

The Bible According to Jesus 2

Jesus did not take the Law lightly. Knowing that we are under grace tends to cause us to lighten up on God's commands. Jesus did not have that attitude. He saw even the least command of God as important. In this passage He promises that whoever lives and teaches them will be great in the kingdom of heaven.

Matt 5:19-21 (NIV)¹⁹ Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.²⁰

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Then he began to elaborate on the deeper meaning of the Law. He begins a series of expanded interpretation. Each one begins with "You have heard that it was said, and then quotes the law. Each is followed by, "But I say to you" followed by Jesus' revelation of the full implications of the verse. Remember these are all following Jesus' expression as to the importance of the Law.

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'

God warned in Genesis 4:9,10 that He would hold those accountable who spilled the lifeblood of another, whether man or beast. He is reminding them they have read this in the Pentateuch. They had their own interpretation which was limited to first or maybe second degree murder. Jesus adds a whole new dimension to this expression, telling them the spirit behind the letter.

²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.

God will hold you accountable for shedding another person's blood, but Jesus is saying that God will hold you accountable for being angry with your brother. The spirit behind the letter is God is Life. He gives life to all. That makes each life a gift of God, valuable. Man is made in the image of God! How precious then is each human life? Not only is it wrong to spill the lifeblood, but to be angry with other human lives then is to devalue those lives. Anger precedes most murders, and is a continuation of the same spirit of holding your life above that of others. Jesus is just getting down to the root of the crime. Man must make judgements on actions taken, but God can see and judge the heart.

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'

This is the second command that Jesus will address. Man sees the outward action and condemns the guilty. God sees the heart of man where the action begins. When the heart rebels against God and desires what is forbidden the sin has already taken place. It is that rebellion against God's good boundaries.

²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

From that point he continues with a warning to remove from your life anything that would cause you to sin, even if it is a part of your body! Pretty serious warning, and profound depth from a seemingly simple commandment.

Here we have Jesus interpretation of Scripture. He looks beyond the surface and the obvious and goes to the very source within the heart. He sees the broader implications not just the letter or the exact thing that is written. Do we take time to contemplate the Word like that? Most of us do not. God told Joshua to meditate on the Law day and night. In Joshua 1:8 God promised Joshua prosperity in his way and good success in his life if he would do that. Obviously Jesus took the Father up on that promise. The ultimate fruit of his life on earth will be heaven filled with saints. That is success!

If you keep a journal you may want to write what the Lord shows you as you meditate on a passage. What is the deeper meaning, the implications, and the applications to your life? Writing it out helps you clarify the truth and grasp it better. It is also a helpful memory aid.

How would you apply this interpretive method to the commandment to have no other gods before Jehovah?

³¹ "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' Jesus is quoting Deut. 24:1. In this case Jesus is going to redefine a Law. This is something that we cannot do, a line we cannot cross. He can only do this because He is God. ³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. Later he tells us that it was because our hearts were hard that Moses gave the command but it was never God's intention. He goes back to the example in the Garden. One woman for one man is God's original plan and His intention. Though we cannot redefine the Law we can see what looks like principles that seem to contradict. In this case God's example is better than Moses permission.

What is the spirit behind marriage? Commitment and faithfulness! Marriage is a picture of Jesus and the church. We destroy the picture when we divorce. We are unlike the Father who keeps His commitments and is faithful. We can learn from this that not every Scripture is simple and complete in itself. If we were to take only what Moses said, there would be no problem with the divorce rate as high as it is today. Since we are to be a reflection of the attributes of God, something is wrong taking that verse alone as your sole authority. We must rightly divide the word of truth. Are some things spoken to a certain group of people because they are weak? It appears to be the case. So we must consider other passages that address the same issue and find a balance. We could say that this is one of Jesus' own interpretive methods. He uses the Word to clarify and so must we.

How would you apply this interpretive method to the commandment to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy?

In today's lesson we have seen two more interpretive methods. Can you name them? Meditation and seeking the underlying issue to let God expand the meaning to your heart. The other is interpreting Scripture with Scripture. Don't take any verse as a stand-alone expression without comparing related passages.