

035: Righteous Inside and Outside (based on Sermon #30 in the Life of Christ Series)

Actors are experts at playing a wide variety of roles, on the stage or on film, that are typically quite different from their own personality.

- By way of example, think of the famous Hollywood actor Lionel Barrymore, who played the part of Mr. Potter, the curmudgeonly, greedy old businessman in the classic Christmas film, “It’s a Wonderful Life” (1946).
- Yet in an earlier film he had played the kind, happy-go-lucky grandpa in “You Can’t Take it With You” (1938).
- He was expert at putting on personas that were not his own for entertainment purposes.
- Ironically, the ancient Greek word for *actor* is *hypokrites*, a dissembler.
- Jesus condemned the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, essentially calling them “actors” — pretenders.
- Matt. 23:28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

They put on airs of spirituality and righteousness outwardly but, inwardly, they were disobedient.

- In the next section of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21-48), Jesus condemns this kind of behavior, particularly, for anyone who seeks to be His disciple.
- He gives six examples of the righteousness that is necessary for inheriting the kingdom of the heavens.
- In fact, these verses are an expanded commentary on the meaning of v. 20, which I explained in detail in a previous study.
- We could refer to this as Christ’s commentary on righteousness.

- In other words, this is what it means to have righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees.
- The Pharisees taught their own version of God’s commandments, putting their spin on it.
- Isn’t that what often happens, even in our world today?
- Christians tend to interpret the Scriptures in a way that is comfortable and convenient.
- That’s been around at least since the days of the Pharisees in the first century.
- But Jesus sets the record straight.
- He gives the *correct* interpretation in His commentary on righteousness.

Christ’s point is that righteousness must not be merely external obedience of the *letter* of the law, it must also be internal obedience of the *spirit* of the law.

- Jesus makes His point by giving six examples of *internal* righteousness.
- Each example starts out with some variation of the words found in v. 21:
- “You have heard that it was said to those of old,” and then in v. 22, “But I say unto you ...”
- Each of the six examples follows the same pattern, not only in v. 21, but also in vs. 27, 31, 33, 38, and 43.
- The first example of the righteousness that is necessary for inheriting the kingdom of the heavens is found in vs. 21-23:
- Matt. 5:21 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’”
- 22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of

the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”

1. Not Harboring Anger or Animosity

- Jesus reminds His audience of the letter of the law as found in Exod. 20:13, which is the sixth commandment, “You shall not murder.”
- It is not referring to capital punishment or necessary killing in time of war, but premeditated murder.
- Jesus says whoever murders is in danger of the judgment.
- That literally means they will be found guilty by the court.
- The penalty for murder in the Old Testament was capital punishment, typically death by stoning.
- The scribes and Pharisees, who observed the *letter* of the law, considered themselves righteous, for they had never murdered anyone.
- But they had apparently forgotten something else God had commanded in the Old Testament:
- Lev. 19:17-18 You shall not hate your brother in your heart ... You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Jesus defines murder in v. 22 to include sinful anger against a brother in Christ.

- If someone pulls the trigger on a gun, intending to murder someone, but the gun merely goes “click” — because they forgot to load it — that person will not be found guilty of murder under the law.
- They could be convicted of other crimes, but not murder.
- But in God’s courtroom, the person is guilty of murder, for their heart is murderous.

- Jesus makes clear that those who are angry at others without a cause (i.e., guilty of sinful anger) will also be in danger of judgment by the court.
- For the Jews of Christ’s day, one could possibly be found guilty in an earthly court of law, such as the Sanhedrin (*council* in v. 22).
- In our day if anger results in destructiveness or abuse or “domestic disturbance,” the guilty party could be arrested and indicted in a court of law.
- But earthly courts are only metaphors for the ultimate court, the heavenly court, the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Jesus illustrates by sharing one type of anger that could result in judgment — speaking to a brother derisively.

- For example, using terms like “Raca!” or “You fool!”
- These are terms of contempt, which we looked at briefly in the previous study.
- *Raca* means “empty one” or “worthless person.”
- *Fool* is the Greek word *moros* from which we get our English word *moron*.
- It is the idea of calling someone dull, stupid, or a blockhead.
- These are derogatory terms.
- Using this kind of contemptuous language is indicative of a hateful, murderous heart.
- In our day, it could be cursing at someone or calling them horrible names or putting them down in a condescending manner.
- Though you may not kill the person physically, you are killing them with your words.
- It is your heart of hatred that will be judged.
- If you use contemptuous speech, you will be found guilty in God’s court of law.

