



FOUR CATEGORIES

1. We are still within the Gospel above all Gospels — the Sermon on the Mount deserves our full devotion. Why? Because in it, Jesus describes those who will inherit the kingdom of God.

1.1. To help us follow what Jesus is teaching, I'll divide the Sermon on the Mount into four main categories:

- a) The first category is Jesus' description of the attributes of those who will inherit the kingdom of God, found in Luke 6:20–23. Here, Jesus portrays those who are blessed — and they are blessed because God has chosen them to live one day with His Son, Jesus Christ, in His eternal kingdom.
- b) The second category is found in Luke 6:27–38. In this passage, Jesus reveals God's vision of righteousness — the standard He requires His people to live by. Those who call themselves disciples of Jesus must align their lives with God's vision of righteousness. Remember, by this time most Jews had embraced the Pharisaic view of righteousness — a vision highly respected and widely accepted among the people. Jesus knew this; He lived within that culture. Knowing well the Pharisees' standard, He told the people that God's righteousness stands far above and beyond theirs. In this section, He describes how one who claims to be His disciple must live and behave.
- c) The third category is found in Luke 6:39–42. Here, Jesus warns His disciples and the crowd: *"Do not adopt the Pharisees' version of righteousness. They have deceived themselves by creating their own standard. And how did they do it? By lowering and reshaping God's standard to fit their own tastes. Because of this, they're convinced they deserve God's favor. But if you desire to inherit the kingdom of God, do not listen to them — don't be deceived as they were, blinded by their own self-made beliefs."*

- d) The fourth category is found in Luke 6:43–49. Here, Jesus says: *“The kingdom of God will not be inherited by those who merely call themselves My disciples. It will be inherited by those who hear My words and put them into practice.”* In other words, those who both listen to His teaching and live by it — they are the blessed ones.

REFLECTING GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS

2. Last time, I tried to explain who the poor in spirit are, who are the hungry, and who are those who now weep. At first glance, one might think Jesus is asking us to be depressed, right? But that’s not the case. Jesus is not telling us to reject the joys God built into this reality. We are free — and even called — to delight in God’s world.

We are free to discover what we’re good at, to explore our talents, to develop them and use them for the good of others.

We are free to enjoy love, travel, and success.

We are free to create — to write, sing, dance, build, and dream.

We are free to enjoy all these things when circumstances allow — when we are not caught in suffering such as war, famine, disaster, or pain that hinders us from tasting the sweetness of life.

2.1. But if we believe that this is the ultimate purpose of our existence, then we are rich in spirit — we have deceived ourselves.

2.2. Through His teaching, Jesus wants to offer us something infinitely greater. Nothing this world can offer compares to the purpose for which our Creator made us — to know Him and to worship Him by reflecting and promoting the image of God’s righteousness.

2.3. In other words, we are meant to become noble, humble, and glorious human beings who radiate God’s goodness.

— Believe me, from personal experience I can testify that when we accept this as the true purpose of our existence, we become whole — we become fulfilled. —

2.4. And once we are fulfilled, we stop searching for meaning in the colorful offerings of this world. Yes, we may enjoy its variety — but our daily joy no longer depends on it. Even if life were to strip away the pleasures of this world — through illness, poverty, war, or loss — there would still remain a quiet, steady joy within us.

THE PROCESS

3. How does this process unfold within a person?

First, I want to say — it is a lifelong journey. Yet there are a few key moments that ignite it.

3.1. As I said in the previous sermon, sooner or later, life brings each of us to a wall — and written on that wall are the words: *“This is not the life that can fulfill you. This reality is filled with your own and others’ selfish and destructive choices. Do you not see that you are sinful? Do you not see that your decisions bring harm — to yourself and to others? Stop deceiving yourself! Repent! Seek God’s*

forgiveness! Stop running from God and from your conscience! Understand that you need Him — for only He can truly satisfy your soul!”

3.2. And at that moment, our conscience asks: *“Alright — now that I’ve told you this for the thousandth time, which path will you take? The path of righteousness and holiness, or the path of ruin? Will you keep pretending that this life is all there is, or will you turn toward what is glorious — will you turn toward God?”*

3.3. My dear friends, that is the most important and the bravest decision a human being can ever make. When a person realizes that no pleasure in this world can fill the emptiness within — the emptiness caused by our fragility and our bent toward sin — that person becomes one of the blessed, destined to inherit eternal life.

3.4. For that reason, I believe the first category (see § 1.1) is the heart of the entire message — the very center of the Sermon on the Mount. All the remaining categories, in one way or another, fit into the context of the first.

