

The Righteousness God Requires

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Well, it's quite possible that the most important question that any man, woman or child could ask of themselves is, "What does God require of me? What is it that God requires of me if I am to stand before him in judgment as Scripture says?" Hebrews 9 says that it is appointed for man to die once and after this to face judgment and the question is: what is God going to want from me when that moment occurs? Every other question in life is secondary. Everything else is incidental by comparison. And in the text that I read earlier, Jesus is giving you a sense of what God looks at and what he evaluates when he looks down upon your life.

Turn to Matthew 5 in verses 17 to 20 which we have completed our study of that, of this passage, but it's an important introduction and segue into the longer text that we're going to look at this morning. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." And here we get a sense of what it is that God requires. "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." Somehow there is a surpassing righteousness that God requires from those who would enter into his presence. Somehow that righteousness is testified in the law and the prophets and somehow it must surpass that which existed in the scribes and Pharisees. So as Jesus is speaking here, he's describing the righteousness that God requires and he says, he points to the Old Testament and says, "It can be found there." And he looks at his contemporaries and he says, "It must exceed what you find here."

So the question becomes: what was it that was going on in the Old Testament that was setting a standard that he would call us to. What is it that was in the Old Testament that the contemporaries of Jesus were not meeting? What were they lacking? Well, we've said many times that the Pharisees were those who were the religious leaders of the day who had externalized all manner of religion and made it simply a matter of external behavior rather than that which would actually comport with the standard of righteousness found in the Old Testament. They had reduced it to things that they could keep and boast in rather than seeing the searching standard of God that was revealed. And what we have as

we look at that section and then we move into the lengthy passage, 21 through 48 that I read just a moment ago, what you find in verses 21 through 48 is Jesus is expanding on this statement. It's like one of those collapsible cups that reduces into a small little segment but you can stretch it out and expand it like a telescope and see more of what he is discussing. Jesus in verses 21 to 48 is expanding on this statement that he made in verse 20 that your righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees. That's what's going on in this longer passage that we're looking.

What I want to do here today is before we take communion and all coming to a goal of climaxing in the taking of communion, is to simply show you that in two parts to this message, that the Old Testament required heart righteousness from the people of God. That was the standard. And as Jesus speaks in the second part of today's message, you're going to see that Jesus Christ was requiring heart righteousness as well. So all of a sudden everything about your inner man is on display, everything is at stake here. There are no secrets before God in what we are about to look at. And I want you to think about it this way: we are used to people who have professional or trade skills to be able to break things open in order to repair and fix them. A mechanic goes to an engine and opens it up in order to repair that which is not working properly; he goes beyond the externals and gets to the internal workings of the engine in order to repair it and make it work properly. In a similar way, a physician will penetrate the human body in order to remove diseased tissue either through slicing it open or through something less invasive, but he will deal with the inner body in order to correct that which is ailing it. We are used to this in human terms. Well, here in a much more profound way, in a much more important way, the Lord Jesus goes inside the human being, goes into the inner man, as it were, and says, "This is the matter which must be corrected. This is where the problem is. It's found in the heart, not in the external rituals of man."

So what we want to do since Christ started at the Old Testament and then made his way into his lengthy exposition in verses 21 to 48, just in the most brief manner, I want to remind you and for some of you probably for the first time maybe, see that all along the Old Testament required a righteousness of heart from man. It was never simply about external sacrifices. It was never simply about going through the rituals and ceremonies and the feasts that was established in the Old Testament. Those were all means to a greater end and that's what you have to understand. The law always had a moral force that went beyond external behavior. Always. Always. Always. Always. And you need to see this.

Go back to the passage where the Lord first gave us the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20. Exodus 20, and what you find as God gave the 10 Commandments, giving a vertical dimension to them, saying that, "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not worship or serve them. You shall not take My name in vain. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." Then there enters in a more horizontal dimension with relationships among men, "Honor your father and mother. You shall not commit murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not commit false witness against your neighbor." That's verses 13 through 16 that I just ran through very quickly there. But then in verse 17, what is so often neglected, the tenth of the 10 Commandments is this, "You

shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor." The breadth of that is astonishing. All of a sudden we realize that God is prohibiting matters of the heart rather than simply restraining external behavior like theft or physical adultery. So you find that there is this inner dimension to the law, this inner dimension to the 10 Commandments from the very beginning and we realize that God is applying his law to the heart and not simply to the external man. And until you understand that, you haven't understood the first thing about the 10 Commandments or the law of God or the righteousness that he requires. God looks on the inner man. He looks on the heart.

