

THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT

Important principles from Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. (paraphrased and with minor adjustments/additions by yours truly)

As we studied last week, Jesus said the following in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:17-20 “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. ¹⁸For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. ¹⁹Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus then went on to make several points, all of them beginning with the phrase “*You have heard that it was said... but I say...*” These points are what we are currently studying. I have found the following 5 principles very helpful in understanding this section of Matthew 5.

1. **It is the spirit of the law that matters primarily, not the letter only** (God’s heart and truth are in the law; it is God alone, through His Word and Holy Spirit, who can reveal His heart to you)
2. **Obedience and conformity to the law must not be thought of in terms of actions only** (remember - our hearts, minds, and words can break or fulfill these laws as well)
3. **The law must be thought of not only in a negative manner, but also positively.** (for example: we fulfill the law regarding murder, not only when we don’t break it, but when we love someone actively)
4. **The purpose of the law is not to keep us in a state of obedience to oppressive rules, but to promote the free development of our spiritual character** (remember – Jesus conformed perfectly to God’s law; He was the only one to ever do so. Yet He was so free, and loving, and real)
5. **These laws (law of God) must never be regarded as an end to themselves. The objective is to know and love God** (if obeying God leads to pride, you aren’t obeying God. Obeying God leads to loving Him and others)