

# Christ Explains the Law

By Paris Reidhead\*

Please turn to Matthew chapter 5 and we will see the words of our Lord Jesus and what He proposed to do at Calvary. We have been studying the words of Christ, as a parentheses, in our study of the book of Hebrews. In the book of Hebrews, we read we are to give the more earnest heed as God who has spoken in times past by the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son and it seem the Lord's mind and will that we should discover again something of that which the Son said so His words are engaging us for this period of time. We saw in Matthew 5 the beatitudes and remind our hearts again this morning that the beatitudes are not a ladder by which we climb to God, but they constitute a photograph of the redeemed heart.

They do not tell us how but they tell us what. You will not meet God savingly by trying to keep the beatitudes. You can only keep the beatitudes because you have met Him in saving power. The beatitudes are the revelation of the out working of the new life. The unveiling of what God does of the heart that He redeemed. Verses 13 to 16 declare the function and the purpose of the Christian in life and the world. The first the beatitudes tell us the kind of a person Christian is. The second portion verses 13 to 16 tell us the kind of a life he lives. In the kind of the world for to which he is being sent. A world that is decaying and needs salt, a world that is in darkness and that needs light. Verses 17 to 20 describe the relationship of Christ and His people to the Law. There would be those hearing Him speak that would surmise that He was going to destroy the Mosaic Law and substitute precepts of His own. But such is not the case. And early in His ministry declares that "He is not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it" (Mat. 5:17). Not only its prophetic utterances concerning Him, but its glorious personal intension is to be fulfilled by His work on the cross and therefore we see the relationship of Christ and his people the Law.

Beginning with verse 20 Christ is expounding the relationship of Himself and that His people to the Law in two aspects, two different ways. First, He declares that which the Law means to Him and how He intendeds it to be understood and obeyed. In a positive sense, He gives the declaration of the true meaning of the Law He doesn't add to it. He simply expounds it and in the second aspect of this portion of verses 20 to 48 He contrasts His teaching with the perverted twisted false teaching of the Pharisees. Actually, I suppose we could well say that the balance of this sermon that is from verse 21 though the last verse of chapter 7 is an exposition of verse 20. In this portion from 21, on the end of the sermon, the Lord Jesus is an explaining what He said here in this verse "I say unto you that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Mat. 5:20). The balance of chapter 5 from 21 on, our Lord explains the true interpretation of the law against the Pharisees false and twisted interpretation.

In chapter 6, He shows the true nature of fellowship with God as over against the superficial shallow and meaningless relationship that the Pharisees had taught. In chapter 7, He shows the true righteousness that He imparts as over and against that which was taught and practiced by the Pharisees.

In all of this sermon, this marvelous Sermon on the Mound that is evangelical in its character, in its detail, and purpose. Our Lord is describing what He prophecies in Ezekiel. Do you remember what He said? He said "I will sprinkle clean water upon you and cleanse you from all your filthiness" (Eze. 36:25). This is pardon and justification. Then He said "I will put a new heart within you and I will write my Law upon your hearts" (Jer. 31:33). And then He said "I'll put my spirit within you and cause you to keep my statutes" (Eze. 36:27). And thus in the Sermon on the Mound He is expounding this, explaining this, and unfolding this so that we might understand what His new thing is.

Now there are 6 statements made by the Lord Jesus in this portion and I want you to see them not that we should expound them in detail. Each such statement would merit an entire sermon and more in fact. So you understand that all we can do is to try and gain some prospective and see this in the relationship to this one theme that He is in this portion explaining the proper interpretation of the Law as against the twisted false interpretation given by the Pharisees. Hear it as I begin with the 21st verse and each of these 6 statements has this formula "Ye have heard that it was said by them but I say unto you."

Hear the first “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old-time thou shalt not kill and whoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say Raca shall be in danger of the council, and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”

He has now carried the meaning of this Scripture this statement “thou shalt not kill” away from the act of slaying as it was interpreted by the Pharisees, to the attitude which would make possible a slaying (Exo. 20:13). He has taken it away from the act from the overt, outward expression of hatred down to the very existence of hatred in the heart. This is what our Lord is seeking to say when He declares, “Except your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