Look over at Deuteronomy 5 where the Decalogue, the 10 Commandments are repeated in Moses' final sermon to the people of Israel before they entered the Promised Land and he was taken away. You find in Deuteronomy 5:17, I'm being selective here, and you just see the latter part of the 10 Commandments being repeated. The other ones come earlier in the passage. I just want you to see the principle of inner regulation for now. Verse 17, "You shall not murder." Deuteronomy 5:18, "You shall not commit adultery." Verse 19, "You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet." And when you take these as a seamless whole, you realize that it's not just the illicit desire for something that does not belong to you that is present, that that tenth commandment helps us understand the moral force of everything that went before it. It's not just that you shall not actually murder, it's that you shall not desire it in your heart. It's not simply that you shall not commit external adultery, you shall not desire it in your heart. And on it goes.

God, in other words, sees your inner man. He sees your inner thoughts. He sees your inner attitudes. He sees your inner motivations. He hears the words that you whisper in private to others that you would never want broadcast to people at large. God sees all of that and says, "This also must be holy, not simply what man sees on the outside." And in so many places, the Old Testament made this clear, that God sees, he evaluates, he judges attitudes and desires and motives and the quiet gossip that is whispered in the ears of those who will receive it. Not just your behavior that's on display for all men.

We won't look at all of these passages but I'll give you the text reference that you can see later on. 1 Chronicles 28:9, "the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts." That's pretty comprehensive. All of it, every intent of the thoughts. The Lord is scrutinizing every aspect of your inner man at all times without exception.

Look at Psalm 19. We'll kind of bounce maybe back and forth between some positive and negative statements here. But David in Psalm 19 understood this most explicitly. And for those of us that say that we love the word of God, Psalm 19 being a Psalm that greatly extols the perfections of the word of God, should understand where David ends up at the conclusion of that Psalm after he said the law of the Lord is perfect. What is his concluding takeaway in light of the way that God has revealed himself in nature in verses 1 through 6 of Psalm 19, and the way that God has revealed himself in his word in verses 7 through 11. He looks inward. He looks to his inward man and with a sense of fear and

trembling in verse 12 he says, "Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression." Look where he ends in verse 14, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer." Why would he say that? It's because the God of revelation in nature and in the written word is a God who examines the inner man. David understood that it was not simply about external matters, it wasn't simply about what he did but that God looked at his heart and he said, "O God, in light of the greatness of your revelation, in light of the way that you have displayed your glory in the heavens and in your word and in light of the fact that I am open and laid bare before you, O God, let the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight because I realize how serious this is."

In Psalm 51:6, turn over to Psalm 51 with me. Psalm 51:6, David in his confession of his sin after he sinned with Bathsheba, killed her husband through an illicit military maneuver, and confessing his sin he says in verse 6, "Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom." God, in the innermost man, you want it to be true and righteous there.

Look at Psalm 139:1, he says, "O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all." And the cumulative weight of the Scriptures which could be multiplied again and again and again, make it obvious to us that in the Old Testament God made it plain that he required an inner righteousness, a heart righteousness of the inner man.

Proverbs 16:2. You don't need to turn there but in Proverbs 16:2 it says, "All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives." And in Jeremiah 17:10 the Lord himself speaks and he says, "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."

So in numerous passages that we've already looked at and many others that we could see, we're not looking at isolated texts out of context, we are seeing, beloved, we are seeing a predominant theme of revelation: that God is a God most high, he is the eternal immutable God, and he not only created the outer man, he created the inner man as well. And that your inner man, you young people, understanding this from the start can save you a world of trouble later on in life, understand that the God who created human flesh also created the inner man and intended that to be a pristine sanctuary of worship and obedience and devotion to him, and that nothing unclean, nothing unworthy was to intrude upon that. So much so that – listen to this, oh my goodness, especially when we are about to celebrate communion – so much so that religious ritual from a rebellious heart is a sin against God rather than something that he finds pleasing.

