

Briefing Document: Matthew Lesson 65-The Sermon on the Mount: Christ and the Law

May 3, 2026

Executive Summary

The following briefing document outlines the key themes and teachings from Lesson 65 of the Sermon on the Mount series. The central message focuses on Matthew 5:20, where Jesus instructs that entry into the kingdom of heaven requires a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. The text explores the futility of human effort in achieving salvation and emphasizes that true righteousness is an internal condition of the heart, provided only through Jesus Christ. Key distinctions are made between the external legalism of religious leaders and the spiritual purity demanded by God.

The Identity of the Scribes and Pharisees

To understand the standard of righteousness Jesus requires, one must first identify the two groups He used as examples.

The Scribes: Scholars of the Law

- **Role and Function:** The scribes were the official scholars and authorities of Judaism. They were responsible for recording, studying, and interpreting the law. They are considered the forerunners of the rabbis.
- **Detailed Focus:** They were highly detail-oriented, often struggling over fine points of the law. Many could recite the entire Old Testament verbatim.
- **Two Categories:**
 - **Civil Scribes:** Acted as government notaries, recording state affairs.
 - **Religious Scribes:** Dedicated their lives to studying and expounding upon the scriptures, specifically the law of Moses.
- **Affiliations:** Scribes belonged to various sects, including both the liberal Sadducees and the conservative Pharisees.

The Pharisees: Religious Separatists

- **Definition:** The name "Pharisee" comes from a root word meaning "to separate." They viewed themselves as a spiritual elite, superior to common people and Gentiles.
- **Legalism:** They were extreme legalists who developed a rigid system of rituals and traditions. This system eventually included over 600 specific rules.
- **Tradition over Scripture:** Rather than following the spirit of the law of Moses, they prioritized the words and traditions of rabbis.

The Nature of True Righteousness

The core conflict presented in the text is the difference between external observance and internal purity.

The Failure of Externalism

The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was purely external. While they avoided outward sins like theft or murder, their internal lives were often characterized by "impure thoughts, covetousness, and hatred." Jesus described them as "whitewashed tombs," appearing beautiful on the outside while being full of "dead man's bones and all uncleanness" on the inside.

The Standard of the Heart

Jesus taught that God's law is not merely about physical actions but about the condition of the soul. He provided specific examples to illustrate this:

- **On Murder:** While the law forbids physical murder, Jesus taught that being angry with a brother is also subject to judgment (*Matthew 5:21-22*).
- **On Adultery:** While the law forbids the physical act, Jesus taught that *whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart* (*Matthew 5:28*).

The Necessity of Jesus

The text concludes that human goodness is "not good enough." Because no one can perfectly fulfill God's standards through their own effort, righteousness must be conveyed through Jesus. Salvation requires a "purity of heart" that only the Spirit of God can produce.

Scriptural Integrity and Manuscripts

The briefing addresses the history of how the Bible has been preserved and translated, noting that despite human influence, the core message remains unchanged.

- **Manuscript Discoveries:** The text mentions the recent discovery of 42 pages of the Apostle Paul's writings from the sixth century (Codex H). These writings were found on parchment where the original ink had been scraped off to be reused. Notably, these discoveries do not refute the established Gospel.
- **Translation Nuances:** The document notes that translators have sometimes influenced the text, such as changing the word "slave" to "servant" due to societal pressures in the 1700s.
- **The Living Word:** Despite historical changes in punctuation or specific phrasing (such as the phrase "without a cause" in *Matthew 5:22*), the Bible is presented as the "living word" that remains the same today.

Practical Application and Church Life

The community is encouraged to move beyond "the superficiality of religion" and seek a genuine internal relationship with God.

- **Self-Examination:** In preparation for the Lord's Supper, believers are urged to examine their hearts, confess sins, and seek purity. Paul warns that taking communion with an impure heart can lead to spiritual and physical consequences.
- **Obedience:** True salvation is evidenced by obedience. A Christian cannot "sin habitually" because they are being molded by God, like clay on a potter's wheel.
- **Community Support:** The church maintains various ministries, including the We Care Pregnancy Center, Vacation Bible School (VBS), and outreach programs, reflecting the "courage to share" the Gospel.

Key Quotes

- "The purpose of God's law is to show you that you must have more righteousness than you could ever come up with on your own."
- "Your goodness is not good enough. The only way to get to heaven is through Jesus because He is the conveyor of righteousness."
- "If you have a cold prickly heart, you can study whatever you want to; it is not going to penetrate that heart unless you are truly redeemed by the Spirit of God."
- "If you can't live up to the biblical standard, what do you do? You drag the standard down so that you can make the standard, and then you convince yourself that you are all right."

Greek Terminology Reference

Greek Word	Phonetic Pronunciation	Definition
Grammateus [^1]	gra-ma-TEUS	A scribe, scholar, or expert in the law; one who writes or interprets religious texts.

[^1]: **Footnote:** The transcript references the Greek origin of "scribe" in relation to the word "grammar" (grammatical). In the New Testament, this refers to the *grammateis*, or those responsible for the letter of the Law.