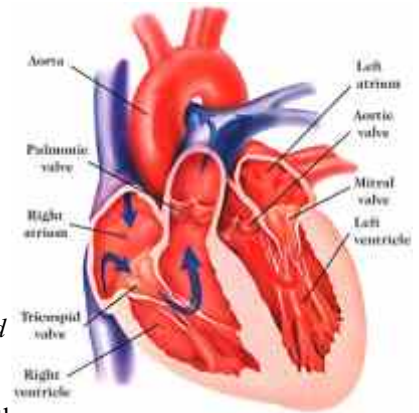


# HEART CONDITION

## MATTHEW 5:17 TO 48

### THE PROBLEM WITH PHARISEES

The Pharisees were famous for their enthusiasm for keeping the rules. Their response to God was reduced to strict observance of “the rules” - and, of course, looking for loopholes. After all, if you could get away with something without technically breaking a rule, why not do it? An attitude like that is a sure sign of “heart problems.” Remember Deuteronomy 30? God’s promise to Israel was, “If you turn back to me with *all your heart and all your soul, and obey my laws*, then I’ll bless you again.”



The “legalistic righteousness” of the Pharisees was truly awesome, and they were widely respected in the community. If there was a law to be kept, they kept it. And if they weren't sure the law was clear enough, or strict enough, they added clarifying clauses. A good Pharisee, for example, didn't just give a tenth of his normal income to the temple - he'd donate a tenth of the parsley and mint from his garden as well. On the other hand, in more weighty matters like marriage and divorce, and questions of who you were obliged to “love”, they were quick to offer escape clauses that let them off the hook.

They were keen to see God's blessing restored to Israel. And obedience to God's law was certainly one part of what Israel was called to do if they wanted to be restored. But there was something more... something to do with the “heart”... that they weren't keen on at all. On the outside, they looked great - and when Jesus said **“unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven”** (5:20), there must have been some pretty worried looks on the faces of his disciples! But as we're going to see, the extra righteousness won't be measured by even more rules. It's a matter of the heart!

### READ THROUGH MATTHEW 5:17 TO 48

1. If Israel's blessing is going to be restored, how important will it be for them to return to obedience to God's law? (See Dt 30:1-6)
2. What does Jesus say he has come to do? How will he do this?
3. The Pharisees are famous for the way they keep the law. How could the ordinary Israelites listening to Jesus possibly *surpass* the righteousness of the Pharisees? (v20)
4. Clearly, the “righteousness” required to enter the Kingdom of God is more than just a matter of keeping the law - it's a righteousness that comes from the heart. From what we saw in the Beatitudes (previous study), where can we find such righteousness? (See 5:6)

*The question is, what's this righteousness that comes from the heart going to look like? It's not enough just to argue about the wording of particular laws and find ways to excuse yourself (as the Pharisees did). Our whole intentions and motivations are in the spotlight! Read on, to see how Jesus explains what true righteousness looks like in the big issues of murder, hate and revenge, adultery, divorce, oaths, and love.*

# NOW HEAR THIS

**NOTICE that all the small sections that make up the rest of this chapter start in the same way, and have a similar structure...**

5. Jesus does an amazing thing! After quoting the Pharisee's teaching, and the words of the Old Testament ("You have heard that it was said...") Jesus goes further. We shouldn't miss the boldness of the four words Jesus says at the start of v22...

Fill them in: - \_\_\_\_\_ — \_\_\_\_\_ — \_\_\_\_\_

He says it again in verse 28, and 32, and 34, and 39, and finally 44. Why is this so significant?

6. Rather than taking away the Old Testament regulations like "Do not murder" and "Do not commit adultery," Jesus transforms them. How?

Who will know whether you're obeying these commands or not?

7. Do you think Jesus literally means what he says in verses 29 and 30? If not, how do you interpret what he actually means?

8. On the matter of divorce (v31), the Pharisees had created huge loopholes. All that was required was the right paperwork, and a man could divorce his wife at the slightest provocation. How does Jesus transform this attitude?

9. How does what Jesus says about *swearing oaths* in verses 33 to 37 fit in with what he's saying about laws, loopholes, and integrity of the heart?

For examples of how the Pharisees had twisted the laws about oaths, have a look at Matthew 23:16 to 18. Why should members of the Kingdom of God not need to use oaths?

10. If the people listening to Jesus decide to stick with Jesus, they need to know they'll be called to be distinctive nowhere more than in verses 38 to 42. The laws of retaliation are as old as history itself, and are rooted deep in our nature. Why do you think we find it so hard to take Jesus seriously at this point?

How does this teaching connect with what Jesus does at the cross?

Can you think of situations in your own life where you find it hard to put these principles into practice?

11. Verses 43 to 48 offer more of the same medicine. Again, Jesus is setting out the way of radical repentance for Israel.

How have the teachers of the law modified God's original command? (v43)

How does Jesus reverse their teaching? How will this distinguish his followers from the rest of the world?

How does Jesus demonstrate this principle? (Read Romans 5:10).

Have you ever put this teaching into practice? Why, or why not?

For Israel, turning back to God at this point is a matter of life and death. Jesus is the one who has been sent to baptise with both the Spirit (enabling righteousness from the heart) and with the fire of judgement. The heartless religion of the Pharisees is no substitute for an Israel that wants to serve God from the heart, and pursue a righteousness that's more than just skin deep. We need to guard against making exactly the same mistake. It's easy to be self-satisfied, and go through the motions of religion, without really desiring a righteous heart. It's easy to build an impressive outward religion, and still be far away from God.

How can we safeguard ourselves against these things?