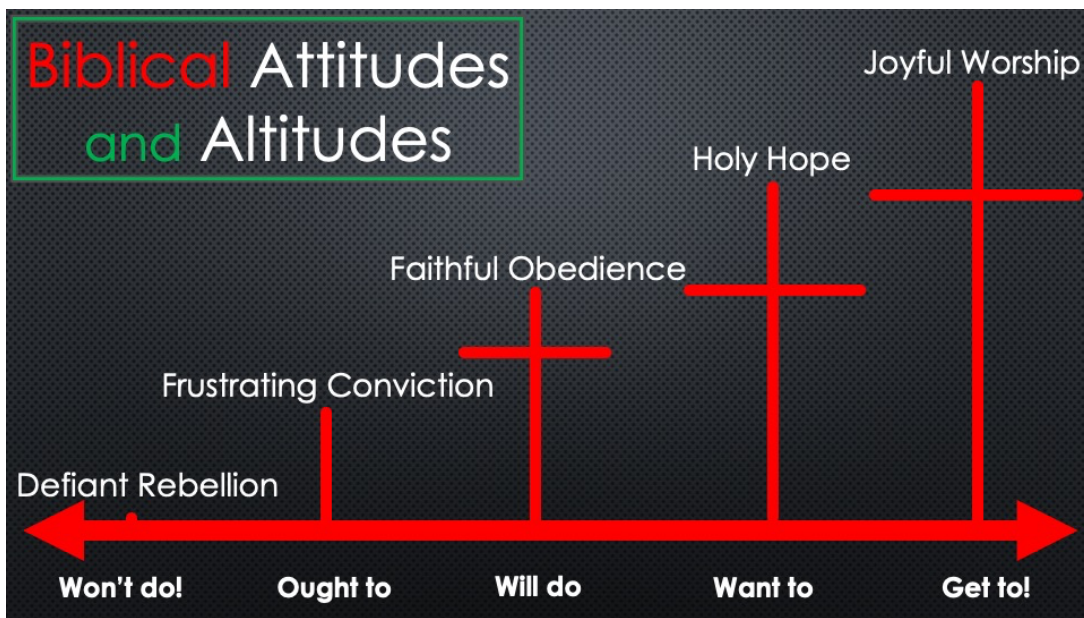
- Per HIS Word, will, and way(s)
- Positional righteousness = justified

