

Text: Mt 5.21-48

Proposition: On the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, the way we think about God's law must produce thoroughly transformed life.

Last Sunday afternoon I preached to you on the topic, "You Have Heard," working on this proposition:

What God is after with the law is not mere conformity but "transformity" – a heart that is preoccupied with the will and ways of God.

As we think about that message, I think the emphasis was on the "not mere conformity" section.

Today I want to talk about the transformed thinking that is the proper response to God's Law and to the Sermon on the Mount.

Let's read the opening two paragraphs of the section we are considering:

Read Mt 5.20-30

Last week was *You Have Heard* ... this week is:

But I Say Unto You

Last week I emphasized that Jesus is responding to or countering the message of the Pharisees. One commentator said:

"It is as if the Saviour were referring to some specific discourse, which some Rabbi or other had recently been delivering to the people; and perhaps as a polemic against the doctrines and influence of Jesus."¹

We don't know if that is the case, of course, but it highlights the strong contradiction of Pharisaic teaching that Jesus is making.

- Pharisaism is a risk in any religious following.
- If someone takes the Sermon on the Mount and makes of it the same kind of law as the Pharisees made of the OT, the same result will ensue – the whole message of the Sermon will be missed.

"There are people today who so look at the Sermon on the Mount as to miss its spirit. ... Take for instance the attitude of the Quakers with regard to taking the oath. They have taken the letter here literally, and, it seems to me, have not only denied the spirit, but have made our Lord's statement

¹ W. Sunderland Lewis and Henry M. Booth, *Matthew*, The Preacher's Complete Homiletic Commentary (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1892), 70.

almost ridiculous. There are people who do exactly the same with turning the other cheek, and giving to those who ask gifts of us, bringing the whole teaching into ridicule because they are constantly living on the letter, whereas our Lord's whole emphasis was upon the primary importance of the Spirit."²

I recall a time when we were kids and our neighbour buddies (who were on-again-off-again friends) got mad and hit us and then told us the Bible said we were supposed to "turn the other cheek." Something about that didn't seem right!

What Lloyd-Jones is saying is that the Lord is not doing away with the Law, but with the notion that by serving the letter you can gain God's approval.

- The Law informs us of God's will comprehensively but not exhaustively
- The Lord expects us to think of God's will exhaustively and to live God's will spiritually

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I. Template for transformed thinking

A. The concept of a template or pattern

1. A template/pattern is designed to reproduce a consistent product
2. The template/pattern is not the product, but a guide to produce the product

B. The Lord's method for teaching spiritual understanding of the Law and righteousness: example after example

1. You shall not murder (21-26)
 - a. Righteousness of the Pharisees: I haven't murdered anyone, so I'm ok.
 - b. Righteousness surpassing that of the Pharisees
 - 1) If I am angry with my brother

² David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, One-Volume Edition, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 217.

- 2) If I call my brother a good-for-nothing
- 3) If I call my brother a fool
- 4) Then I am guilty of the law
- 5) I am obliged to do everything I can to be reconciled to my brother

How often are we afoul of the Law by this thinking? Examine your own relationships? Are you guilty before the law?

2. You shall not commit adultery (27-30)

- a. Righteousness of the Pharisees: I haven't committed adultery with anyone, I'm righteous.
- b. Righteousness surpassing that of the Pharisees
 - 1) The look of lust = adultery
 - 2) Principle of radical amputation

Suppose a married man or a woman is too flirty with someone they are not married to?

Suppose they regularly have lunch with someone not their spouse, especially alone?

Suppose a guy is known for hugging all the women in the church? Especially the younger, good looking women?

- Should we not think God's will through in this way? What is Jesus teaching us?

3. The laws of divorce (31-32)

What would Jesus think about the ease of divorce in our country?

Should Christians be entertained by programs, books, etc., that glorify divorce (or other transgressions of the law)?

4. The laws of oaths (33-37)

What about OMG? Or worse?

5. The law of justice (38-42)

Should we, as Christians, be concerned with rights?

6. The law of neighbors and enemies (43-48)

Should my life be lived well (as the world defines a life well-lived) or for the sake of others?

C. Five observations summarized from Lloyd-Jones sermon on the passage

1. The spirit of the law matters more than the letter of the law
2. Thoughts, motives, and desires are as important as actions – it isn't enough to say "my actions are right."
3. The function of the law is not merely to restrain our impulses, but to train our impulses towards the love of God (*i.e.* our love for God)
4. The object of the law is not simple obedience but to develop Christian character:
 - a. for the fruit of the Spirit to blossom and bear fruit in abundance
 - b. for the measure of the stature of Christ
 - c. for the glorious liberty of the children of God
5. The law of God and Biblical ethics are not an end in themselves, they are tools to help you know God (relational)

At the end of the day my question is not, "have I murdered anyone today" but "have I pleased God today, has he been first in my life?"

II. Triumph of transformed thinking (past)

Some, though no doubt not all, OT saints thought deeply about God's law and got to the Spirit of it:

A. Jeremiah 29.13

NAU **Jeremiah 29.13** 'You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.'

B. Solomon, Pr 2.1-8

^{NAU} **Proverbs 2.1-8** My son, if you will receive my words And treasure my commandments within you, ² Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; ³ For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; ⁴ If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures; ⁵ Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God. ⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth *come* knowledge and understanding. ⁷ He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; *He is* a shield to those who walk in integrity, ⁸ Guarding the paths of justice, And He preserves the way of His godly ones.

C. David, Ps 51.16-17

^{NAU} **Psalms 51.16-17** For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

III. Transformed living after the cross

- A. Jesus called us to love God with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength (Lk 10.27, et al)
- B. Paul called us to present our bodies a living sacrifice (Rm 12.1-2)
- C. The Epistles Guide us (but not exhaustively) in transformed thinking
 - 1. Example: 1 Cor 8-10, eating meat offered to idols
 - a. Weakness of the brother (8)
 - b. Worth of the gospel (9)
 - c. Wickedness of the heart (10)
 - 2. General guidance: “think on these things” (Phil 4.8)

Conclusion:

I don't know if it is possible, but suppose you were to log your thoughts and actions all day long tomorrow. At the end of the day, sit down and evaluate:

- What did I think about?
- What did I say?
- What did I do?
- Why did I do any of them/all of them?

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We are prone to think of overt categories; did I meet the exacting outward standard of Christianity? (However I define that...)

God wants us to match his mind, will, emotions in every aspect of our being – to think God's thoughts after him, to live Christ's life on this earth as we wait for him.

How are you doing so far?

The Sermon on the Mount points us to our desperate need of the Saviour and the Holy Spirit to enable us to live as he lived.