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO DO

4. Before we go deeper into studying the Sermon on the Mount together, I want to emphasize something very important: the kingdom of God will not be inherited by those who *perfectly* live out Jesus’ vision of righteousness.

Why do I say this? Because such perfection is impossible for a sinful human being.

4.1. Those who will inherit the kingdom of God are not the ones who flawlessly fulfill every command, but those who long and yearn for God to make them into the kind of people Jesus describes in His vision of righteousness.

With that posture of heart, we must approach the following verses — because if we don’t, we’ll completely miss what Jesus truly wants to teach us.

4.2. Here’s why I believe that: if we read Jesus’ words — *“Do good to those who hate you, love your enemies, pray for those who mistreat you, give to everyone who asks and do not demand it back...”* — and assume we must fulfill them perfectly, leaving no room for human failure, His teaching can easily overwhelm and even frighten us. Who among us could ever say, with full confidence, that they perfectly live out Jesus’ vision of righteousness?

I believe — no one!

4.3. Jesus never intended for us to believe that we could achieve perfection in this life. His goal was to help us realize that we can’t — and through that realization, to drive us to seek God with all our heart, to depend on His mercy and forgiveness. Jesus knows that we cannot be perfect. But He wants those of us who call ourselves His disciples *to desire* to be such people — even though we know we will never fully attain it in this reality.

THEY LOWERED THE STANDARD

5. Let's return now to the second category, where I said that Jesus contrasts His vision of righteousness with that of the Pharisees.

Unlike Jesus, the Pharisees convinced the people that they could perfectly fulfill God's righteousness — what Jesus later calls "the leaven of the Pharisees."

5.1. And how did they do that? By *lowering* God's standard of righteousness. They persuaded themselves — and then the nation — that God's favor could be earned.

5.2. Personally, I believe that the Pharisaic movement was simply one faction¹ within a universal religious mindset that has existed in this reality since the beginning of time. Throughout history, every religious system — no matter its name — has taught, in one form or another, that human beings can earn God's favor, gain entrance into heaven, or secure eternal life — the kingdom of God. And how, according to them, can one achieve this? Each movement teaches its followers through oral traditions and commentaries written by their elders that by following those rules and customs, they can win God's approval.

In other words, the elders of every religious order have created their own vision of righteousness and then convinced themselves — and everyone else — that it can be perfectly achieved.

JESUS ENTERS THE SCENE

6. (**Matthew 5:17–20**) *Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever nullifies one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

6.1. I've often asked myself: why did Jesus feel the need to begin with, "Do not think..."? Most likely because the people had already begun drawing false conclusions. They were confused. Jesus' teaching was unfamiliar to them. They had grown up under Pharisaic instruction, which claimed to have exclusive authority to interpret the Law of Moses. So when Jesus came preaching something that didn't sound like their rabbis, they assumed He was bringing something new — something that contradicted the Law.²

6.2. Understanding their thoughts, Jesus tells them: *"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill."*

In other words, Jesus is saying, *"Don't be alarmed — everything I am teaching is fully consistent with the Law of Moses. It is the Pharisees who have distorted it to suit their own preferences. I have come*

¹ By "factions," I mean all worldly religious institutions that have arisen throughout human history. This includes not only Christian denominations but also Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity as a whole — for all of them contain factions (brotherhoods) that uphold their own sacred writings and, believing they interpret them best, have convinced themselves and their communities that God's righteousness can be earned through their own vision of righteousness.

² Sermon 31, § 1.-2.2. — The Confused Disciples of John the Baptist

to restore its original meaning — the very Law God gave to Moses and to His people, that they might live by it if they truly desire to be His people.”

COMPLETELY THE SAME

7. With that in mind, when we read the Ten Commandments and the other moral laws given through Moses, we realize that, in their essence and intent, they are the same as the commands of Jesus. Let me give you a few examples:

1. **(Exodus 20:13–17)** You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.
2. **(Exodus 21:18–19)** If men quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist, and he does not die but remains in bed — if he gets up and walks around outside on his staff, then the one who struck him shall go unpunished; he shall only pay for the loss of his time and ensure he is completely healed.
3. **(Exodus 23:1–9)** You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. You shall not follow the crowd in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice; nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute. If you come upon your enemy's ox or donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him — you shall surely help him with it. You shall not pervert the justice due to your needy brother. Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty. You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just. You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you also were strangers in the land of Egypt.