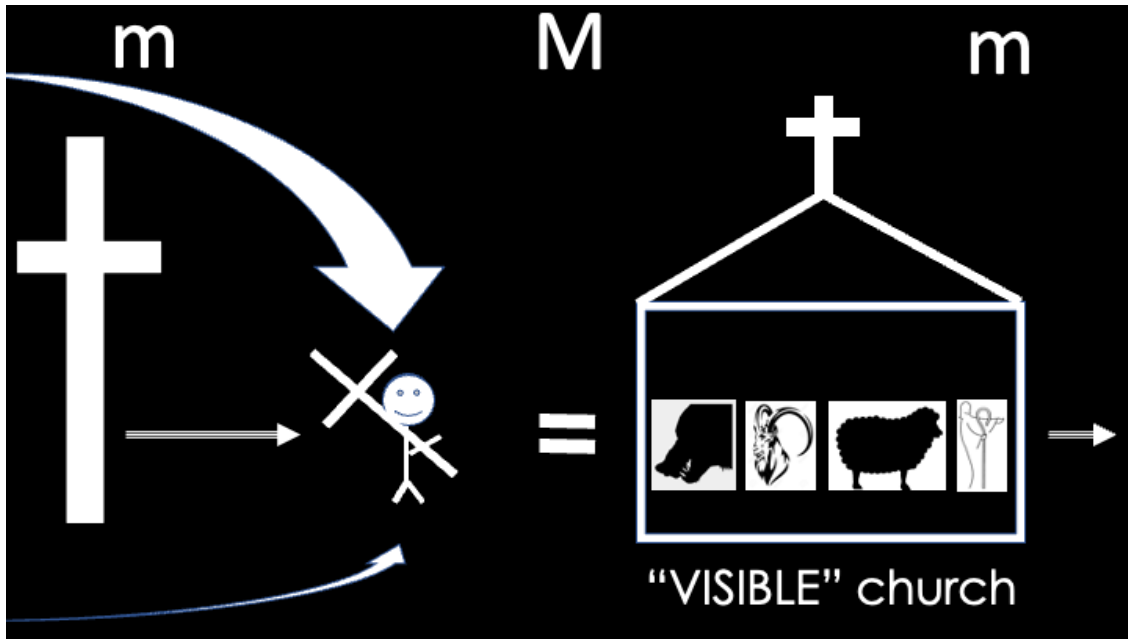


- Progressive righteousness = sanctified



- God's gift of Gospel grace that keeps on giving...
  - **Ephesians 2:1-10**

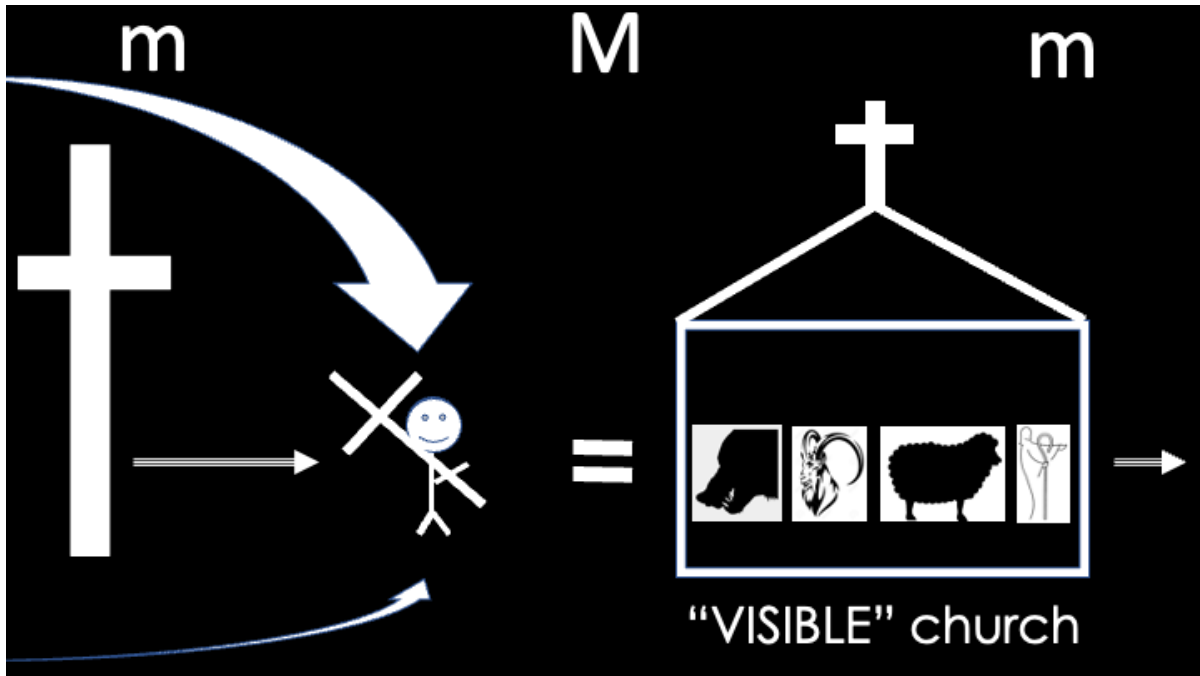




○ 1 Peter 1:3 = *Blessed be the God & Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*

○ 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. <sup>18</sup>Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, <sup>19</sup>namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their wrongdoings against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup>Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup>He made Him who knew no sin to be sin in our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*



TEXT:

[Matthew 5:20 – 28:20](#)

## I. Righteous **AUTHORITY**

[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>For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup>Therefore **whoever relaxes 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 does them and teaches them will be called great** in the kingdom of heaven.