Look at Proverbs 21. Proverbs 21:27 says, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, How much more when he brings it with evil intent!" So as God looks on those who would approach him in worship, he's evaluating the intentions with which we do it. Oh, what that says about the casual approach of many toward gathering together with people of God and approaching him.

If you look at the book of Isaiah 1. I hadn't intended to read this but how could I not when it comes to my mind. He says in verse 10, "Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah. 'What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?' Says the LORD. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts?'" Beloved, you understand they were going through the motions, they were going through the prescribed sacrifices and yet God says, "You are trampling upon the holy place of worship. You are desecrating the whole purpose for which these things were appointed by the Spirit with which you bring them." And he commands them and he says, "Stop it," in verse 13. "Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies-- I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them. So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow." The external stuff doesn't matter to me if it is not accompanied by a heart life of righteousness.

Now, you and I are all in the same boat to one degree or another. We tend to worry about our appearances before men, "What does So-and-so think about? Does this person like me? How does this appear? What are they thinking?" I hope, beloved, that you see that as we've gone through these preliminary texts here, that none of that stuff matters by comparison. None of that is important. It should be obvious that you should have a far greater concern about your life. A holy God knows your secret thoughts. He knows your secret words. Nothing is hidden from him. And the God who sees through you like that is a God who is holy and who does not compromise his standard and who is offended by the sinfulness that he finds in your heart.

Let's just be real today. Let's just be candid and faithful to Scripture in what we see and in what we say. It is imperative for you to see yourself in a vertical way, in a vertical dimension. God is looking down. Man may see nothing to complain about on the outside but God sees the inner emotions of your heart, the prolonged, the persistent attitudes. And if that brings conviction upon you, then let it bring conviction. If that convicts you it's because it's necessary for you to be convicted of these things and to realize that while man may laugh it off, this is a matter of utmost seriousness to a holy God.

Now, that's the Old Testament background from which Jesus was speaking in general when he said the law and the prophets as he was pointing people back; you could look back to the law and prophets and find that God requires a heart righteousness. Well, now as we pivot into, and you can turn back to Matthew 5 now, as you turn back to Matthew 5, we find that the Lord is expanding and expounding on this very same theme. Having said that you must have a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, he goes into an extended discussion applying the law to the inner man, and what he's doing here is he is upholding heart righteousness against the false external righteousness of the Pharisees. The Pharisees had covered up this fundamental principle with all manner of external observances that weren't even called for in the Scriptures: multiplied fasts and things of that nature, wearing their garments long and gaudy so that people would look at them and focus on the outer man. And the Lord comes, as it were, and he blows off the accumulated dust of 400 years of silence of divine revelation, the intervening 400 years and, as it were, he picks it up and he blows all of that away in the section that we are going to look at this morning in order to get back to the clean and the purifying word of God that is applied to the heart. And what we're going to do ever so briefly this morning, is cover this section, verses 21 through 48 in an overview fashion today. We're just going to look at the main principle that he is enunciating here, that he is teaching here, and we'll save for future weeks a closer look at the individual passages. This is an opportunity for us to kind of rise up and see the big picture. This is a satellite view of a very important section of Scripture and I want you to see what unifies this section of Scripture rather than what makes each section distinct from one another. This is such an important matter of biblical interpretation of understanding the text, is to be able to see the global picture of what's going on, the big picture so that you understand how to interpret individual sections in light of the overarching thing that is going on.

Jesus here in this section of Scripture that I read earlier has an obvious pattern that he is following and what he is doing is this, I'll point it out as we go through it quickly, what he's doing is this: he is quoting a misapplication of the law by the Pharisees in order to refute it and to recover the truth and to show the true moral force of the principle that was on their lips. Now, you must remember that the Pharisees, we talked about this several weeks ago, it's been a while since I mentioned this, but remember that we said that the Pharisees relied on oral tradition in order to establish their authority. As we said, there was the written law of Moses and what the Pharisees said was that God had also given an oral tradition to Moses and to those who followed him that added to the law, that protected the law, and that if you followed the oral tradition, you were never in danger of violating the written word. Now, that all sounds well and fine and good, the only problem was it wasn't true. It was a total fabrication. There was no such thing but that became that on which they used and based their entire authority.