In the previous study we noted that Jesus wants the lawbreaker to beware of Gehenna (translated “hell” in v. 22).

- Jesus is not saying that violators will go to Hell if they have hatred in their heart toward another brother.
- He is saying they will be judged by God at His Bema and will be shamed in the Judgment Seat fires, for their works will be burned up.
- Christians should wake up and realize the high price they will pay at the Judgment Seat for such sinfulness.
- This admonition applies to every believer, regardless of age.
- Don’t treat your brother disdainfully, or you will be judged by God.

In fact, this is such a serious offense in God’s eyes that He wants believers to reconcile with other believers right away.

- Matt. 5:23-24 “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.
- 25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.
- 26 Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.”

When you go to church and prepare to worship the Lord by giving of your tithes and offerings, or teaching your Sunday class, or singing hymns of praise to the Lord, don’t even bother to worship God if you know you have something in your heart against a brother or sister in Christ (and this includes husband and wife).

- First, reconcile with your brother or sister in Christ, then you can worship.
- God doesn’t want your worship if your heart is not right with others.
- Interestingly, v. 23 also includes situations in which you were wronged by someone else.
- Perhaps you were not the *offending* party, but the *offended* party.
- You must, nevertheless, make an effort to go to your brother, state the offense, and attempt to reconcile.
- If you don’t attempt to reconcile — *quickly*, as v. 25 indicates — you may have to face the judge and pay a price for your refusal to reconcile.

The judgment could come in your lifetime, but it most certainly will come at the Judgment Seat if you remain unreconciled at that point.

- Don’t meet Jesus with unresolved hatred in your heart.
- These are matters of utmost importance.
- Any Pharisees listening to Jesus — if they are honest about themselves — must surely be thinking:
- “Oh no! According to the standard of Jesus, I am guilty of external obedience!”
- Child of God, our Lord doesn’t merely want your *external* obedience to the letter of the law, He wants your *internal* obedience to the spirit of His law.
- Jesus gives a second example of the righteousness that is necessary for inheriting the kingdom of the heavens:

2. Avoiding Impurity

- Matt. 5:27 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’

- 28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
- 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.
- 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”

Here Jesus makes application regarding the seventh commandment in Exod. 20:14, “You shall not commit adultery.”

- It is not acceptable to rationalize, “I have never committed the act of adultery, therefore, I have never broken the seventh commandment.”
- God considers lusting to be breaking the *spirit* of His law on adultery, for it is impurity of heart.
- Matt. 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
- Lusting is the initial sin that sent King David down the path of actual physical adultery with Bathsheba.
- The sinful act began with a sinful thought; that is usually the case with most sins.
- Job 31:1 I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?

What should be done to avoid impurity?

- Jesus admonishes taking radical measures.
- If the right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you.

- The admonition is obviously metaphorical, not literal, for literally poking out your right eye will not solve the problem.
- You could still see with your left eye and be prompted to lust.
- For that matter, poking out both eyes will not eliminate lust in the mind either.
- Jesus is not encouraging self-mutilation.
- He is urging sinning saints to take radical measures to root out the sinfulness in their lives lest they face unfavorable judgment at the Bema.

As mentioned in a previous study, you might need to terminate your cable television service or put strong filters on your internet usage.

- You might need to eliminate some music or movies that are impure.
- It seems the admonition to cut off the hand is to keep from touching a woman sensually, which could lead to more serious sexual sin.
- 1 Cor. 7:1-2 It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.
- Whatever you must do to keep from enticement to lust, do it!
- Thus, Jesus encourages believers to take radical measures, if necessary.
- Incidentally, just as plucking out the eye is a metaphor for taking radical measures, so Gehenna is a metaphor for temporal judgment.
- For church-age believers, Gehenna serves as a metaphor for the Judgment Seat of Christ.

