

## **Briefing Document: Matthew Lesson 71-Our Attitude Behind Our Actions**

**Sunday AM-June 14, 2026**

### Executive Summary

This document synthesizes a teaching on Matthew 5:21-22, focusing on the internal motivations behind human behavior. The central theme is that God prioritizes the "spirit" of the law over the "letter" of the law. While the law of man concerns itself with outward actions, God's judgment focuses on the heart, equating internal anger and contempt with the act of murder. Because the divine standard for entry into the kingdom of heaven is absolute perfection—a standard no human can meet on their own—righteousness must be received as a gift through faith in Jesus Christ.

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### Core Principles of the Law

The teaching identifies five key principles that explain how Jesus views the law and human righteousness.

#### 1. The Priority of the Spirit Over the Letter

The most important aspect of the law is its "spirit" (the intent) rather than the "letter" (the literal words). The letter of the law is functional; it warns of the consequences of actions, often summarized as "do it or die." However, God's primary concern is a person's internal state.

- **Internal vs. External:** A person can appear righteous on the outside while remaining "vile" on the inside.
- **The Purpose of the Law:** The law serves as a signpost to drive individuals toward Jesus because the "letter" of the law kills, while the "spirit" gives life.
- **Heart Transformation:** God is looking for transformed lives and hearts that have been changed, not just legalistic conformity.

#### 2. The Law as a Positive Guide

The law is often viewed negatively (as a list of things not to do), but it is also intended to be positive. It should lead believers toward having right attitudes.

- **Righteous Thinking:** True justification comes from thinking and living with a heart oriented toward righteousness.
- **The Beatitudes:** A Christian should have an inward desire to be merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, and to mourn over sin. These internal qualities distinguish believers from the world.

### 3. Glorifying God, Not Self

The goal of following the law is not to gain personal glory or to feel self-satisfied.

- **The Ultimate End:** According to the Westminster Catechism, the purpose of man is to glorify God. Therefore, the "end of the law" is to bring glory to God.
- **Daily Self-Examination:** Rather than asking "Have I kept every law today?" a believer should ask, "Have I glorified God in my spirit, my desires, and my wishes today?"

### 4. God as the Only Competent Judge

Only God can truly judge a person because He is the only one who knows the "secrets of the heart."

- **Inward Transparency:** No creature is hidden from God's sight; all things are open to Him.
- **The Sympathetic High Priest:** While God knows every failure, He also acts as a sympathetic High Priest who understands human weaknesses. Believers are encouraged to come boldly to His "throne of grace" to find mercy.

### 5. The Necessity of a Divine Standard

The standard for entering the kingdom of heaven is higher than humanly possible.

- **The Requirement of Perfection:** As stated in *Matthew 5:48*, the standard is: *Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*
- **Human Inability:** No person is naturally righteous (*Romans 3:10*).
- **Imputed Righteousness:** Because humans cannot meet the standard, Jesus Christ—the only one who kept the law perfectly—gives His righteousness to those who believe. When God looks at a believer, He sees the righteousness of His Son.

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#### The Danger of Internal Sin

The teaching emphasizes that internal sins like anger and hatred carry the same weight in God's eyes as physical acts of violence.

#### The Problem of Self-Justification

People often justify themselves by comparing their outward behavior to others. Jesus addressed this in *Luke 16:15*: *You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.*

- One can perform religious duties and "play Christian games," yet remain an "abomination" if the heart is full of corruption.

## The "Clock" Illustration

The document uses an illustration of a church clock that never kept the right time. The pastor placed a sign over it saying, "Don't blame the hands; the trouble lies deeper."

- This serves as a metaphor for the human life: the "hands" (outward actions) will only change when the "trouble deeper inside" (the heart) is addressed through the power of Christ.

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## Relevant Scripture References

The following scriptures from the NKJV provide the foundation for these principles:

- **Matthew 5:20:** *For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*
- **Matthew 5:21-22:** *You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment." But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, "Raca!" [<sup>1</sup>] shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, "You fool!" shall be in danger of hell fire.*
- **Hebrews 4:12:** *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*
- **Romans 3:21-22:** *But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.*

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## Greek Terminology Guide

<b>Word</b>	<b>Phonetic Pronunciation</b>	<b>Brief Definition</b>
<b>Raca</b>	<b>[rah-kah]</b>	An Aramaic/Greek term of utter contempt meaning "empty-headed," "brainless," or "worthless person."

[<sup>1</sup>]: See the **Greek Terminology Guide** for pronunciation and definition.