



Session 2: Internal & External

- OPENING -

- Take a moment as a group to prayerfully read Matthew 5:17-48.
 - What patterns do you notice as you listen/read?
 - Is there a particular section or command that surprises you or stands out to you? Why?
 - Is there a command or aspect of this section of that you think would have been most shocking to Jesus' listeners in the first century?
- One of the ways that Jesus is going to consistently raise the bar throughout this section is by taking external standards and then making corresponding internal standards. So for example, do not murder becomes "don't be angry with your brother" (5:22), and do not commit adultery becomes "everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (5:28).
 - What effect might this elevation of the law have on the self-righteous in Jesus' day? What effect should it have on the self-righteous in our own day?
 - How does living on this side of Pentecost with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit affect our understanding of, and interaction with these commands?
 - How do Jesus' commands throughout this section call for a consistency between our outward presentation of ourselves, and the inward reality of our hearts?

- DISCUSSION -

Jesus, the Fulfillment of the Law

1. Jesus says that he has not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (5:17). He then goes on to say that not an "iota" or a "dot" will "pass" from the Law (5:18) and then calls for the righteousness of his followers to surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (5:19-20).
 - What would it have meant for Jesus to abolish the Law?
 - What does it mean instead for Jesus to have fulfilled the Law?
 - How can we reconcile Jesus' attitude here towards the Law, with Paul's attitude towards the Law in Galatians?
 - What is the place of the Old Testament in the life of a Christian?

- Why does it matter what our view of the Old Testament is?

Anger

2. Jesus has some strong words to say about anger and the need for making things right between people in 5:21-26. R. T. France insightfully notes, “This is not an injunction merely to avoid certain abusive expressions (that would be another form of legalism) but to submit our thoughts about other people, as well as the words they give rise to, to God’s penetrating scrutinyⁱ.”
 - In what ways are you tempted to lapse into anger when thinking about or speaking about other people?
 - Is there someone you need to go and be reconciled to because your attitudes or words towards or about that person?
 - Who can you speak to about this so that you have a measure of accountability in seeking reconciliation?
 - What do we risk when we allow anger to fester in our hearts, in our relationships and in our community?
 - What do we gain personally and communally when we deal forthrightly with our conflicts in relationship?

Lust

3. In 5:27-30 Jesus addresses the issue of lust in seemingly extreme language.
 - How do you deal with Jesus’ statements in vs. 29 & 30? If self-mutilation is not the right response to these verses (and it is not!), then how do we apply Jesus’ statements?
 - How does Jesus’ internal standard help address the core reality in our sexual brokenness?
 - How do you both avoid sin in this area, while also cultivating healthy sexual intimacy or purity?

Loving Your Enemies

4. Read Matthew 5:43-48. Notice the linking between our call to love our enemies and our call to mirror God’s perfection.
 - Who do you tend to think of as an enemy? If you do not have anyone who comes to mind, ask this instead: Who is it easy for me to love? Who is it hard for me to love?
 - Do you feel that you face persecution for being a Christian? How does that persecution show itself? How do you respond to that persecution?
 - Why do you think Jesus appeals to God’s sending of rain and causing the sun to shine? How does God’s gracious provision in nature for all people, connect to the idea of loving our enemy?
 - Is God’s perfection attainable for us? Why do you think it is, or is not? If it is not attainable then what is the point of Jesus command here in 5:48?

- CLOSING -

- Ask God to show you where your internal reality is out of line with who God is calling you to be.
- Remember that this entire sermon presupposes both the grace of God, and for the Christian today, the indwelling and enabling power of the Holy Spirit. How can you step forward into radical obedience, seeking genuine Christlikeness, while also remaining dependent on the power of the Spirit and free from self-righteous legalism?

ⁱ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 1; IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 125.