

SIMPLE FAITH

Simplicity Starts from Within

Matthew 5:17–26



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Though centuries have passed since He spoke them, Jesus' words remain just as penetrating as when they first fell on the ears of His original audiences. Because He alone spoke with anointed authority, people were amazed as they listened and ultimately became changed individuals.

Christ's teachings continue to bring about powerful transformation and arouse the attention of all who study them. Nothing Jesus stated was ever more profound than His Sermon on the Mount. With searching wisdom, He peeled back the externals of hypocritical religion and addressed the issues that really matter. In the section of Scripture we'll examine in this lesson, Jesus discussed the Christian's relationship to the Mosaic Law.

At the heart of Jesus' instruction is righteousness—the state of having sufficient grounds to stand before a holy God.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. The Authority of Scripture

Authority involves the ability to command obedience. Jesus possessed the authority to compel obedience because He was God in the flesh. In the same way, the Bible compels its readers to obey because it is the Word of God.

The authority of Scripture is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith because without it, we are all left to distinguish right from wrong by ourselves.



Quotable

*We cannot be
right with God
if we aren't right
with others.
Take the first step.
It's your move.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. The Fulfillment of the Law (Matthew 5:17–26)

Jesus taught with authority, a stark contrast to the prophets before and the apostles after who spoke in the name of the Lord or in the name of Jesus.

Such teaching raised questions about Jesus' relationship to the Law. If Jesus taught with authority, then was the Law still authoritative? Did the words to Moses pass away with the coming of Jesus and the church, or were they still maintained? And what about for followers of Jesus; would the Law carry authority for them as well?

Three truths emerge from this passage. Jesus honored the Law and lived under its authority. Jesus calls Christians to a life lived in obedience to God and His Word. We cannot be right with God until we are right with our fellow human beings.



A CLOSER LOOK

Interpreting the Law

Throughout biblical history, the ability to read and write could open doors. In the Old Testament, an educated, elite group of scribes devoted themselves to copying, guarding, and interpreting God's Law. Scribes worked closely alongside priests. In a natural progression, the scribes' role of interpreting the Law eventually evolved into practicing law. They became lawyers. They wrote letters, drew up contracts, and tracked taxes. They were a respected part of society.

By the time of the New Testament, scribes had gained strong political power and were serving as judges in the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court system. As teachers of the Law, the scribes—alongside their counterparts, the Pharisees—were often at odds with the spirit of the Law. Both the scribes and the Pharisees militantly interpreted the letter of the Law with utmost strictness and with the good intention of protecting the sacred text. But their interpretations often devolved into trivial controversies, like creating endless genealogies (Titus 3:9).

Jesus adjured in His Sermon on the Mount that the people's righteousness should be "better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees" (Matthew 5:20 NLT) in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.



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LET'S LIVE IT

We can adopt these three guidelines as we seek to implement in our lives the lessons of this passage:

- *The principles of Scripture go deeper than the externals.* Christianity is not just about a change of behavior, though it is partly that. Following Christ will continually mature us throughout this life, ending with complete transformation and new life inside and out in the next life.
- *The potential of anger is greater than words.* It's difficult to quantify how badly our words can impact others. When we speak in anger, we can do a kind of lasting damage that leads to the death of joy, hope, and love in the lives of others.
- *The power of reconciliation is stronger than revenge.* When we humble ourselves in order to reconcile with someone who has been angry with us, we create an opportunity to bring renewal into the world.

Have you been relying on externals? Consider a few areas in your life where the image of goodness has outweighed the substance of goodness, and record them below.



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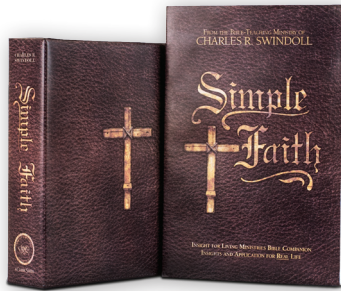
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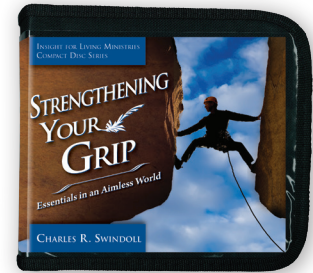
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