- Jesus gives a third example of the righteousness that is necessary for inheriting the kingdom of the heavens:

3. Honoring Your Marriage Commitment

- Matt. 5:31 “Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’
- 32 But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”
- The Mosaic law allowed divorce in certain situations, but it was not God’s plan from the beginning.
- Jesus said Moses allowed divorce because of the hardness of the hearts of the people (Matt. 19:8; see Deut. 24) — presumably, to protect the women — for once divorced, they had no way to continue on with any form of support.
- The Pharisees, of course, were in *external* obedience to the *letter* of the law, but not *internal* obedience to the *spirit* of the law.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary points out:

- Among the Jewish leaders were two schools of thought regarding the matter of divorce (Deut. 24:1). Those who followed Hillel said it was permissible for a husband to divorce his wife for any reason at all, but the other group (those following Shammai) said divorce was permissible only for a major offense. In His response, the Lord strongly taught that marriage is viewed by God as an indissoluble unit and that marriages should not be terminated by divorce. The “exception clause,” except for marital unfaithfulness (*porneias*), is understood in several ways by Bible scholars. Four of these ways are: (a) a single act of adultery, (b) unfaithfulness during the

period of betrothal (Matt. 1:19), (c) marriage between near relatives (Lev. 18:6-18), or (d) continued promiscuity.

It seems what Jesus is telling these scribes and Pharisees is that it’s not acceptable to divorce one’s wife for just any reason, for that would be adulterous.

- There must be just cause — divorce is allowable only in cases of sexual immorality.
- Once again, Jesus upholds obeying the *spirit* of the law and the heart of God rather than mere *external* obedience to the *letter* of the law.
- Jesus gives a fourth example of the righteousness that is necessary for inheriting the kingdom of the heavens:

4. Keeping Your Word

- Matt. 5:33 “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’
- 34-35 But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.
- 36 Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.
- Once again Jesus uses the words, “You have heard that it was said ...” In this case the passage in question is Lev. 19:12:
- Lev. 19:12 And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.

To swear falsely is to perjure, and to perjure is to lie under oath.

- The Pharisees would make oaths frequently, and they would often wiggle out of their oaths by swearing by something other than the name of Jehovah.
- For instance, they would swear in the name of Heaven or Earth or Jerusalem, instead of in God's name, and thus consider the oath non-binding.
- But Jesus says, "Don't swear at all, because Heaven is God's throne, and Earth is His footstool, and Jerusalem is His city ... and don't swear by your head either (v. 36), because you can't make your hair black or white."
- That is, God even controls the color of your hair and, for that matter, your very life.
- In fact, don't swear at all, because God wants you to be honest all the time.
- This illustration touches on the matter of honesty (the ninth commandment) — Ex. 20:16, "You shall not bear false witness."
- Jesus adds this at the end:
- 37 But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one."

Here's the idea: Be straightforward in communication.

- Don't mince your words and make empty promises.
- When you say "yes," then mean it, and when you say "no," then mean that.
- Be a man of your word.
- Having to back up your promises with empty oaths is evil, Jesus says at the end of v. 37.
- Just keep your word!
- So once again we have an illustration of the importance of *internally* obeying the *spirit* of the law rather than *externally* obeying the *letter* of the law.
- Jesus gives a fifth example of the righteousness that is necessary for inheriting the kingdom of the heavens:

5. Enduring Hurts and Not Seeking Revenge

- Matt. 5:38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'
- 39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.
- 40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.
- 41 And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.
- 42 Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away."
- The "eye for an eye" principle comes from the Mosaic law and is known as the *lex talionis* in Latin, the law of retaliation.
- Ex. 21:23-25 You shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.
- Lev. 24:21 And whoever kills a man shall be put to death.

Does the *lex talionis* principle mean that if you poke out my eye, I can poke out your eye?

- If you knock out my tooth, I can knock out your tooth? That is what many people *think*, but that is incorrect.
- The *lex talionis* — "an eye for an eye" — simply means the punishment must fit the nature of the crime.
- You don't invoke capital punishment on someone who knocks out someone else's tooth.
- Punishment is to be administered according to the crime committed.
- This law was intended to preserve justice in the land.
- Of course, the Pharisees followed the *letter* of the law rather than the *spirit* of it by invoking the *lex talionis* and retaliating at every opportunity.

- Jesus, on the other hand, teaches that even though you may have rights under the law, don't pursue your rights.
- Notice carefully that the examples Jesus uses are *not* crimes, per se.

If someone commits a crime against you, you definitely should report it to the law enforcement authorities and let the law do its work so the offender cannot go on hurting people.

- Jesus isn't referring to criminal situations here.
- There is also a place for self-defense in criminal situations.
- That's not what Jesus is talking about. He is referring to non-criminal offenses, personal offenses.
- If someone slaps your face, which is the idea of shaming you, then don't shame them back.
- Endure the insult and injury to your pride. For that matter, don't even report it as an assault, we might say in our culture.
- Simply turn the other cheek and let it go.
- There is an obvious application here to persecution as well — don't fight back.