7.1. In these verses, we see that God gave Israel a vision of righteousness that was impossible to fully keep. Of course, He gave it in a specific time and context — one that applied to them then.

7.2. Some of those laws are difficult for us to grasp today. Why? Because we now live in a far more civilized society than they did. As I've mentioned before, the world before Christ's coming was a harsh and merciless place. Barbaric practices were common — slavery, polygamy³; women were left completely unprotected in society; some nations even sacrificed their own children to pagan gods; there was bestiality⁴ and countless other forms of corruption.

³ Polygamy — a marital custom widespread in many parts of the world that allows marriage to multiple spouses.

There are two forms: polyandry (when a woman has several husbands, as in Tibet or among the Eskimos) and polygyny (when a man has several wives).

⁴ Zoophilia or sodomy — a sexual behavior disorder in which sexual arousal or acts are directed toward animals; it is one of the oldest recorded perversions.

7.3. Their everyday life, therefore, is often beyond our comprehension. They lived in a world utterly different from ours. So when God gave Israel His vision of righteousness, it naturally created in them a sense that it was impossible to fulfill — and indeed, it was impossible to keep perfectly.

7.4. This is why I believe that the commands of Jesus and the Law of Moses are, in their essence, *completely the same* — both are expressions of God's holy nature.

This means that every Israelite then — just as in Jesus' time — was meant, through God's vision of righteousness, to come to the realization of how holy God truly is and how sinful and unholy they themselves were.

And once they understood that, they would cry out for mercy — asking God to forgive and transform them from within, to become people who genuinely desire to live according to His will and His vision of righteousness.

YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID TO THE ANCIENTS

8. Let us recall — what exactly happened in the Pharisaic era?

As I've already said, they distorted and lowered the standard of God's righteousness. To prove that, let's look together at **(Matthew 5:21, 27, and 43)** *You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not murder,' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'*

8.1. In these verses, Jesus begins each statement with the words, *"You have heard that it was said to the ancients..."* Who are these "ancients"? Were they the Israelites who stood at Mount Sinai and received the Ten Commandments? Or were they the "ancients" — the long Pharisaic tradition that, for centuries, dominated Jewish religious life?

8.2. When we read the Law of Moses carefully, it becomes clear that the "tradition of the ancients" stands in direct opposition to what Moses taught the people.

That's why I believe the "ancients" Jesus refers to are the Pharisees and their predecessors — the religious teachers who relied on oral tradition rather than Scripture itself.

Through these words, I believe Jesus is urging His listeners to open the Scriptures for themselves and test whether Pharisaic teaching truly aligns with what Moses wrote.

8.3. And we will do just that — we will follow Jesus' invitation and compare the statements ourselves.

THE TRADITION OF THE ANCIENTS AND THE LAW OF MOSES

9. Let's begin with "Murder and love for one's neighbor."

Read Matthew 5:21–24 carefully.

Here, Jesus takes a position radically different from that of the Sanhedrin — the supreme court of all Jews in His day. The members of the Sanhedrin believed they had the right to stone those they declared false prophets, adulterers, or thieves — in short, anyone they labeled as enemies of Yahweh. But did they truly have that right? In the end — no.

Why not? Because their concept of righteousness was corrupt. In other words, when they judged others through the lens of their distorted standard of righteousness, deciding who deserved punishment and who did not, their judgments were unjust in the eyes of God.

9.1. In the following paragraphs, I will try to show from Scripture why this is true.

9.1.1. In **(Exodus 20:16)** we read, **You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**

Yet were not the Pharisees and priests themselves guilty of bearing false witness countless times — against Jesus and against His apostles — just to silence the preaching of the Gospel?⁵

Weren't those who were supposed to be righteous judges — including Saul himself — guilty of refusing to listen to Stephen's defense? Instead of hearing him, they stoned him to death.

Why? Because he stood against their vision of righteousness.

While Stephen cried out, *"Lord, do not hold this sin against them,"* they gnashed their teeth and shouted, *"Kill him! Stone him!"*⁶

In short, the very leaders who were meant to represent justice violated, time and again, God's clear command: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

9.2. Likewise, when we examine the Mosaic Law — especially Exodus 21:12–26 — which deals directly with acts of violence and justice, we see that God required His people to practice mercy and fairness in their judgments.

Jesus, knowing the true heart of the Law, explains to His people how justice will be carried out when He reigns as King over His kingdom.