A. The **CHRIST**

- a. The promised One to come...
- b. He has come ***"to fulfill ALL righteousness"***
- c. He is ***BE-ing Spirit-led***

B. The **WORD**

- a. Living Holy Word
- b. Holy written Word (**Bible**)

C. Constant, Consistent, & Courageous...

**VIDEO:**

*Bible Project/Beatitudes*

**T/S:** From God's grace... humans have to decide at their eternal FORK in the road... between hypocrisy & authenticity.

## II. UN-Righteous **HYPOCRISY**

**Matthew 5:20**

*For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds  
that of the scribes and Pharisees,  
you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

A. True **CHRISTIANITY**

B. The **WAR** & Warriors

- a. Jesus is the best interpreter of Jesus...
- b. See **1<sup>st</sup> John...** *it Defines & Defends The Church!*
- c. **Hebrews...** *exhorts The Church & exalts Christ*

C. Constant, Consistent, & Courageous

T/S:

Matthew 6:33

VIDEO: Bible Project/Sermon Righteousness

### III. Righteous **AUTHENTICITY**

#### A. The **CHURCH**

#### B. The worshipping, warrior-WITNESSES

➤ **Ch. 5** = Righteous CHRIST / Authority

- a. **Believers** (in & per Matthew 1-4)
- b. **BEATITUDE** Bullseyes & Blueprint “followers”
- c. 5:17-20 = BE realistic, real, right, & righteous!
- d. 5:21-48 = **“You have heard... BUT I say...”**
  - i. **CONFRONTING** = “You have heard...”
  - ii. **CONTRASTING** = “BUT”
  - iii. **COMMANDING** = “I say...”
  - iv. **CLARIFYING** = “to you...”
  - v. **COMMISSIONING** = Matthew 5:3 - 28:20
    - 1. “Go make disciples of ALL nations”
    - 2. “teach them to **OBEY all** of My commandments”
    - 3. “I will be with you ALWAYS... to the end...”

#### **ELEVATE vs. ELIMINATE**

#### RIGHTEOUSNESS IN RELATIONSHIP TO

- vi. *Anger*
- vii. *Lust*
- viii. *Divorce*
- ix. *Oaths*
- x. *Retaliation*
- xi. *Love of Enemies*



**T/S:**

**Matthew 6:1**

*“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*

➤ **Ch. 6 = Righteous CHRISTIANITY / No-Hypocrisy**

e. **Matthew 6:2-14**

- Jesus is about to literally teach & preach on biblical vs. cultural (& self) righteousness...
- He is going to literally confront, call out, and command abandoning religious HYPOCRISY
  - i. Hypocritical **GIVING**/Generosity
  - ii. Hypocritical **PRAAYER**/Praise
  - iii. Hypocritical **FASTING**/Eat-nothing
  - iv. Hypocritical **PRIORITIES**/Values
    - 1. Worldly **treasures** **vs.** heavenly ones
    - 2. Dark **vs.** light
    - 3. Choose 1 master, NOT 2...
      - a. Money **vs.**
      - b. Messiah
  - v. Hypocritical **FAITH**
    - 1. *Do not be anxious about your life*
    - 2. *Don't be anxious about time on earth*
    - 3. *Do not be anxious about priorities*

f. **Matthew 7:1-28** Church's righteous 3-leg stools

- i. God: **Father, Son, & Holy Spirit**
- ii. God: *Creator, Christ, & Convicting Spirit*

- iii. God's **Word, God's will, & God's way(s)**
- iv. God's *Bible, God's Bullseye & His Blueprint*
- v. God's **Truth, Love, & Works/Warfare**
- vi. God's *miracle, Messiah, & mission (mMm)*
- vii. Godly (righteous) **Heads, Hearts, Hands**
- viii. God's mission: *Local, Regional, & Global*
- ix. God's **chosen, cleansed, & commissioned**
- x. God's righteous love goes *Up, In, & Out*
- xi. God's righteous: **Plan, Guide, & Test**
- xii. God's exhortation: *Here, Heaven or Hell*