They didn’t kill but they found convenient and subtle ways to accomplish their purpose without staining their hands with blood. Their hearts were filled with hatred, with angry, with animosity and they had been forbidden to kill, but they could mullein, they could plot, they could unscrupulously slay by innuendo and they could deceive. All this was held to be a keeping of the Law because they hadn’t taken a knife and plunged it into a back or a club and crushed a skull. Therefore, they could say “Well, I’ve kept the Law. The Law says ‘Thou shall not kill’.” Our Lord doesn’t add to it at all. He simply expounds it. He simply opens it. And said, God doesn’t look on the outward appearance He looks on the heart and when God sees hatred in the heart He sees murder there. For hatred is the intension to harm. He uses three statements here He said “If thou shall be angry” there is hatred boiling as an emotion. And when angry is present this kind of which he speaks without a cause, because of personality difference or because of ambition being thwarted or some other hindrance without a cause, this anger that comes that had would be as came Cain’s anger was toward Abel. When He says “when the anger is there even though it never even raises to the surface is sufficiently to come out in a word or look or a jester. It is still seen by God. God says that viewing the anger as it is He holds it to be murder. He says it is murder. Thus Christ has now taken the Law down from where it had been placed as a 10 foot rule of outward action to an x-ray that peers right down into the inter most part of the heart and discovers there the feelings and the motives and the attitudes. And then He enlarges upon it by using the word Raca I don’t anybody who knows too much as to what this met. It may have been a term of derision there may be some who knew exactly what it is, but I have never been satisfied about it. But whatever it was, it was a term of derision that expressed contempt and expressed the desire to hurt we might use it for all slanderous terms, all terms which deride, all terms which belittle, all terms which twisted and misrepresent. It’s that the Lord sees that which He looks at and then He said “whoever shall call another ‘Thou fool’ and this of course He attaches with extreme penalties of the danger of hellfire.

Now He has taken the one statement “thou shall not kill” and He has added a dimension to it of depth. You see what God proposes to do with not simply to keep people from slaying one another by forbidding it, but He proposed to give a climate of love by changing the heart and what He says these things He simply saying that the person that gets angry without a clause that says Rocca, the person that says “Thou fool,” the one whose heart sees, and boils in rage with a purpose to hurt, never have happen to him what has to happen if they’re to see heaven. Never had the new heart given. For when one is been given that new heart by the Lord the motives becomes as grievous as the act would have been. The attitude becomes as heinous a sin in the individual eyes as the act would’ve been. And so what He is actually saying is those that have received His grace have not simply had an outward form of life in posed upon them because of an obedience to the Law, but they had a miracle take place within them so they have partaken of the divine nature. This is what He saying “Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.” Oh one can go on without ever having blood on their hands and go straight to Hell. Because all through their lifetime professing religion, professing Christianity, professing salvation, quoting Scripture verses, even witnessing, and working in religion serves. They have had a heart filled with anger and malice and wrath, never been changed. You see the plan of salvation doesn’t save and Scripture verses don’t save and decision doesn’t save. Salvation is a person. A person that invades the human personality and in coming in gives a new life, a new nature, and makes one a new creation is what He is saying.

We precede to the next verse 27 to 30. Here He speaks of this problem that confronts every generation. I’m sure His and ours, the problem of morality. “You’ve heard that it was said by them of old-time, Thou shalt not commit adultery, but I say unto you

whoever looketh unto a women to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart and if thy right eye offends thee pluck it out and cast it from thee” (Mat. 5:27-29).

What is our Lord saying? He is saying that again the crime, of course, has its social consequences in the act, but it has its spiritual consequences in the attitude. And that God who looks not at the outward appearance looks upon the heart and sees deeply within the spirit of man and when He sees the look with lust with the intention or the purpose to secure illicit pleasure and gratification He deals with that intention of the heart as though it were the deed was consummated. Obviously, He is dealing with it on a spiritual basis and obviously we recognize that the social consequences do not result from the attitude, but the spiritual consequences do. And what He is saying is that the Pharisees could have rigidly kept the Scripture, the Commandment “thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exo. 20:14). But they’re hearts were filled with avarice, with covetousness, with lust, with immorality, and they had failed to recognize that the heart was the measure of the man and not the outward action. And that therefore they were to judge themselves as being religious or irreligious not on the basis of what we did but on the basis of what they wanted to do.

My friend today we must face this fact that you are not what do you do, you are what you want to do. And when God regenerates a heart He puts within that heart a want, a new want, a new desire, a new passion, a new longing, to glorify God, and please God, and to obey God. And that one that has been born of God will deal with the attitude of the heart as though it were the act. He will slay himself in the presence of God on his face before the Lord, not because of an act, but because of an attitude. It will be whether it is in anger, or hatred, or animosity toward a brother, he will slay himself, indict himself as the murderer God holds him to be, not because it has come to any outward action or word, but because of the heart.

