

## Sermon on the Mount

### Lesson 4 Article

Over the centuries the Roman Catholic Church had developed a system of religion that departed further and further from Scripture. It was a system that the common man had no way of investigating or verifying. The greatest contribution of the Protestant Reformation was to give the Bible to the people in their own language. It put God's Word into the hands of God's people. It was the truth of Scripture that brought light to the Middle Ages and consequently an end to the Dark Ages.

In a less extreme way the Jews of Jesus' day had been separated from their Scriptures. During and after the Exile most Jews lost their use of the Hebrew language and had come to speak Aramaic, a Semitic language related to Hebrew. Parts of Ezra, Jeremiah, and Daniel were originally written in Aramaic, but the rest of the Old Testament was in Hebrew. The Septuagint, a Greek edition of the Old Testament, had been translated some two hundred fifty years earlier. But though it was widely used by Jews throughout the Roman Empire, the Septuagint was not used or understood by most Jews in Palestine. In addition to that, copies of the Scriptures were bulky, expensive, and far out of the financial reach of the average person. Therefore, when the Hebrew text was read and expounded in the synagogue services, most of the worshipers understood little of the text and consequently had no basis for judging the exposition. Their respect for the rabbis also led them to accept whatever those leaders said.

After the return from exile in Babylon, when Ezra and others read publicly from the law of Moses, they had to translate "to give the sense so that they [the people] understood the reading" (Neh. 8:8). Most later scribes and rabbis, however, did not attempt to translate or expound the scriptural text itself but rather taught from the Talmud, an exhaustive codification of the rabbinic traditions.

Therefore both the Jewish leaders and the rank and file of the people were amazed at Jesus' radical departure—in both content and delivery—from the type of teaching they were used to. Whether He was right or wrong, it was obvious to them that "He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22).

Among Jesus' most amazing departures from traditional teaching was His insistence that tradition and Scripture were in conflict and that inner righteousness, not outward form, is the central and necessary characteristic of a right relationship to God.

Five basic principles summarize the central thrust of 5:21–48. The first principle is that the spirit of the law is more important than the letter. The law was not given as a mechanical set of rules by which men in their own power could govern their outward living. It was given as a guide to the type of character God requires.

The second principle is that the law is positive as well as negative. Its purpose not only is to prevent both inner and outward sin but to promote both inner and outward righteousness.

The third principle is that the law is not an end in itself. Its deeper purpose goes beyond purifying the lives of God's people. Its supreme purpose is to glorify God Himself.

The fourth principle is that God alone is qualified to judge men, because He alone can judge men's hearts. Only the Creator has the right and the ability to judge the deepest inner workings of His creatures.

The fifth principle is that every human being is commanded to live up to the perfect divine standard to which the law points. Because that command is impossible for man to fulfill, God Himself has provided fulfillment through His Son, Jesus Christ. The Demander of righteousness is also the Giver of righteousness; the Lawgiver is also the Redeemer. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). *Matthew*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary (286–287). Chicago: Moody Press.