

It is 5:30 in the morning. I'm driving south-bound on I-5 on my way to work. To my right I see a black and white speed limit sign which reads 60 mph and I laugh mockingly at it. I glance down at my speedometer - it reads somewhere between 25 and 30 – and quickly I turn my attention back to road – at least what I can see of it through the blanket of snow which is falling.

Just then a 4 wheel drive SUV goes flying by me doing at least 60!

“What a JERK !” Have you ever responded this way to another driver because they **were** following the traffic laws? I was ticked off because I thought they were going way too fast for this much snow, but according to the black and white sign, they were not breaking the speed limit, a patrol officer probably could not have actually given them a speeding ticket.

There is a traffic ticket that is often given out for these situations– it's called “Unsafe speed for road conditions” right?

Let me ask you this... how is a person supposed to know they are driving too fast for road conditions? Is there a sign anywhere on the freeway which states – if there is a ¼ inch of rain on the road, drive 45 mph. For 1/2 inch of snow, drive 35, for snow greater than 1 inch - drive 25?

No, you are just expected to know what is safe and what is unsafe. The law expects you to exercise some common sense about good driving in bad conditions – and they will ticket you for ignoring this common sense. I was angry at that SUV because I assumed they *knew* the full speed limit provided by the law was unsafe at that moment, and they were putting me and everyone else at risk by ignoring that fact! JERK!

I thought to myself... What else can you say about people like that? People who think -“Well, the sign says 60! So I'm going 60!”? Do they have the common sense expected of them but just refuse to use it? Or is it possible that they are just blind to the intent behind the law? Truth is, my response to them shows that I am no better.

What do you think about the people who wrote the traffic laws for Wa state? How many of you have thought – “Whoever wrote speed limit law was a vindictive politician who is just out spoil my fun!”? I only ask you to raise your hand so that I can be sure to drive the opposite direction as you when we leave the parking lot today!

The rest of you might well guess that those who wrote the traffic laws did so with a concern for the safety of those who drive on the roads and freeways right? They probably spent millions of dollars and hired hundreds of engineers, statisticians and other smart type people to ensure fatal accidents on our roads were kept to a minimum. You could therefore assume that they valued the safety Wa State drivers right?

Now what might you assume about people who drive under the traffic laws? They probably fall into two groups, one group which shares the concern of the law makers for the safety of their fellow travelers and drive accordingly. The second group may follow the traffic laws, but only

because they don't want to get a ticket. These are always upgrading their radar detectors and are always nervous when there is a police officer driving behind them. They obey the laws well enough as long as there is some one around to catch them.

If Jesus were to communicate the speed limit laws, he might say something like this...

“You have heard it was said, ‘Thou shalt not exceed 60 miles per hour on I-5’, but I say to you, you must share the heart and have the same intent as the traffic law. You must accurately judge a travel speed that is safe for yourself and your fellow drivers”.

If it's not obvious at this point, we will be looking today at the section of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is apparently redefining the law for his listeners.

What is actually happening is Jesus is reclaiming the original definitions and rejecting the relaxed versions of the law that we have written for ourselves. He goes down a list of rules that people would pride themselves in keeping and basically says, ‘You follow rules that tell you not to kill, not to sleep around, not to hate, not to lie or steal, but while you appear to keep these, you are lacking within yourself the intent behind them and so you continue to jeopardize yourselves and others.

There are two versions of God's Law. The version we rewrite for ourselves is relaxed - it is a mere list of external expectations. You can always just look down at your speedometer and say proudly “I am within the limit”.

The other is that of the intent or purpose of the law. Keeping God's law as Jesus is defining it in the Sermon on the Mount requires something far more than a checklist of dos and do-nots, it requires a spiritual understanding and a spiritual response. This law is scribed into the hearts of citizens of the Kingdom.

This law is spiritual because it involves knowing and responding to, and even sharing in the heart of God himself.

A list of expectations requires only that I know the list of expectations, but the spiritual law requires that I have a growing relationship with God Himself, that I have His Spirit within me, that I have the mind of Christ. Our speedometer is our King Himself. Rather than looking to ourselves or each other to gauge our rightness, we look to Christ - focusing our attention on Him, allowing His values to define our values.

Allow me to paint a little analogy. Like all analogies, it falls somewhat short of the full truth, but it may help you see to the law in a new light.