What is Jesus Christ saying? He is saying those that He regenerates receive from Him a new nature. And in that new nature, they have a new purpose, in that new purpose they have a sensitivity to the thought of sin as though it were the deed completed and they will deal thus with the thought. This is what He is saying. He is saying that everyone to whom He gives His life, He gives His attitude toward sin, all sin.

The third thing that He speaks of here is in reference to the marital relationship. “It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery” (Mat. 5:9). This is His Word. He is saying, now, that the writing of divorcement that Moses proscribed fulfilled the outward purpose of the law, but it left uncovered the deep need of the human heart in the human spirit. He said it’s not enough or the one that has been born of God discovers that the church is pictured by the home. And He has taken a divine illustration of what the home is to be, the church is to be. When He said Christ is the bridegroom and the church is the bride. And He said, now, anyone that’s been born of Him can’t be content with a writ of divorcement. Because they realize there is a heavenly significance glorious, glorious heavenly significance that it has to be respected. And He said, “You have heard, but I say unto you,” saying now there comes into the heart a deep passionate desire to secure the glory of God, not one’s own whim or fancy or pleasure.

Verse 33 brings us to the fourth, “Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:” Yes, that is what it was in the old-time but He says it’s not that way now. God doesn’t ask for an oath. He doesn’t ask for this swearing by all that is good and all that is holy. He said, “You’re not to swear by earth it is His footstool, by Jerusalem to the city of the king, you can’t even swear by your own head because you can’t turn one hair black or white” (Mat. 5:34-36). He said the Christian that has a new heart and the new nature doesn’t have to reinforce his statements by appealing to heaven or kings or city or his hair or head because his only desire in speech is to speak that which is true. And he’d only need say yes or no or anything beyond this comes from a desire to reinforce and with Shakespeare would imply that “one did protests too much.”<sup>1</sup>

---

1 “Hamlet” by William Shakespeare, 1600AD

And so He is saying that person that is born of Him, that person has the righteousness from above does not need to protect his truthfulness by appealing to those that could bring reprisals upon him for failure, but because he has a heart that is committed to truth, and loves truth, he simply says yes or no in this the end of it. And it is thus that He is saying the truth is in the inward parts and the one that's been born of Him has had this rectifying of the inner man so that he doesn't need to be protected by oath, because he fears God and stands in the presences of God, His Word is enough. He is describing the regenerate heart, the one whose word is yea, yea; nay nay.

And then the fifth one, verse 38, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (Mat. 5:38). This was the great improvement, when Moses declared this, he changed the social condition of Israel and of the world round about him, for soon it was adopted by others. You see it was in days past that if a man lost an eye he slew the one who caused it. If he lost a tooth, he took a life of the person that had injured him. And it wasn't an eye for an eye it was a life for an eye, a life for a tooth and life was cheap. But now He said somethings happened it isn't just this improvement over that by establishing an eye for an eye. Now it is something entirely different, "resists not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on right cheek turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away" (Mat. 5:39b-42). Unfortunately, I'm afraid that about all most people see in this is the first phrase the 42nd verse. They use it to justify giving to the people on the streets. Now, I would urge you and plead with you not to so misapply the Scripture. And I would urge you and plead with you not to give to the people that on Sunday morning come and stand outside the church door expecting a hand out. I believe that there is no greater damage done to human personality than this. It wasn't until the prodigal was fain to eating the husks and no man would give to him, that he came to himself. (See Luke 15:11-32) And it is a known fact that a pan handler in Times Square area, if you work a full 8 hour day, can collect a \$350 on the average week. Of course, snowstorms and natural things would stand in the way. Now don't any of you go out and say it is better than what I'm making. This isn't what I'm suggesting it for. I'm simply saying that there's absolutely no justification for interpreting this Scripture on that bases.

Now, if you happen to know some family or some need or some individual for you understand that in Israel the begging such as we would know here for the purpose of continuing an indulgence, licentiousness didn't exists as such. And if there would be such a case where you would have someone come, I believe that it is very wrong for Christians seeing someone in need. Where there is need there is an opportunity to help and to establish a home and established a something that could protect from great grief. You know it's a loss of a nail, that causes the loss of the shoe, that causes the loss of the horse, that causes the loss of the soldier, that causes the loss of the battle. There are times when help is needed, but I suggest to you when that's done do not be considered alone. He says "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away."