So as you go through verses 21 to 48, you'll find Jesus using words along the lines that say, "You have heard that it was said," making a reference to the oral tradition; invoking in a summary form the manner in which the Pharisees took this and applied it and externalized it. So when he says, "You've heard that it was said," Jesus is referring to the prevailing teaching of the Pharisees as it existed amongst his contemporaries, not in an effort to reverse or to modify the law – watch this, oh, this is so important – there are

those who say Jesus is changing the law here, that's impossibly wrong. That can't possibly be correct because he had just said, look at verse 17, he had just said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." So if he's coming to fulfill them, he wouldn't suddenly turn around and start contradicting them by what he's saying. What he's contradicting are the Pharisees and enforcing and applying the true moral force of the law. That's what he's doing here. And what Jesus does is he calls people back to the heart righteousness – watch this, listen to this – calls them back to the heart righteousness which God had always required as we saw from a dozen passages just now.

So with that in mind, notice how Jesus will quote something that focuses on externals and then he will apply it to the heart. Why does he do that? Because Scripture requires heart righteousness. That's what the Old Testament did. And because Jesus was here fulfilling the law and the prophets, he fulfilled it in part by his teaching, then he is showing what the law really means in what he says. In the process of seeing that, we have detailed for us one after another after another, sins of the heart of which we are all guilty of. No one could hear this teaching from Jesus and come away thinking, "I satisfy the standard. I bring in my own accord, I bring from my own heart the righteousness that God requires." Let me just tell you as a preview of coming attractions that that's not the reaction that you should take away. That's not your takeaway from this text that we're going to look at. Jesus elevates the righteousness that God requires in a way that shows clearly and convincingly that we've all violated it and fallen short of the glory of God so that we come before God as humble beggars seeking grace rather than those with pride and expectation that we deserve something from him. This is so very fundamental.

So let me show you the pattern. There are six times that Jesus does this in these 28 verses. Look at verse 21 where he says, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you." Notice Jesus speaking on his own authority, Jesus not relying on a past oral tradition, Jesus presupposes and manifest his authority to definitively state what the word of God means. He alone can do that from his own authority because he alone has the authority of God. Everything that we teach is derivative of what is said in Scripture, not based on an independent authority, not based on an independent word from God. Jesus is not in that position. He says, "I can tell you what God's word means because I am God." So he says in verse 22, "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."

Here's what he's doing. We'll cover this more next week, I think, Lord willing. But just for you to see, you've heard that the issue is don't commit murder, I'm here to tell you that that's only part of the story. Jesus says, "I say to you that you need to be concerned about the sinful anger that is in your heart because that's guilty enough to send you to hell. So don't be satisfied – watch this – don't be satisfied, don't congratulate yourself on the mere fact that you haven't literally taken the physical life of another human being through the actions of your own hands. Don't be satisfied with that, the question is what about the

anger that's in your heart? What about the way that you slay people with your words? What about the way that you judge people and turn people against one another with the wicked things that you say? What about that going on in your heart?" Jesus says that's the righteousness that God requires. Don't excuse yourself from the greater inner standards simply because you've met a lesser external standard. That's what he says.

And he goes on and you can see the same principle being played out in verse 27 when he says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." You focused on the external action. And young men who are raised up in a Christian or in a quasi-Christian environment might congratulate themselves on the fact that they haven't sinned with a girl physically. What Jesus says is, "Fine, but understand that the righteousness of God goes far deeper and examines the lust of your heart and your desire to do that which you are too scared to do in your flesh. And the fact that you desire it and want it and long after it and look in ways that are completely inappropriate, exposes the sinfulness of your heart. It's in the heart that God requires righteousness." And all of a sudden you're just starting to feel the sense that Isaiah must have felt when he saw the glory of God in the temple and said, "Woe is me! The holiness of God is being unveiled before my eyes and I find that I am a man of unclean lips. Not only am I a man of unclean lips, I live among a people of unclean lips. This totally undoes me! This shatters my pretensions of being a good person! This shatters any idea that I have of standing before God and saying I am good enough." God says, "Why should I let you into heaven?" And you say, "Oh, I'm pretty good. I did right by my fellow man. Never killed anyone." God says, "What about your heart?" You say, "Wait, no one told me that was the issue!" Well, no one that hears this message can say that, can they? No one who reads the Bible can say that. So we have this powerful declaration from Jesus that says, "Understand what the righteous standard of God is."