Imagine a huge fancy living room, like one in a castle or a mansion. It is decorated with the most beautiful furniture and art you have ever seen. The coffee table and end tables are crafted from the finest woods and have these gorgeous inlays of gold and jewels. There is the grandest grand

piano ever heard sitting almost in the middle of the room. The couches and chairs are upholstered with the most exquisite materials on the face of the earth. The floor itself steps down several levels and in the center is a huge mosaic that looks like it took the better portion of a lifetime to design.

Now, turn off the lights. Close the drapes so that not even the slightest amount of light can enter into the room. Try to walk around... what is the first thing that you learn? You can't see! By now you have probably tripped down the steps and left a little blood on that mosaic from the minor head wound you suffered when you landed. Your shins are likely bruised from running into the end tables. All of the beauty of this extravagant room is lost on you – it is a mere obstacle course where you are trying desperately to avoid any more pain.

What can you do? You are quite obviously in darkness. What do you need more than anything at this particular moment? You need someone to turn on the lights don't you.

In Col 1, Paul's says this.

God has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.

In the domain of darkness, God's law is merely a stumbling block – we cannot keep it perfectly, it can only condemn us. It serves to reveal our actual loyalties -to prove to us our citizenship in the domain of darkness. But people who are in darkness often try to convince themselves pridefully that they are not blind and they treat Gods law as a game – thinking the object is simply trying to make it from one side of the room to the other without getting stuck or tripping over things. But the law is impassable; it was not designed to merely provide the blind with easy navigation through life. It was designed to show them they are blind.

Imagine if getting into heaven were a jumping contest. You might have a huge group of contestants lined-up, some of which have strong legs and nimble ankles and others who might not even be able to jump up onto the curb. The bell rings and the jumping contest begins. Heads are bouncing up and down, some a little and some a lot. There are many there who look like they took lessons from Michael Jordan himself. Eventually though, they all start to get tired, and they start to whine and complain – “Hasn't any one won yet?” The referee shakes his head No. “Well how high do we have to jump in order to win?” The ref points up. “Do you see that star up there? The brightest one in the sky? **That** is how high you must jump in order to win”.

“Impossible! Who then can be saved?”

And we hear Jesus answer, “With man, this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Matthew 5 closes with Jesus saying... You must be perfect... as perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect. Can we possibly even be perfect as citizens of darkness? If our lot is so bad, how can God expect us to ever jump so high?

Listen... Christ is able to reach down into our darkness and pull us over into Light. Having been transferred into the kingdom of light, God's law is now seen for what it is. It is the furniture which beautifies the room. It reveals His finest art and craftsmanship and glorifies the skill in His hands.

The law is His desire, His pleasure, His compassionate will. Citizens of the kingdom of light cannot only see His will for what it is, but they share it. His heart is written on our hearts and we become light bearers. Living by a list sheds little light (Do not even the tax collectors do the same) but in living by the heart of God our righteousness will more than exceed that of the Pharisees.

I guess I had better get to the text before they chase me out of here.

Matt 5, verses 21-48. Jesus deals with several topics. Murder, adultery and marriage, taking oaths and speaking truth, retaliation and loving our enemies are all covered. In each case He starts with "You have heard it was said - But I tell you." Now some of these traditions they were following were straight out the Ten Commandments, but the tradition had just shifted their meanings. Some of these rules we cannot find anywhere in what God has spoken and so they are obviously man-made rules.

Well, before we actually get to the specific verses, lets jump ahead 10 chapters and look at an example being played out.

Matt 15.

Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said,

"Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.'

But *you* say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," he need not honor his father.'

So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.

You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:

"This people honors me with their lips,

but their heart is far from me;

in vain do they worship me,

Do you see what is happening here? God told them to honor their parents but they added a rule to what God said. Essentially they were allowed to cheat their parents as long they used a religious excuse for doing so. I want you to take special notice of Jesus' respond. In quoting Isaiah, he was saying essentially that living in light of the law is about having our hearts stitched up tight with Gods, and it is about worship. As we read through these sections in the sermon, I want you to keep those two things in mind, a heart that is close to God and a spirit of worship.

v21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

Great! So you're saying that not only is it against the law to bash heads in when I feel like it, but I'm not even allowed to even be angry? This is a typical response from darkness. But let us look deeper, let's dig under the restriction to find the intent. What do we see of Gods heart here? Isn't God saying He values life? All life, both natural and spiritual, are His creation and are precious to him. God placed His image in us all, and that is very precious to Him.