- Do not judge superficially but righteously
  - Don't focus on other's specs vs. you logs...
  - Don't give your best to the dogs...
  - Don't throw your pearls to the pigs...
- Accept the Gospel's sovereign grace & human responsibility... Ask, seek, knock... & it will be opened to you...
- Learn, love, & live "the golden rule"
- Contrast consequentially... *broad vs. narrow way*
- **Beware wolves/false prophets in sheep's clothes!**
- Become righteous fruit & root inspectors...
- Believe... fruitless trees are "thrown into the fire"
- Jesus will say: **"I NEVER knew you..."**
- All sand castles WILL come crashing down!
- *Only real Rock-fortresses will w/stand the storm.*

**REVIEW:** The Sermon On The Mount is meant to be an

**AHA! moment** for all who hear.

- Righteous AUTHORITY of The ALMIGHTY...
- UN-righteous HYPOCRISY is unacceptable!
- Righteous AUTHENTICITY is Church DNA...
- *Creator Christ's sacrificial crucifixion, coupled with His resurrection-righteousness, are the loving & living red threads of God's grace, Gospel, & glory.*
- See O.T. prophecies: Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 53; etc.
- See Old Testament typology: Ark; Isaac; David...
- See Old Testament Christophanies: Mel... 3 boys...
- See New Testament **foundations...**
  - Entirety of the Old Testament
  - John the Baptist's ministry
  - Matthew ch.1-4 & John 1:1-18
- See New Testament FACTS
  - *Incarnation*
  - *Mission*
  - *Crucifixion*
  - *Resurrection*
  - *Ascension*

(Big Idea #66, #67, & #68)

Real righteousness is a miraculous, Christ-like, grace-gift that exemplifies right-standing, in attitude and action, in motive and methodology, with Almighty God, per HIS Word, HIS will, & HIS ways.

Consequently, biblical righteousness is truth-defined, love-saturated, works-verified, purely-motivated, others-oriented, & missionally, fruit-producing.

Christ's resurrection righteousness is God's biblical, eternal, & missional PLAN, GUIDE, & TEST for one's journey with Jesus from here to heaven... EVERY step is to be taken BY resurrection-righteousness... IN resurrection-righteousness... and FOR resurrection-righteousness... no more, no less, NO MATTER WHAT!

Resurrection-righteousness's truth in love is the biblical bullseye and blueprint that exemplifies God's grace, Gospel, & glorification.

- JDP

## CLOSE:

1<sup>st</sup> John tells us that what we practice is who we are righteous or unrighteous – children of God or children of the Devil.

- **Practicing** righteousness > pursuing...
- **Practicing** righteousness > **playing**...
- To end with pursuing or playing with real righteousness = biblical and/or missional **unrighteousness!**

Romans 6 tells us that we are to be "slaves to righteousness."

True, biblical righteousness is not some ivory tower ideal. No! Real righteousness is an all day, every day, step by step way of life. – JDP

Per Jesus, here and throughout His ministry, it begs the question of all of us: Is our righteousness exceeding or excusing the Scribes & Pharisees?

## Real righteousness grows!

**REAL RIGHTEOUSNESS IS THE BEATITUDES  
BE-ING LEARNED, LOVED, & LIVED OUT...**

- Righteousness is the priceless blessing & wealth that identifies the truly poor in spirit.
- Righteousness is the revealed joy that accompanies the biblical grieving & mourning of sin.

- Righteousness is the bold blessing that comes with miraculous meekness.
- Righteousness is the supernaturally soul-satisfying reward that those who hunger & thirst after it receive.
- Righteousness is the authenticating signature of The Gospel's transformative mercy & grace.
- Righteousness is the motivating force in and behind those with a pure heart.
- Righteousness is the mission, message, & methodology advanced by biblical peace makers.
- Righteousness was, is, and will continue to be persecuted, reviled, hated, and slandered by the unrighteous of the world.

