

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

Intro: Everyone has a standard of right and wrong: It may be what one has been taught; it may be based on faith in some eternal source. We may consider ourselves right in comparison to others, particularly the "average" person; or perhaps if we strive for greater morality we may compare ourselves with good people we know.

But actually none of these are really the true standard of right and wrong! In our lesson today we will find that the true standard rises far above these things. People today tend to do just as people did in Jesus' day. Compare their lives with people around them. Many of those people compared themselves with the average man and said, "I'm as good as anyone else". A few compared themselves to the religious leaders of the day and tried to be like them! The Pharisees thought they were better than anybody else, so they were righteous. But Jesus says, "Except your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, you cannot enter the kingdom" (be saved now or in heaven!).

And with that principle in mind, in Mt. 5, he contrasts 6 times the rules of the Pharisees derived from a misuse of God's law with the true principles of righteousness taught in God's law and continued in Christ's own law!

1. The Pharisees said, Commit no murder! But Jesus says, Anger in the heart is sinful!

2. The Pharisees said, Commit no adultery! But Jesus says, Lust in the heart is sinful!

3. The Pharisees said, Divorce is acceptable for every cause! But Jesus says, Whoever divorces his wife, except for fornication causes her to commit adultery..."

4. The Pharisees said, fulfill your promises to God! But Jesus says, tell to the truth all the time!

5. The Pharisees said, If someone wrongs you, you have a right to get even! But Jesus says, Graciously forbid personal revenge and retaliation!

Now let's look at the final paragraph of Mt. 5 in which Jesus explores one last doctrine of the scribes and Pharisees! v. 43-48

I. THE PHARISAICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE LAW--

(See notes)

II. JESUS' STANDARD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS!

III. APPLICATION

A. What Jesus is looking for out of us is a forgiving spirit that seeks the restoration and reconciliation of those who wrong us! Such a spirit will set

us free from the bitterness and resentment that spoils our lives! Cf. farmer and his mule!

B. Think for just a moment of the person or persons in your life that have caused you the most pain!

1. Go back into childhood; a father, a mother who said words to you that you have never forgotten or done things to you that you have never been able to forget!
2. A person of authority! Maybe a teacher (cf. the man who broke down crying when he told how his teacher told him years ago "You're a failure; you will never amount to anything!")
3. A person once close to you! A husband or a wife who has hurt you.

C. Now Jesus says, "love them". He says, "let go of your hatred and bitterness and resentment". Free yourself! Throw off the ball and chain you've been dragging around for weeks or months or even years.

D. Now, start moving in the direction of reconciliation!

1. Start talking to them again as human beings!
2. Start praying for them to be transformed by the power and word of God!
3. Start doing for them those things that they need whether they deserve it or not!

Conclusion: They may be changed; they may not! But thing is for sure; you will change! You will be at peace with yourself! and with God! And you will be able to say, "I am a true son or daughter of God!" Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect!

Our conduct toward others may be the thing that alienates us from God also!