Yes, let's move back again and see the significance of it. "That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Most of the trouble that people get into is in trying to protect themselves and avenge themselves and defend themselves. And someone says something against you and so you can't wait for an opportunity to get even. And someone does something and the person just can hardly wait for an opportunity to give in kind. And the Lord Jesus Christ has said this is all finished with my people. My people haven't a desire to avenge themselves and vindicate themselves and prove themselves right, defend themselves, because they have seen themselves worthy of death. And they have stood at the door of the cross and they viewed a man hanging there for them and they have said that I deserve the death He dies. How can anyone that's taken that attitude toward himself, vindicate himself, justify himself? "No, no," He said. "Smite you on the right, turn the left," leave it with the Lord.

This is the...not so much...it has to do, of course, with social relationships, but what He is saying is in His work of grace He does something in the heart. It is deep within the heart that the Lord does the work. And that's where He's letting it come. There is something happened in their heart. By nature none of us are of this order. Every one of us are right there to defend ourselves, but God and grace gives new hearts. And you're prepared to leave the case in His hands and allow Him to take care of it.

Truth crushed to earth will rise again. It won't fall. It won't disappear. It may be stomped upon it will, it will come back. And so He said anyone that's mine that's had this work I've come to do has a new law within them, not the law of retaliation, not the

law of self-indication, not the law of self-defense, but the law that nothing can touch me but what my Father permits it. Nothing can happen to me but what my Father allows it. He's given me a new attitude. This is what He saying. He is describing what He does.

And in the last is found in versus 43 to 48: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy." Oh yes, this was even an improvement because Israel didn't always love his neighbor, but He said when was given it was considerable improvement because it involved the necessity of dealing with one's neighbor on the same basis that one would be dealt with. It is the root of the Golden rule: Do unto others as thou wouldst have done unto you.

But now our Lord is saying what they had heard love your neighbor and hate your enemy wasn't what Moses said. It was the Pharisees interpretation of what Moses said. For you see after the captivity in Babylon, most of the Jewish people in our Lord's time could not read Hebrew. They spoke Aramaic or Arabic and they couldn't read the Scripture. They had to depend upon the rabbis to tell them what God said. And so what the rabbi said was thy shall love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. It was their interpretation of it.

The Lord said no, no. He said, "I say unto you, I say unto you love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them which spiteful use you, and persecute you that you may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven" (Mat. 5:44-45). "That ye may be," yes, in that sense that it may be revealed and manifest and disclosed that you are children of your Father which is in Heaven. That's what He is saying. Everyone that He redeems gets this kind of a heart to. You say, "Well, I haven't lived this way all the time." The question isn't as much have you lived this way all the time, but have you dealt with everything contrary to this as the sin that it is. If you have been born of God, He's given you this kind of a heart, this kind of a desire, this kind of a purpose, the kind of a longing, and you cannot tolerant the contrary to this in your life is a justifiable and defensible. And so when you find hatred springing up, self vindication springing up, and you're going to have to deal with it as sin it is.

That's what the Lord is saying. He is saying that when He makes a person over again He saves them and makes them a new creature! Oh we've lost so much of the sense of the supernatural-ness of the grace of God. We've reduced it down to a formula a tipping of the hat and a nodding of the head. When it is something infinitely more than that. It's an encounter with God when the whole personality undergoes that glorious transformation work that only living Christ can perform. This is what He is saying. You see what we've done, we tried, we had salvation made so easy and then we've tried to get done in sanctification what God put in salvation and filled the churches with unconverted people. Oh that the Spirit of God could bring us back to see all that the Holy Ghost put into salvation. And there is still abundance left to be done in His sanctifying grace and work.

But this is what He does to a regenerative heart. This is what He does to one that is born again. This is the kind of a person a Christian is. That's what He is saying. This is what He does; He is putting this dimension. He is saying this is the kind of righteousness that I give that excesses and surpasses that of the Pharisees and by possessing this and this alone, can one go into Heaven. Salvation that He is talking about.

Now, I want you to see in closing, five things. First, **He** has shown us here the matter of upmost importance is *the spirit of the Law* and not just the letter, the intention and not just the word, the motive and not just the detail.

And then the second thing He has shown **us** is that *conformity of the Law* is not in action only, but also in motive. And God is judging not so much what one does, that of course is clear, but why one does it. Oh, what a pity it is that we have usurped to ourselves the prerogative of judging motives. No one can ever save another person. The reason they did that was this, no one knows why. We only have to deal what. There are times when people do things and persist in doing things that must be judged on the bases of the thing itself. But only God knows the motive and God always judges according to the motive.