## PRAYER

**WORSHIP:** *"In Christ Alone & Christ Is Risen"*

# STUDY NOTES:

## MacArthur N.T. Commentary: Matthew

### The Attitude Behind the Act

(an Overview of 5:21–48)

From the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus focuses on the internal, on what men are like in their minds and hearts.

That is the primary thrust of Matthew 5:21–48, as the Lord reemphasizes the divine standards for living in His kingdom, the divine standards already given in the law of the Old Testament, in contrast to Jewish tradition.

*Contrary to the external, superficial, and hypocritical righteousness that typified the scribes and Pharisees, the righteousness God requires is first of all internal.*

**IF IT DOES NOT EXIST IN THE HEART,  
IT DOES NOT EXIST AT ALL.**

Though it had been long forgotten or neglected by most Jews of Jesus' day, that truth was presented to them throughout the Old Testament.

Solomon prayed, ***“Hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place, and forgive and act and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart Thou knowest, for Thou alone dost know the hearts of all the sons of men”*** (**1 Kings 8:39**).

In **David’s last words to Solomon** he said, “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts” (**1 Chron. 28:9**).

Hanani the seer reminded King Asa, “For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His” (**2 Chron. 16:9**).

“All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight,” we are told in Proverbs, “but the Lord weighs the motives” (**Prov. 16:2**).

## **THAT GOD IS FIRST OF ALL CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT MEN ARE LIKE ON THE INSIDE IS A CENTRAL TRUTH OF BOTH TESTAMENTS.**

A good outward act is validated before God only when it honestly represents what is on the inside. “I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds” (**Jer. 17:10**).



In the last book of the Bible **the Lord warns the church at Thyatira**, “I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds” **(Rev. 2:23)**.

Right external behavior only pleases Him when it corresponds to right internal attitudes and motives. “I am conscious of nothing against myself,” Paul said, “yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore, do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; & then each man’s praise will come to him from God” **(1 Cor. 4:4–5)**.

**THE PRESUMED GOOD DEEDS OF THE PROUD SCRIBES AND SELF-GLORYING PHARISEES DID NOT COME FROM THE HEART ATTITUDES JESUS SAYS ARE CHARACTERISTIC OF KINGDOM CITIZENS: POVERTY OF SPIRIT, MOURNING OVER SIN, GENTLENESS, HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND SO ON (VV. 3–12).**

Because Jesus knew that His hearers, especially the self-righteous and self-satisfied religious leaders, could not possibly understand what He was saying, He devoted much of this sermon to exposing the faulty principles and motivations of the legalistic system that had replaced God’s own revealed Word.

Jesus used the phrase “*You have heard*” that the ancients were told,” or a similar one, to introduce each of the six corrective illustrations He gives in this part of His sermon (see vv. 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43).

**THE PHRASE HAS REFERENCE TO RABBINICAL, TRADITIONAL TEACHING, AND IN EACH ILLUSTRATION, JESUS CONTRASTS THAT HUMAN TEACHING WITH THE DIVINE WORD OF GOD.**

*The examples show ways in which God’s righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees (see v. 20).*

They deal with the specific subjects of murder, sexual sin, divorce, speaking the truth, retaliation, and loving others. Yet they all illustrate the same basic principle, the principle Jesus says must be applied to every area of life: **righteousness is a matter of the heart.**

Jesus is not modifying the law of Moses, the teaching of the Psalms, the standards of the prophets, or any other part of Scripture. The essence of what He has just said in verses 17–20 is (1) that His teaching stands firmly in agreement with every truth, even every word, of the Old Testament, and (2) that the Jewish religious traditions *did not*.

In the six illustrations found in verses 21–48, Jesus first refers to two of the Ten Commandments, then to two more general principles in the law of Moses, and finally to the two broad principles of mercy and love. Murder and adultery deal with the foundational issues of individual and social preservation. Protection of life is the foundation of individual welfare, and protection of marriage is the foundation of social welfare. Divorce and truth-telling involve a wider area of social relationships, and mercy and love a wider area still. **The illustrations progress from the protection of each human life to the love of all human life, including enemies.** Together, those illustrations affirm that every area of our lives should be characterized and measured by God's perfect standard of inner righteousness.

