

## Reading & Preparation Packet for September 30, 2012 High Expectations

*“We looked at pictures of all the best pole-vaulters from around the world. We took the best parts of them, and we created a person that never existed. We then started to work toward being such a person.”*

*—Sergei Bubka, 1988 Olympic Gold Medalist*

### MONDAY STUDY

#### Introduction

“Nobody’s perfect!” “Practice makes perfect!” So which is it? We live our lives in this dichotomy— trying to achieve the impossible. We either set the bar too low in libertarianism or we set the bar too high with legalism. Where is the balance? This lesson will help us understand how setting our sights on Jesus gives us the perfect mix of a high standard and greater grace. He is the both the giver and fulfiller of the law, demanding perfection and yet providing it on our behalf.

#### 1. Affirm Scripture’s Authority

*Read Matthew 5:17-19 and then try to answer the following questions.*

- In verse 17, do you think Jesus was correcting an attitude He had heard expressed by the disciples?
- If so, why were the disciples assuming something about Jesus that was untrue?
- In what way does this passage give you confidence in the accuracy of the Bible as we have it today?
- How did Jesus fulfill the laws? The prophets?
- Both the negative— “Whoever breaks one of these commands”; and the positive—”Whoever practices,” contain the element of teaching others to do the same thing. Can you truly be considered great in the kingdom of heaven if you are ONLY practicing these commands, without teaching them to others?
- What implications does this have for you in your role as a student, parent, employee, or Church member?
- The people in Jesus’ day were mostly reliant on the scribes and Pharisees to tell them what God wanted them to do. The problem was that the scribes and Pharisees were often wrong. Where do you get your information from about who God is or what He wants you to do--from a book? A teacher? A pastor? How can you be sure that teaching is right? How important is it to verify your source?

**There were Three Kinds of Old Testament Law:** Below is a summary of the three kinds:

- A. Moral Law** reveals the nature and will of God and it still applies today. As we saw with the civil laws, the teachers of the law added interpretations and traditions that became as important as the original law in the daily lives of the people. Jesus obeyed the moral laws completely but did not follow the traditions added by men.
  - B. Civil Laws** were specifically for the people of Israel while they lived in their land. Over time, the teachers of the law added interpretations and traditions to the civil laws. By Jesus’ time these traditions were as important as, or more important than, the actual law in the daily lives of people.
  - C. Ceremonial laws** included the elaborate system of sacrifices as well as the instructions for anointing the priests.
- In Jesus’ ministry, he either RAISED expectations for obeying the law, REINTERPRETED understanding of the law, or REFUTED improper application of the law.

## TUESDAY STUDY

### 2. Rise Above Mediocrity

*Read Matthew 5:20,48 and try to answer the following questions.*

- How do you think the disciples reacted when they heard that they were to be more righteous than the Pharisees?
- Based on this, who were the disciples NOT to look at for an example of righteousness?
- Who was to be their example of perfection?
- Had you been part of that group that day, would you feel challenged or defeated? Why?
- Do you think you are setting the bar high enough when you do that?
- Jesus was perfect because he fulfilled the law—how are we to attain perfection?
- How is this understanding different from how we think of “perfect” today?
- How can we strive to be “complete” rather than “flawless?”
- How do you evaluate when someone is especially “holy”? How do you judge when someone is especially bad?
- Is the idea of major and minor sins a biblical concept? How can you raise the bar for you in a way that is healthy spiritually?

**Summarize:** In verse 20 Jesus said something that must have been hard for the disciples to believe. The scribes and Pharisees made a career out of finding new ways to be declared righteous. And Jesus was saying that the disciples’ righteousness had to surpass that? Impossible! But Jesus wasn’t talking about quantity here; he was talking about quality. The Pharisees were misdirected in their quest for perfection. They were trying to be outwardly perfect, forgetting that God looks at the heart. The standard for the quality of our perfection is God Himself. We were made in his image (Gen. 1:26) and are being made into his likeness (Phil. 3:21, Rom. 8:29). Only an imputed righteousness from Christ will satisfy God’s standard.

## WEDNESDAY STUDY

### 3. Go Beyond Superficiality

*Read Matthew 5:21-22,27-28,31-34a,38-39,43-44 and then try to answer the following questions.*

- How would you summarize the main idea expressed in these six passages?
- What is the consistent train of thought in these five passages?
- Does this teaching suggest that if you think of sinning, you might as well go ahead and do it because you’re already guilty? Why or why not?
- Does it seem strange that this teaching comes so soon after Jesus told His disciples He had not come to abolish but to fulfill it? Why or why not?
- How do we not just obey outwardly, but to keep a pure heart? How do we evaluate our hearts and have right motives?
- How are you personally keeping the spirit of the law? Are you legalistic in checking off good behavior or are you going deeper? Knowing that you are a sinner, incapable of keeping the whole law, does this make you more compassionate? How can you be more dependent on God?
- When someone begins a sentence with “Forget everything you’ve ever heard about...” and then proceeds to tell you something that is contrary to everything you’ve ever heard, how do you decide whether to listen to him?

**Summarize:** Jesus is not reuting the law, but of the Pharisaical interpretation of the law. There is a big difference. Every time Jesus uses the phrase “You have heard that it was said” he is talking about the traditional teaching on the law, not the law itself. It is also important to note that when Jesus says, “but I tell you,” he is identifying himself as having a superior authority to the Pharisees.

## **THURSDAY – SATURDAY**

Read through the following articles in preparation for Pastor Jim's Preaching and Teaching.

1. Divorce in the First Century;
2. Perfect: A Word Study;
3. Raca, The Meaning;
4. The Righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees;
5. You Have Heard It Said;

**SUNDAY – SEPTEMBER 30<sup>th</sup> Be Ready To Really Grow in God's Word**