



# The Motives of the Heart

*Twelfth in a Series*

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

*Romans 13:8-10*

Let’s be honest: Wouldn’t we all rather have fewer rules in our lives? Wouldn’t we all rather drive the speed of *our* choosing on the freeway, and not have to be tied in with a seat belt? When we were younger, did we *enjoy* the rules set down by our parents? Wouldn’t we rather have stayed out as late as we wished, gone to parties without chaperones, not bothered doing our homework, ate or drank whatever we liked whenever we liked?

Few people actually *like* the inconvenience of some rules in their lives, but most of us attain a level of maturity that understands that we, and society as a whole, are better off with certain fundamental laws and regulations. It is in our nature to rebel against laws, but it is also in our nature to require them.

Some Christians are only too happy to believe that in Christ the laws and regulations of the Old Testament no longer apply. After all, we live under grace, right? So they would be surprised to hear what Jesus had to say about this during His Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus has just finished telling His disciples that He did not come to abolish or weaken the Law, but to fulfill it—to complete it. Now He gives them some examples of just what this fulfillment looks like. He introduces each example with the phrase (or a variation on it), “You have heard that...,” followed by “But I say...”—and the “I” is always emphatic. That is, with these examples Jesus begins

with a passage from the incomplete Law, then explains how that is changed or deepened now that He, in His coming, has completed it.



We can all agree that the proscription of murder—the malicious or premeditated killing of another human being, either out of anger or hatred, or during the commission of an illegal act—belongs on any list of laws, and only a congenital imbecile would think that under grace God would not mind if we murdered someone. But Jesus not only retains the law, He drills down into the *roots* of the crime, and includes them along with the physical act.

“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.”

*Matthew 5:21-22*

It isn’t so much that Jesus is saying that anger is synonymous with murder, but that one does not have to go so far as murder to transgress His new kingdom-level of ethics.

Is He saying that all anger is equivalent to murder? If that were the case, He would have to hold Himself up for judgment on the same offense.

And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business."

*John 2:14-16*

There is an anger that leads to death, and there is an anger that leads to holiness. And the condition of the heart makes the difference.



Throughout the gospel accounts Christ repeatedly emphasizes the importance of the heart—the internal over the external. Man places greater weight on the actions, the behavior, that which is visible, but God looks at the heart, and gives it greater weight than that which can be seen.

When they entered, [Samuel] looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

*1 Samuel 16:6-7*

Heart-condition plays a critical role in Jesus' completion of the commandments regarding murder and adultery. In His kingdom it is not enough that we refrain from literally, physically taking the life of another individual; we are not to permit in our lives the simmering resentments that effectively "murder" the integrity of the body of Christ.

Similarly, in Christ's kingdom it is not enough that we refrain from physically cheating on our spouse; we are not to

countenance even those things that tempt us to do so.

"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 lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell."

*Matthew 5:27-30*

In Jewish sources, the original command against adultery was treated primarily as a law against theft, for the act of adultery ostensibly stole another man's wife—that is, at that time, his property. But Jesus makes clear that the commandment against adultery was not at all about property rights, but purity.

In God's economy, marriage is to be the earthly picture of Christ's love for His church; repeatedly in Scripture Jesus is portrayed as the groom, and the church His bride. And His dedicated, sacrificial love for it is the standard by which a man is to love his wife.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

*Ephesians 5:25-27*

Not surprisingly, then, Scripture portrays those in the church who love the world more than God as having betrayed the marriage bed.

You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the

world makes himself an enemy of God.

*James 4:4*

Why should we take God seriously? Because He takes *us* seriously. Jesus loves us with a single-minded devotion; He is passionately in love with His bride, and He desires that she remain spotless and pure, passionate only for Him. When we take Him for granted, when we entertain passions for others in His place, He feels the disappointment and pain of the betrayal as any loving man would.



Israel's interpretation of and adherence to the Mosaic Law was based on mechanical obedience to the letter of the law; they cared little or nothing about motive, only behavior. One way that Christ Jesus fulfilled, or completed the Law was that He insisted that motives—the condition of the heart—mattered. Mechanical obedience means nothing, He declared, when the heart is not right. And to preserve the condition of the heart, we are to stay clear of anything that might tempt our heart away from Him.

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