He goes on in verse 31. You can see the pattern again. He said, "It was said, 'Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'" As long as you file the right paperwork, you're okay. Just fill out the right certificate and you've satisfied the demands of God's law for righteousness. And Jesus says, "No, I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery." Whether you've gone through the right paperwork or not, if your motives are wrong, if you have no biblical justification for divorce, you're guilty. And he says at the conclusion of verse 32, "whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." You see again the pattern. What was said was it's the externals that matter. Don't commit murder. Don't commit physical adultery. Do the right certificates when you file for divorce. And Jesus says, "No, anger, lust, uphold the sanctity of marriage in every way."

Look at verse 33, "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vials to the Lord.'" You know, they had these silly things that if you swore by the gold of the temple you were bound, but in essence, this is not right but in essence just to make the illustration because we will cover this later, if you've got your fingers crossed behind your back, then the vow doesn't count. Jesus says no. He says what matters is your word and your integrity.

Verse 34, "But I say to you," do you see it again? "But I say to you." Let's look at that again. Verse 22, "But I say to you." Verse 28, "But I say to you." Verse 32, "But I say to you." Verse 34, "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King." Verse 37, "let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil." "Tell the truth. Be honest or it doesn't matter. If you're honest, you don't need to swear by anything and if you are dishonest, swearing to it doesn't help is what I say to you," Jesus says.

Notice that for the disciple of Christ the word of Christ is expository here. Jesus is making an assertion of his Lordship when he says these things, "But I say to you. But I say to you. But I say to you. But I say to you." We recognize that embedded in that is an assertion of absolute authority. And understand this, beloved, that as he is making statements and declaring law that governs inner heart righteousness, what is he saying except this: that he is Lord over the inner man. He's asserting his dominion not only of inanimate creation, not only of external behavior, Jesus Christ asserts his authority over the human conscience and over the human heart. And as you understand these things, he rises, as it were, in our mind, he rises in our hearts the exalted authority of Christ who can declare such things and they be true.

Look at verse 38, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'" Here it is again, "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person." You see, what had happened here, again, we'll study this in future weeks, what had happened here is that the Pharisees had turned that into if they were wronged, they turned that injunction an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth to an entitlement to inflict similar punishment on the one who had hurt them when actually it was just intended to be a restraint that vigilant justice wouldn't go beyond bounds. And they said, "That entitles me. You hurt me, I'm going to hurt you back." But Jesus says that's an entirely wrong view of the law.

So you need to be like God. You need to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you and he appeals to an undeniable truth about the nature of God. As he reigns over the creation of those who by and large rebel against him, what does he do? He keeps the orbits of the planets going. The sun rises up and the sun comes down and the rain comes and the rain comes down and God does not simply send that blessing on those who belong to him, he sends it on those who hate him. He sends it on those who would reject and rebel against him. That's who God is. That's what he does. He blesses with great common grace a humanity and rebellion against him with daily acts of kindness and provision that they never give him thanks for. And Jesus says, "You look at the law and you twist it and say I'm entitled to my piece of flesh," and he says, "you should compare yourself to the eternal God and see what he does with his enemies. You should respond to your enemies in the way that God responds to his."

Look, speaking collectively, speaking generally, not aiming this at anyone, just kind of collectively sharing in the guilt of humanity here: who do we think we are to inflict punishment on others and to bear grudges and carry these things out against people who

have wronged us when God has dealt with us completely differently? God has been gracious to you in your sin. God has been gracious to you in your rebellion if you know Christ. And not only that, God is gracious to his enemies. Well, by what standard do we say a different set of rules apply to me and I'm going to get my piece of flesh out of this? By what justification that would satisfy the holy character of God do we think that way? That's inconceivable. It's wretched, especially for those of us who know Christ, especially for those of us within the body of Christ. I've been offended, okay, you've been offended. What did Christ do with the offenses that were lodged against him? He bore them quietly and went to Calvary and laid his life down and Scripture says freely you have been forgiven, freely forgive. By what standard of behavior does anyone think that they can withhold that in the body of Christ and think that they are satisfying and pleasing to God? There is nothing of the sort. Jesus will hear nothing of it and what we must understand is that this starts within the heart. This starts within the desires and attitudes of the heart with a proper understanding of who God is.