Commentator Thomas Constable says:

- "We should stand up for what is right and for the rights of others, but we should trust God to stand up for us."
- For example, in v. 40, if a Christian brother sues you (which he should not) and takes you before a judge, trying to obtain your tunic (which is the equivalent of your shirt), then give him your cloke (your outer garment) also.
- 41 And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

- Under Roman law, a Roman soldier could commandeer a private citizen and make him carry the soldier's baggage for up to one mile.
- This was an insult to Jews, who hated the Romans.
- But Jesus teaches, "Be willing to carry the baggage two miles" with a good spirit, Don't be bitter and upset about it; do it joyfully.
- That's called going the extra mile.

Another challenging admonition is given in v. 42.

- If someone asks you for help (financial help is implied), give it to them, if you have it, or loan it to them.
- Don't turn them away.
- Be generous, especially with those brethren who have needs.
- Of course, this doesn't mean that we should give all our money away to just anyone who asks, such as the multitude of charities seeking to raise support over the phone or through solicitation letters.
- The focus is on *individuals* who have need and come asking for your help, and it seems the emphasis is regarding brethren, but perhaps not exclusively.
- This can be somewhat challenging in our present era when people with drug and alcohol habits are asking for money.

Commentator William Barclay said:

- "Are we then to say that Jesus urged upon us what can only be called indiscriminate giving? The answer cannot be given without qualification. It is clear that the effect of the giving on the receiver must be taken into account. Giving must never be such as to encourage the recipient in laziness and in shiftlessness, for such giving can only hurt. But at the same time it must be remembered that

... it is better to help twenty fraudulent beggars than to risk turning away the one person in real need.”

- If you lack wisdom to know when to give, ask God.
- The point is that God doesn't merely want you to follow the *letter* of the law, but rather the *spirit* of the law.
- Endure insults and injuries; don't resist; let go of your rights; go the extra mile; and be giving to those who have needs.
- Jesus gives a sixth example of the righteousness that is necessary for inheriting the kingdom of the heavens:

6. Loving Your Enemies

- Matt. 5:43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’
- 44-45 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.
- 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?
- 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

The Mosaic law taught that Israelites should love their neighbors (Lev. 19:18).

- Nothing was said about enemies, but hating enemies was never condoned biblically.
- Hating enemies became generally accepted after the Assyrian invasion and the Babylonian captivity.
- The code of the Pharisees was to love close friends and relatives, and hate enemies.
- But Jesus turned this code on its head.

- He commanded His disciples to love their enemies also.
- That was opposite from the Pharisees' credo, and it goes against our human nature.
- The parable of the Good Samaritan is an illustration of how followers of Christ are expected to behave.
- Paul picked up on this theme in his epistle to the Romans:
- Rom. 12:19-20 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. Therefore, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.

After all, God loves His enemies too!

- Matt. 5:45 says, “He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”
- God is good to everyone, even those who are His enemies.
- When we treat our enemies lovingly, we are acting like our heavenly Father.
- Keep in mind, this passage has nothing to do with salvation (regeneration); it's about sanctification unto reward.
- Verse 46 teaches that if you love only those who love you, you are no better than the tax collectors, who are selfish and political.
- As Christians we don't want to be political and love only those who can do something for us, or those who are “big shots.”
- Furthermore, v. 47, we don't merely want to greet our brethren; we want to greet everybody and treat them as we want to be treated.

- Anything less is characteristic of the tax collectors.
- Although this does not come natural to us, we have the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to help us reach the goal.
- The bottom line is that if you love only those who love you, then you will not be rewarded.

If you settle for *external* obedience to the *letter* of the law, as the scribes and Pharisees, then you will be *least* in the kingdom, which means you will not inherit the kingdom of the heavens (the heavenly ruling realm).

- On the other hand, if you strive for *internal* obedience to the *spirit* of the law, then your righteousness will surpass that of the scribes and the Pharisees, and you will be *great* in the kingdom, being granted the privilege of ruling together with Jesus.
- Our Lord's desire is that we learn to obey the *spirit* of His law in increasing measure. His goal for us is found in v. 48:
- Matt. 5:48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.
- Perfection is not sinlessless.
- It is maturity, but — more than that — it's maturity in uprightness, righteousness, and obedience to the will of God as described in the Sermon on the Mount.
- Are you obeying the *spirit* of God's law or merely the *letter*? Are you righteous inside *and* outside?
- I challenge you to THINK ON THESE THINGS