For example under Christ, saying nasty and unjust things, losing your temper when you speak, is now the punishable offense.

This sets a standard well above the old commandment, "You shall not commit murder" (Exo 20:13).

Now the commandment is that you shall not be angry with your brother without cause (Matt 5:21).

Under the new standard, Christ controls attitudes and feelings of the heart rather than physical acts (anger rather than murder, lust rather than adultery).

This new standard requires one to work on trust, love, and peace, not on legal rights and processes (divorce certificates, cleverly worded vows, lawsuits).

So the "I say to you..." boils down to this: Christ’s followers must, by his power, change their hearts to a heart like His (Rom 12:1-3; Eph 3:14-20).

THE OLD LAW FELL SHORT

Moses, in the law he gave, did not fully address the condition of the heart.

Of course God has always looked on the heart rather than the outward appearance (1Sm 16:7). Matters of the heart always ranked above observances.

So, for example, Jesus commended the Pharisees for tithing even their kitchen herbs, but he condemned them under the same law for their lack of justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

They looked squeaky clean on the outside but were corrupt in the heart (Mtt 23:23-25).

Even the law condemned this lack of heart, yet to some extent made concessions to it.

A notable example was the permission Moses gave for men to divorce their wives (Mtt 19:1-9). The law of Christ and his kingdom makes no such concessions.

So if we want to follow Jesus, we are going to have to yield our hearts to him and through him subject our hearts to a standard far higher than the old law. We must let him help us make our hearts entirely new and true.

DEEP THOUGHT

These questions are for you to think about and discuss. Other parts of this lesson may help you with the answers.

1. Is it always wrong to be angry? Is there such a thing as "righteous anger"? If we have cause to be angry, how should we deal with that anger and express it?

2. Because Jesus talks about the Old Testament practice of bringing offerings to the altar, does this mean that the teaching in Matt 5:21-26 is only for Old Testament people?

3. What sort of concessions should we make to people who want to sue or charge us at law? (Jesus talks about this not only in verse 25, but also verses 40-41).

4. What is the underlying reason for this attitude of peace, reconciliation, and withholding of anger, against our adversaries?

TRY THESE...

1. How many different words can you find in Matthew 5 that contain "oo" (double-o)?

2. In which verse of Matthew 5 do you find each word below? Also decide whether the action, in that context, is considered good or bad.

REVILE
REJOICE
REMEMBER
AGREE/BEFRIEND
DESTROY/ABOLISH
ANGRY
SLAP
RECONCILED