Patrick Fairbairn wrote,

In the revelation of law there was a substratum of grace recognized in the words that prefaced the ten commandments, and promises of grace and blessing also intermingled with the stern prohibitions and injunctions of which they consist. And so, inversely, in the Sermon on the Mount, while it gives grace the priority and the prominence, [such as in the Beatitudes], it is far from excluding the severer aspect of God's character and government. No sooner, indeed, had grace poured itself forth in a succession of beatitudes, than there appear the stern demands of righteousness and law. (Cited in Arthur Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950], p. 67)

The phrase "The ancients were told" could also be rendered "the ancients told, or said." In the first instance the implication would be that the ancients were told by God, in which case Jesus would be referring to God's revealed Word. That cannot be, because He contrasts His teaching, the teaching of God, with that of the ancients. For Him to contradict God's Word in any way would be totally out of the question in view of verses 17–19. In the second rendering the implication is that the ideas the ancients taught were primarily of their own devising. That must be the correct approach.

Jesus customarily referred to the Scriptures by such phrases as "Moses commanded," "the prophet Isaiah said," "it is written," and such. Here His words are much more general and therefore cannot refer directly to the Old Testament. He shows that, even in regard to the specific biblical commands against murder and adultery, their tradition was at variance with the holy Scripture, which reveals that God's primary concern has always been for inner purity, not simply outward compliance.

Fairbairn again observes, "The scribes and Pharisees of that age had completely inverted the order of things. Their carnality and self-righteousness had led them to exalt the precepts respecting ceremonial observances to the highest place and to throw the duties inculcated in the ten commandments comparatively into the background" (cited in Pink, *An Exposition on the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 69).

THE RABBIS OF PAST GENERATIONS WERE  
OFTEN CALLED THE “FATHERS OF  
ANTIQUITY,” OR “THE MEN OF LONG AGO,”  
AND IT IS TO THEM THAT “THE ANCIENTS”  
(VV. 21, 33) REFERS.

Jesus was contrasting His teaching—and the  
true teaching of the Old Testament Scriptures  
themselves—with the Jewish written and oral  
traditions that had accumulated over the  
previous several hundred years and that had so  
terribly perverted God’s revelation.

AS MARTYN LLOYD-JONES HAS POINTED OUT,  
THE CONDITION OF JUDAISM AT THE TIME OF  
CHRIST WAS REMARKABLY LIKE THAT OF THE  
CHURCH IN THE EARLY SIXTEENTH CENTURY.  
THE SCRIPTURES WERE NOT TRANSLATED INTO  
THE LANGUAGES OF THE PEOPLE. THE  
LITURGY, THE PRAYERS, THE SCRIPTURE  
READING, AND EVEN MOST OF THE HYMNS AND  
ANTHEMS WERE IN LATIN, WHICH NONE OF THE  
COMMON PEOPLE KNEW OR UNDERSTOOD.  
WHEN A PRIEST GAVE A SERMON OR HOMILY,  
THE PEOPLE HAD NOTHING BY WHICH TO  
JUDGE WHAT HE SAID. THEY HAD NO IDEA AS

TO WHETHER OR NOT HIS MESSAGE WAS  
SCRIPTURAL, OR EVEN WHETHER OR NOT  
BEING SCRIPTURAL WAS IMPORTANT. THE  
BIBLE TAUGHT WHAT THE CHURCH SAID IT  
TAUGHT. THE CHURCH, THEREFORE, PLACED  
ITS OWN AUTHORITY OVER THAT OF SCRIPTURE  
(SEE *STUDIES IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT*  
[GRAND RAPIDS: EERDMANS, 1971], 1:212).

Over the centuries the Roman Catholic church had developed a system of religion that departed further and further from Scripture. It was a system that the common man had no way of investigating or verifying.

