

The Law of God and the Lives of Men

Chapter 11

Audio lesson: Sermon on the Mount 11



Objective: To understand Jesus' approach to the Law of God and personal righteousness. (Text: Matthew 5:17-20)



"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."

—Matthew 5:20

Many people think Jesus was contradicting the Old Testament in these verses, but He was only confronting the teaching of the religious leaders. He was telling His disciples: "Everything I am teaching you is found in the Word of God, but what I am teaching is in direct conflict with what your religious leaders have been teaching you." He then goes on in the following verses to explain the difference between the letter of the law—the teaching of the Pharisees, and the spirit of the law—the teaching of Jesus. He taught that the Law was to be internal, not merely external; that it was to be vertical (done for God) rather than only horizontal (done for others to see); that it was to be scriptural rather than traditional; and that it was to be real rather than hypocritical.



1. **True** or false? In order to be part of Jesus' solution, we need to know how to use the Scripture in people's lives.
2. **True** or false? God gave His Law and His Word because of His love for people.

3. True or **false**? Jesus' teaching was in extreme conflict with the law of the Old Testament.
4. **True** or false? Jesus taught that the spirit of the Old Testament law was deeper and more personal than the religious leaders taught.

Unless otherwise noted, choose one best answer for each question.

5. What does Jesus say about our righteousness in Matthew 5:20?
 - a. **It must exceed the righteousness of the religious leaders.**
 - b. It could not possibly match the righteousness of the religious leaders.
 - c. It is not very important to God any more.
 - d. It should not be based on the Old Testament at all.

6. Read 2 Corinthians 3:6. According to this verse, what is one of the main differences between the letter and the spirit of the Law?

- a. There is no difference; they are the same.
- b. The letter is easier to follow.
- c. The Spirit is less strict about sin.
- d. **The letter kills but the Spirit gives life.**

[He] also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

—2 Corinthians 3:6

7. Through the lens of God's love, why was the Law given?
 - a. **To judge and condemn sin**
 - b. To urge people to do better
 - c. To improve the well-being of people
 - d. To make religious teachers feel better about themselves

8. On the following list, underline the religious leaders' wrong approaches to the Law. Then put a check mark by Jesus' right approaches to the Law.

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| <u>External</u> | ✓ Vertical |
| ✓ Scriptural | ✓ Internal |
| <u>Horizontal</u> | <u>Hypocritical</u> |
| ✓ Real | <u>Traditional</u> |



Can you see any similarities between the way you approach and apply God's Word and the way the Pharisees did? If so, what are they? What can you do to be more like Jesus?



Thank God that He teaches us righteousness because of His great love for us. Ask Him to develop internal righteousness within your heart as you learn and obey His Word.



Going Deeper

1. What does it mean to apply the law of God through the love of God? _____

2. In what way were the Pharisees violating this principle? _____

3. Why did Jesus' teaching conflict with the Pharisees? List some differences between Jesus' teaching and that of the Pharisees. _____

4. Define and describe what is meant by the word "righteousness" as used in Matthew 5:20.

5. What was the difference between Jesus' concept of "righteousness" and that of the Pharisees?

6. Is your application of the Word more like the Pharisees or like Jesus? What can you do to be more like Jesus? _____

7. What is the difference between the letter of the law and the spirit of the law? Why does the "letter kill but the spirit give life" (2 Corinthians 3:6)? _____