The third thing is we must understand that *Christ is saying that the Law must be thought of positively not just negatively*. Not just what it forbids but what it intends, not just what it prohibits but what it promotes. And you can see from His unfolding of the Law that it wasn't just to restrict certain outward actions, but it was to have a new kind of person, a new genus, a new

species of which He was the first in all of His own were to be followers. What He actually did, you see, when He came was to create an entirely new species. All the others of men had natural life, but now He is coming down and taking men who possess natural life and by a supernatural act is imparting divine life. And the Christian therefore is to be thought of if he is rightly viewed as a new kind of being for he possesses not just human life, but divine life. And he is to act according to the nature, according to the species of which he is now a part.

And then the fourth thing we need to see is the **purpose** of the Law is not just to keep us in a state of obedience by means of oppressive rules, but it is to aid and to develop character, spiritual character. And the Law is just and Holy and good in this intention. When it is used by the Holy Ghost when the Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in us, He quickens our mortal bodies and He quickens our human spirits and the Law is fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. This is what we are to understand, *the purpose of the Law is character, spiritual character.*

And then, of course, the fifth thing that you anticipate is this, that the end of the Law is not in itself an obedience to it, but *the end of the law is to make it possible for us to know God.* And therefore we are to understand when Christ explains the Law that what He is doing is explaining that God is first going to do something in a man and to make him a new kind of a man and do something in a woman to make her a new kind of woman, so that in the doing of this, this new kind of a *man or* woman can know God. And God is the end of all religion, all Christianity. God Himself. Not Heaven. Not blessings. Not good. Not healing. Not help. Not money. Not prosperity. The end of all religion is the know God. The end of the Law is to make it possible for us to know God.

And so what He has done is given to us this explanation of the meaning of the Law and saying the only kind of people that can know God are the people that have had this kind of a supernatural operation performed upon them. I'm sure I speak to many and as I do you say, "Oh, how I praise God for He has done." Yes, this is what He has done. He's given me this purpose and I haven't perfectly fulfilled it. I have failed. I have lapsed. But as I know my heart before the living God this is what I want to do and be. How marvelous it is.

You know preaching the truth should have three results. It should make people glad, or sad, or mad. And if I've spoken to you and this has born witness to your heart and you've said yes this is what God did, when He saved me. Then I trust you're glad with heavenly joy, but if perhaps the preaching of this instead didn't happen to me on this wise, I heard the plan of salvation and agreed with it all these years I have presumed I've been saved, but these things didn't happen. Then oh, friend let it make you sad. Sad to the point where you are willing to meet Him. Let Him do this for this is what He does for His own. And perhaps there will be some that will say, we've never heard it on this wise and will make you mad. The only thing that we can't tolerate is to have you go the way you came. When you hear the Word of the Son of God something must happen. Oh, I am so glad to tell you today that the Lord Jesus Christ stands at the door of grace and bids all who will come. And should it be that you find your heart is not of this sort, do not go from here filled with despair for Jesus Christ stands ready to make everything that He died to produce real in your life. And His nailed pierced hands extended to you and His loving voice beckoning you, "Come unto Me and I will give you rest" (Mat. 11:28). This ought to be sufficient invitation for you to come with your need and ask Him to do all that needs must be done. Christ explains the Law not as something that we do to be, but something that we do because we are.

Shall we bow in prayer.

Living, as we are, in these days our God when men have systematically sought to rob the words of the Lord Jesus Christ of their meaning and their import and cutting edge. We thank Thee that this is Thy Word. Our God, our hearts cry out to Thee this morning, should those here that can say from the Word of the Lord Jesus apply to their consciences, "This is what He's done. He has given me this kind of a heart." Oh, might there be joy and rejoicing. But for such our Father may have professed to be saved, but have not found the delivering, releasing, ransoming power of the Cross of Christ in their lives. Might it be, that just now they would be willing to face their heart and their need and bow before Thee and meet Thee lest they should be satisfied with other than that righteousness, which He imparts. Grant Lord the Word should lay upon our hearts. It's a loving Word. Thou hast never used the Word to wound, only in the wounding to heal. And might it be that the Word this morning is "come"

even where it must deeply cut, with love. Knowing that every, every wound that Thou dost inflict with Thy Word doth bring is but the promise of that healing and health Thou would give. So seal Thy Word to us and for those needy hearts that have heard it. Oh bind it close upon them and draw them to Thyself. Might it be today, this hour that they make known their need. For Jesus sake, Amen.

Let us stand for the benediction.

Now may the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus the great shepherd of the sheep. Through the blood of the everlasting covenant make us perfect in every good work to do His will working in us, that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ our Lord to whom be the glory now and forever. Amen.

\* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, February 19, 1961 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

©PRBTMI 1961