Oh, beloved, stay with me here, will you, for I speak for the good of your soul. A proper understanding of who God is, that he's gracious to his creation, gracious to those who are in rebellion against him, and he has had a special grace upon us as believers in Christ. Beloved, what you are to do is to take your cues from a God like that and say, "Oh, I will reflect that. That has a persuasive sanctifying power in my heart that I must be like the God who saved me rather than step apart and inflict my own punishment when I see fit."

Verse 43, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies." So we've seen six sections where Christ has spoken this way beginning in verse 21, verse 27, 31, 33, 38 and 43, "But I say to you. But I say to you. But I say to you. But I say to you. But I say to you. But I say to you." Six times. So what do we take away from that? Well, one thing that occurs to us is the majestic authority of Christ and the immeasurable courage and authority with which he spoke. He came into a predominant way of thinking and challenged it on his own authority. He said, "You're thinking all wrong. I'll tell you how to think about the righteousness of God and what he requires." Then we step back further and we consider the Bible as a book of two parts, Old and New Testament, and we say, "Wow, the consistency between one part to the other is amazing. To see that Jesus was here to extend and apply the word that was given originally to Israel, rather than to contradict it." And of course, that would be the case. It's God's word. It was going to be fulfilled, not set aside.

Then we look at it historically by way of background. We realize what the Pharisees had done. Corrupting the law, reducing it to an obtainable standard of external righteousness and they are the teachers and Jesus says, "That's not what God requires." He just dropped a nuclear bomb in the way that everybody thought; a total meltdown of what their whole culture and religious thought was based upon. He says that's not the righteousness that God requires.

You know, beloved, it's troubling to realize the significance of what Jesus is saying here. God examines your thoughts and looks beyond external behavior to what is going on in

your thoughts and attitudes and motives. Do you know why that is so troubling? I'm guessing that many of you have never thought about it this way: you sin, you can sin without doing anything. You can be sitting in your chair alone in the living room and sinning greatly against God as you nourish your grudges, your angers, as you let your sinful imaginations run away with you, on and on it goes. You can be sitting in perfect stillness physically and be sinning greatly against God because your anger breaks the commandment against murder, your lust breaks the commandment against adultery, and what does all of this do to us except this: it lays bare under the searching white spotlight of Scripture and shows us how much you and I fall short of the glory of God and how far short we fall of the righteousness that God requires.

So Jesus says, Jesus sums it up in Matthew 5:48, look at it with me when he says, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Understand, beloved, that God doesn't bend the standard. God doesn't lower the bar to your level so that you can pass it. One writer said it this way, Martyn Lloyd Jones said it this way, "As you examine yourself before you go to bed, you do not just ask yourself if you have committed murder or adultery and if you have not, thank God that all is well. No, you ask yourself rather has God been supreme in my life today? Do I know him better? Has there been anything in me that has been unlike Christ: thoughts, imaginations, desires, impulses? In other words, you examine yourself in the light of a living person and not merely in terms of a mechanical code of rules and regulations."

Beloved, that is the righteousness that God requires. Do any of you, I say these things in love but do you know what? Sometimes God's word is convicting and you just have to be clear and convicting and it would be a betrayal of my stewardship of highest order if I try to soften this in order to make it palatable to your tongue and to your ears. So what I'm about to say I say in love. Would any of you want to say in light of the things that we've seen, the righteousness that God requires, would any of you want to raise your hand and as the man in Scripture once said, "All of these things I kept from my youth. I've never violated God's righteousness in any of these internal ways." If you are tempted to say that, let me tell you you are horribly deceived because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, not even one. But for the rest of us, this is humbling. And my friends, I want to tell you, I speak as your friend, I speak as one who is urgent before God for the sake of your soul, knowing that the time that we have together is comparatively brief, by which I mean that life is brief and passing and uncertain: my friends, these things that we've seen today are a serious warning to those of you who do not know Christ. You cannot possibly meet this standard that God requires. You need a Savior.

Those of us who are Christians who do know the name of Christ, who have been redeemed, well, I'm content to let the Holy Spirit convict you as he sees fit. I don't need to apply it any further than that. I'm content to leave you with your conscious before a holy God and let him have his way before you. If the Spirit of God dwells within you, then he'll take the word that is preached and point things out. And to the extent that you've heard something that made you go, "Oh, that hit its mark!" Let it hit its mark and respond and don't continue on in those patterns of sin.

