DISTINCT CALLING, RADICAL GRACE ·

# The Sermon on the Mount

*Internal Purity vs. Ritualism and Legalism*

Moving Beyond Rule-Keeping to Heart Transformation



BACKGROUND

# God’s standard reaches past behavior to the heart

1

## Legalism

The religious leaders reduced God’s holy requirements to manageable, external checkboxes they could boast about fulfilling.

2

## Jesus dismantles it

God’s standard addresses inner thoughts, motives, and hidden desires — eliminating human self-reliance.

3

## Why it matters

Christian conduct is never a self-made moral achievement, and there is no room for moral superiority or condescension toward unbelievers.

PART 1 ·

# Obeying the law vs. caring about the community

OPENING REFLECTION QUESTION

*Think about common civil rules, like posted speed limits or stopping at red lights. What is the observable difference between someone who obeys the law only when a police car is visible versus someone who genuinely cares about community safety?*

Why is it so much easier to manage outward behaviors and public appearances than it is to address our inward motives and attitudes?

God’s mercy is the starting engine for all Christian living. Christ reaches past external observance — true righteousness flows from an undivided heart transformed by grace.

PART 2 ·

# Righteousness that exceeds external performance

**Matthew 5:17–20**

CONTEXT & EXPOSITION

The scribes and Pharisees dedicated their lives to meticulously observing oral traditions and ceremonial codes. Yet Jesus declared that unless our righteousness exceeds theirs, we will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Christ did not abolish the Law; He fulfilled it — revealing that God requires heart-level alignment that external rule-keeping cannot produce.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why would Jesus' statement about the Pharisees have shocked His original listeners?
2. What is the fundamental difference between performing religious duties and possessing a heart aligned with God?
3. If no human effort can reach this standard, what does this passage drive us to conclude about our need for a Savior?

PART 2 ·

# Anger, contempt, and desires of the heart

**Matthew 5:21–24, 27–30**

*"You have heard it said… but I say to you," — Jesus connects overt transgressions to inner mental and emotional states.*

## Murder and Contempt

vv. 21–24

Bitter anger, unspoken resentment, and verbal insults violate the sixth commandment just as physical violence does. Reconciliation with a brother takes priority even over ceremonial worship.

## Adultery and Lust

vv. 27–30

Looking at another person with lustful intent breaks covenantal purity in the heart. The hyperbole of gouging out an eye or cutting off a hand conveys the radical urgency of severing sources of temptation.

PART 2 ·

# Tearing down our sense of moral superiority

**1**

How does Jesus' focus on inner motives tear down our natural tendency to feel morally superior to people whose sins are more outwardly visible?

**2**

Why does unresolved anger or internal contempt disrupt our worship and community life?

**3**

What radical, practical boundaries might someone need to establish today to cut off sources of compromise in a digital age?

PART 2 ·

# Undivided allegiance: where your treasure rests

**Matthew 6:19–24**

## CONTEXT & EXPOSITION

Jesus broadens His teaching from personal relationships to our posture toward wealth, security, and ultimate loyalty. Earthly treasures decay and perish, whereas heavenly treasure endures.

*“No one can serve two masters… You cannot serve God and money.”*

### DISCUSSION QUESTION 1

Why does Jesus describe wealth and devotion to God as competing masters rather than complementary ones?

### DISCUSSION QUESTION 2

In a culture driven by consumerism and financial anxiety, how does our handling of money reveal whether we trust kingdom values or worldly security?

# From Christ's standard to our daily lives

GROUP REFLECTION

*If Jesus's standard is this involved — judging our hidden thoughts, attitudes, and motives — how can our lives show unbelievers that this is a good life?*

PERSONAL EXAMINATION

*Where in your life are you most tempted to settle for "good outward behavior" while letting inner bitterness, pride, or compromised desires go unaddressed?*

# Transformation from the inside out

## Not self-congratulation

Jesus did not give the Sermon so we could congratulate ourselves on our moral progress.

## Dismantling self-righteousness

He delivered it to show us our desperate and ongoing need for His grace.

## Spirit-led change

He invites us into authentic, Spirit-led transformation from the inside out.

**NEXT WEEK** How does this impact the church's boundaries? Who are we called to hold accountable, and how do we relate to those outside?