*The greatest contribution of the Protestant Reformation was to give the Bible to the people in their own language.*

It put God's Word into the hands of God's people.

*It was the truth of Scripture that brought light to the Middle Ages and consequently an end to the Dark Ages.*

In a less extreme way the Jews of Jesus' day had been separated from their Scriptures. During and after the Exile most Jews lost their use of the Hebrew language and had come to speak Aramaic, a Semitic language related to Hebrew. Parts of Ezra, Jeremiah, and Daniel were originally written in Aramaic, but the rest of the Old Testament was in Hebrew.

The Septuagint, a Greek edition of the Old Testament, had been translated some two hundred fifty years earlier. But though it was widely used by Jews throughout the Roman Empire, the Septuagint was not used or understood by most Jews in Palestine. In addition to that, copies of the Scriptures were bulky, expensive, and far out of the financial reach of the average person. Therefore, when the Hebrew text was read and expounded in the synagogue services, most of the worshipers understood little of the text and consequently had no basis for judging the exposition. Their respect for the rabbis also led them to accept whatever those leaders said.

After the return from exile in Babylon, when Ezra and others read publicly from the law of Moses, they had to translate "to give the sense so that they [the people] understood the reading" (Neh. 8:8). Most later scribes and rabbis, however, did not attempt to translate or expound the scriptural text itself but rather taught from the Talmud, an exhaustive codification of the rabbinic traditions.

Therefore, both the Jewish leaders and the rank and file of the people were amazed at Jesus' radical departure—in both content and delivery—from the type of teaching they were used to. Whether He was right or wrong, it was obvious to them that ***"He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes"*** (Mark 1:22).

Among Jesus' most amazing departures from traditional teaching were His insistence that tradition and Scripture were in conflict and that inner righteousness, not outward form, is the central and necessary characteristic of a right relationship to God.

In his *Institutes* (*Library of Christian Classics*, vol. 1, p. 372), John Calvin wrote,

Let us agree that through the law man's life is molded not only to outward honesty but to inward and spiritual righteousness. Although no one can deny this, very few duly note it. This happens because they do not look to the Lawgiver by whose character the nature of the law is to be appraised. If some king by edict forbids fornication, murder or theft, I admit that a man who does not commit such acts will not be bound by the penalty. That is because the mortal lawgiver's jurisdiction extends only to the outward political order. But God, whose eye nothing escapes and who is concerned not so much with outward appearance as with purity of heart, forbids not only fornication, murder and theft but lust, anger, hatred, coveting and deceit. For since He is a spiritual Lawgiver, He speaks not less to the soul than He does to the body.



Five basic principles summarize the central thrust of 5:21–48.

**1. THE FIRST PRINCIPLE IS THAT THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE LETTER.**

The law was not given as a mechanical set of rules by which men in their own power could govern their outward living. It was given as a guide to the type of character God requires.

**2. THE SECOND PRINCIPLE IS THAT THE LAW IS POSITIVE AS WELL AS NEGATIVE.**

*Its purpose not only is to prevent both inner and outward sin but to promote both inner and outward righteousness.*

**3. THE THIRD PRINCIPLE IS THAT THE LAW IS NOT AN END IN ITSELF.**

Its deeper purpose goes beyond purifying the lives of God's people. Its supreme purpose is to glorify God Himself.

**4. THE FOURTH PRINCIPLE IS THAT GOD ALONE IS QUALIFIED TO JUDGE MEN, BECAUSE HE ALONE CAN JUDGE MEN'S HEARTS.**

Only the Creator has the right and the ability to judge the deepest inner workings of His creatures.

**5. THE FIFTH PRINCIPLE IS THAT EVERY HUMAN BEING IS COMMANDED TO LIVE UP TO THE PERFECT DIVINE STANDARD TO WHICH THE LAW POINTS.**

Because that command is impossible for man to fulfill, God Himself has provided fulfillment through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Demander of righteousness is  
also the Giver of righteousness;  
the Lawgiver is also the Redeemer.