Jesus' vision of righteousness says: *"When I become King in Israel, if you even remain angry with your brother, if you sow seeds of slander, gossip, mockery, or use your authority for selfish gain — under the Law of Moses, you will be judged."*⁷

9.3. Now continue by reading Exodus 20:17; 21:18–19; 22:4, 6–7, 24–25; and 23:6–9.

These passages show that God valued the relationships among His people even more than the sacrifices they offered.

He demanded that His people live in harmony with one another — that they act justly, forgive freely, and show mercy.

Knowing this, Jesus tells His people: "The Pharisees teach you that if you bring your offering to the altar, you are automatically right with God. You are not! Go first and be reconciled with your brother — then come and offer your gift. That is worth a thousand sacrifices in God's eyes."

9.4. Next — "Hate your enemy."

Read Matthew 5:43–45.

Here we see an even sharper contrast between Jesus' vision of righteousness and that of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees taught the people to hate their enemies; Jesus teaches them to love them.

⁵ Matthew 26:59-61; Luke 23:2; Acts 6:11-13; 5:27-28, 40

⁶ Acts 7:54-50

⁷ Matthew 5:23-24 — Jesus Tells Them What Is More Important in the Eyes of Yahweh

9.5. In the “command of the ancients” (see § 8.2.), we see that the Pharisees did indeed preach love — but only toward their own.

Who was a “neighbor” to a Pharisee? Did they love every Jew? No. They “loved” — that is, they promoted the welfare of — only those within their movement.

They looked down on everyone else. They placed heavy burdens on ordinary people, mocked the outcasts, and paraded their self-righteousness. Mercy had no place in their world.

And because Jesus knew that even their so-called “love of neighbor” fell short of God’s true command, He takes it a step further and exposes the full height of God’s standard: He goes straight to the heart of their hatred for enemies and tells the people — if you wish to inherit the kingdom of God, you must love your enemies.

9.6. So, let me ask — who here is the true interpreter of the Law of Moses: the “ancients” or Jesus? Let’s look at Exodus 23:1–9 together. There, we find a clear picture of how an Israelite was to treat both his fellow Israelite and even his enemy.

When we read the passage, we realize that God’s vision of righteousness, in its context, is identical to Jesus’ — nowhere in the Law of Moses does God command His people to hate their enemies.

Quite the opposite: He calls them to do good even to those who oppose them.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IN SUCH A SITUATION?

10. As I studied the Law of Moses, I came to realize that God’s vision of love is profoundly different from our human one.

God — and therefore Jesus — does not command us to feel emotional affection for our enemies, for those who wish us harm. That would be unreasonable to expect from any human being. No, that is not the kind of love spoken of here. Notice what Moses says in Exodus 23:

“Do not join hands with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. Do not follow the crowd in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude to pervert justice. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him — you shall surely help him with it.”

10.1. Now, let’s imagine this scenario in modern terms: what if that crowd, that majority, are your childhood friends — people you are deeply attached to?

And what if you see that crowd committing evil against someone you personally dislike — perhaps someone who once wronged you — and now your friends are seeking revenge, determined to “get even”? You know the truth: the person they’re accusing isn’t guilty; someone else is. Yet your friends are ready to lie under oath, to bear false witness, just to destroy him.

10.2. Ask yourself honestly: what would you do in that situation?

Would you go along with the lie just to avoid “betraying” your group — or would you stand for justice, rise above emotion, and by an act of your will choose to love your enemy?

Why? Because you know this is what God requires of you in His vision of righteousness.

My dear friends, let me say it plainly: this is what it means to love every person.

— Unlike human love, God’s love is righteous; it is not driven by emotions that, in such moments, could easily lead us to promote injustice. —

10.3. In closing, throughout this message I've tried to show the difference between God's righteousness and worldly righteousness — and they are radically different.

I hope you are now convinced that Jesus was not introducing something “new” when He taught; rather, He was faithfully interpreting the Law of Moses.

With an open heart and a diligent mind, He studied the Scriptures and shared their true meaning with a people who, for centuries, had been poisoned by the Pharisaic vision of righteousness.

10.4. And so, I turn to us — today's Christians.

Do not allow yourselves to be poisoned by the self-made standards of righteousness promoted by your own denominations or traditions. Love your enemies. Do good to those outside your circle.

Stand against your own community when you see it promoting injustice toward others.

10.5. At the same time, examine for yourselves whether what I teach truly makes sense — and whether it aligns with the teaching of Jesus.

My desire is that you become diligent students of Scripture — not so that you might appear wiser than others, but because, from personal experience, I know how deeply Jesus' teaching will help you navigate life's challenges, its questions, its confusion, and its moments of indecision — all of which, sooner or later, become part of our present reality.