You know, what all of this does for us, all of it brings us down to this simple point: we need a Savior, don't we? We need someone who can come and take our guilt away. We need someone who does satisfy the standard of God, the righteousness of God, and have him put his arm around us, as it were, to save us, to rescue us, to redeem us, to deliver us from the guilt that God's word shows to be true about each and every one of us. We need a Savior, don't we? You need a Savior, don't you?

Well, the glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is this: is that God has provided a Savior in the Lord Jesus Christ. God has provided a Savior sufficient and perfect to meet the need of your guilty heart. That Christ offered himself up as a sacrifice to God so that sinners just like you could be forgiven. While the word of the law of God and the exposition of the righteousness that God requires brings us low, it does so, God wounds us, God convicts us for the purpose of bringing grace to bear once we are all in agreement of where we are at. "I'm guilty! I can't hide that! I don't deny it!" To which point the law then becomes the tutor, as it were, that leads you to Christ, that hands you over to Christ and says, "Yes, God knows about your guilt and God has provided a Savior to address that guilt so that your guilt can be taken away." So that what we remember at the communion table is not an incidental ritual of external Christianity, this is a symbol of everything that we need in light of the righteousness that God requires. And the glory of the Gospel is that God forgives sinners just like you who trust in Christ.

Look over at Romans 5 as we end on the note which conviction is meant to drive you to, to Christ Jesus crucified for sinners; to Christ Jesus, the one who alone can turn away the wrath of God; to Christ Jesus who alone can take away your guilt. In verse 6, in light of the helpless conviction that we feel under the weight of the true righteousness that God requires, your heart should be thirsty to hear the good words that the Apostle Paul wrote some 2,000 years ago. Writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writing that which is certainly true and trustworthy, writing that which sinners like you can stake their eternal destiny on he says this, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation." Guilty sinner, there is a way forward of hope for you. It is that God receives sinners who put their faith in Christ. That Christ died for ones just like you. That Christ's sacrifice is sufficient to cleanse all of the internal and external guilt of your life and to bring you and to present you blameless before God today, right now, in an instant when you put your faith in him.

For the rest of us with a fresh sense of humility and gratitude, we come to the table, the table of communion, the Lord's table and this table reminds us that God didn't give us what we deserved. He didn't leave us to the judgment that was rightfully ours to bear.

Scripture says in 1 John 1:7 that "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." Oh, how that ought to echo in your ear and resound in your heart that the deepest guilt that you wouldn't want anyone to know about has been cleansed by the blood of Christ. And that's what we remember, the bread being a token of the body that was nailed to the cross; the cup being a token, a symbol of the blood that was literally shed on Calvary.

And in light of all of these things, beloved, before the men come, I would ask you to turn to 1 Corinthians 11 just to prepare us to take communion in the proper way. Communion is not a lighthearted matter. It's not casual. It's something that we come to after an earnest examination of ourselves such as the word has given us this morning. And I would just remind you that in 1 Corinthians 11:27 it says, "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup." My friends, generally speaking, if you have trusted Christ, you are welcome to share in this table of communion with us today. Even if you're a visitor, this table doesn't belong to Truth Community Church. It's the Lord's table and those who belong to the Lord are rightly ones to partake of it. If you have rebelled against Christ or you say, "I know I don't know him," then just let the elements pass and let the words of Scripture be that which focus your attention on.

And beloved, for those of you that are professing Christians, I would just encourage you if there is some lingering issue of sin in your life, think twice before you partake of that if it's not with a repentant spirit. If there is lingering bitterness in your heart or anger against someone that's in your heart, you should let the elements pass because this is a table that says, "I have repented of all known sin and therefore I receive these elements as a symbol of my union with Christ." We don't profane that by holding onto sin in our hearts where God looks for righteousness. We don't profane that by taking the elements when in fact in our hearts God knows that there is sin there.

But with that said, beloved, and now speaking intimately to those of you who are of like precious faith, if you view your sins with a broken and a contrite heart, if you look and say, "I know that my life is displeasing. I don't want it to be that way. But I am trusting in Christ alone. There is nothing in my life that I would withhold from his sanctifying hand." Then you of all people, I would say that Christ invites you to come. Christ invites you to partake of the elements. Christ died for people just like you and this becomes a symbol that all is well with your soul, that all of your sins have been washed away, and that God accepts you for the sake of his beloved Son.

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