Obviously, he doesn't take kindly to you and me going around destroying it. It would be like taking a mallet into that living room and smashing the beautiful furniture to pieces. The citizens of the dark kingdom may take pride in the fact that they have never killed anyone, but the citizens of light realize that there are many ways of being destructive towards life without ever getting blood on your hands. Jesus points to anger and insult, then very clearly states that these fall into the same category as cold-blooded murder.

Let your light so shine before others, so that they may see how you value life and then give glory to the God who reigns over you.

v23 "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. "

You might recognize from this that our relationships with one another are valued by God. He makes it clear that we cannot destroy our relationships and then go offer any meaning worship to Him. You might even say that making things right when we are the offender in a relationship is a real part of worshipping God because it is recognizing who God is and what He considers valuable. Citizens of the Kingdom value what their King values – it is that simple.

Let your light so shine before others, so that they may see how you value relationships and then give glory to the God who reigns over you.

v27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. "

What is the value displayed here? Because the word adultery is used, we might jump to the topic of marriage, but Jesus is going to deal with that specifically in the next section so I think this one is a little broader. We may see many many ideas here, but lets look at the value of the person. When our sexual drive drives us out of control, we jeopardize not only life, but personality – on both sides of the lustful intent. Both the luster and the lustee are diminished to something less than a person.

Citizens of the dark domain will say "I did not sleep with that woman." But the citizens of the kingdom of light will say, "I saw in that woman not a thing, but a person, and within that person, I recognized the art and the image of God."

Can you see how the opposite of adultery is really and actually the worship of God?

Let your light so shine before others, so that they may see how you value every person and then give glory to the God who reigns over you.

v29 "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

Jesus is not supporting self-mutilation here. He knows, and expects us to understand, that the offense comes from our hearts and that chopping off our hands is not going to touch the true problem. What he is saying, with very strong imagery, is that this is no game. It is not a philosophy for better living or a way to make a twisted man appear to stand straight. It is serious business.

v31 "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

This command is also played out later in Matthew

>>SLIDE 13

Chap 19 3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and

the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning."

Let me ask you this... towards who were their hearts so hard that Moses had to permit divorce? Was it only towards their spouse or was their heart hardened against the One who had joined them together?

From the beginning you were created to love and to be loved and marriage is one of the most profound ways this is demonstrated. God values marriage – it was His idea, it has deep meaning and purpose in our world. Yet we so often treat marriage like its sole purpose is just to make us happy –and as soon as it doesn't, we write up our certificates and go looking for another. Intimate relationships can so easily become idols in our lives when our hearts are hard against God.

For those of you that are single, does God still expect you to value marriage the way He does?

For those who are married, in what ways can your marriage worship and glorify God? I encourage you to think this one through and then talk about it with your spouse, in your small groups this week, or even write about it in your blog.

Let your light so shine before others, so that they may see how you value what God has joined together and then give glory to the God who reigns over you.

Well, at this point I have to admit something to you all... I only got half-way through in my teaching preparation. It looks like it is going to be up to you to finish the rest of this message for me. This week, read through the rest of Matthew 5. Examine each command and identify through it what God is saying He values. Then examine your own values. How close is your heart to God's heart in these areas? How might your response to God's law resemble worship?

Before I exit however, I would like to ask you all to take a quick look down at yourselves. Are your shins bruised? Do you have any sore spots because you keep running into God's law? Are you constantly stumbling over Christ's demands that you must be 100% perfect? If so, I don't want to just leave you stumbling around in darkness. And more importantly! I wouldn't want you to miss out on the beauty revealed by the light. I want to hear your voice alongside mine, gasping at the wonder of what God has done in this world.

You need to know that it is not good enough to be good by your own standards – that way leads to death. You already know that you have not lived a perfect life, but the good news is that Christ fully met every requirement of the law in both thought and deed – He has lived a 100% perfect life, and He is willing to swap with you.

From your very first infraction of the law, however long ago that was, you became a law-breaker. Your perfect record was forever shattered into millions of pieces and there is not enough super-glue in the entire world that will restore it. You need to know that justice and fairness requires a penalty for law-breaking, it requires death. But Christ is willing to swap that with you too.

For the law of the Spirit of life can set you free through Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. God has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. By sending his own Son into our darkness, He shattered the darkness with light in order that we might live with His law fulfilled in us and walk this world in worship and in oneness with Christ.