

# Trinity VI

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Preacher: Seminarian Ian Jarrells

[ 0 : 00 ] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight. O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Please be seated. When I was in elementary school, I had a classmate who would get into trouble every now and then.

And there is one particular instance that I remember quite well. At the end of the day, we were at our desks, and my friend was mouthing back to the teacher. It was quite obvious that the two of them were butting heads.

To try and settle the situation, my teacher told him to put his head down. So, after hearing that, he promptly gets on the ground and puts his head down to the floor.

Needless to say, he ended up getting sent to the office. On the one hand, you could say that he followed the letter of the instructions. He did what the teacher told him to do, quite exactly.

[ 1 : 02 ] On the other hand, my friend was not doing it the way that it was intended to be done. The spirit of the instructions were not just to put his head down, but to give him some time to calm down and to reassess the situation.

Jesus' teaching about the law is a lot like this situation. At the beginning of our gospel text, he tells all those who are listening that unless their righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, they will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

But what exactly did he mean by that? Did Jesus mean to say that since the Pharisees followed the law, they did not have the righteousness necessary to enter the kingdom of heaven? Well, not quite, because the Pharisees were known to follow the law to its heat.

They were teachers of the law. It was a requirement to know the law like the back of your hand if you wanted to become a Pharisee. But the standard that was in place at the time was the law of Moses, and the Pharisees were following the law of Moses.

So why weren't they considered righteous in the eyes of Jesus? It was because following the letter of the law does not mean that the spirit of the law is being followed.

[ 2 : 23 ] If we look back in Exodus 20 and the following chapters, we will notice that the law was not given as an arbitrary rule for the Israelites to follow. They were given to teach the Israelites how to love God as well as their neighbor.

In Leviticus, you'll notice a bunch of specific laws that seem very odd today. Laws about what happens when an ox gores another person's animal, or laws about what is supposed to happen when there are excess crops during the yielding season.

Now, while the letter of the law was about the ox or the excess yield of the land, the spirit of the law was about loving your neighbor. When Jesus talks about his followers needing to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees in order to see the kingdom of heaven, he's talking about abiding by the spirit of the law.

The commandment on murder is the example given in our gospel text for today. Most people do not commit acts of murder, so someone who is only focused on the letter of the law will find it incredibly easy to follow.

Perhaps the Israelites felt the same way. At least the rich young ruler seemed to think so. But consider this application of the sixth commandment in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 24, verses 14 through 15.

[ 3 : 45 ] Believe it or not, to violate this command would be a breach of the sixth commandment.

Because the spirit of the sixth commandment is not just about refraining from killing someone. It is about being concerned with the sanctity of all human life.

Jesus is not reinterpreting the law when he gives it on the Sermon on the Mount. Rather, he is explaining what the true and spiritual purpose of the law is, or it was, in the first place. That's why when he talks about murder, he brings up anger and slander as violations of this law. Murder happens when the anger within someone builds up through small actions of hate or of malice.

Continual anger towards a person or words of slander about them can only lead to more anger and more slander. It does not get better if we continue to do it.

[ 5 : 09 ] Instead, that person is to reconcile with their brother or their sister before they make sacrifice on the altar. The spirit of the sixth commandment is understood when a desire for reconciliation trumps a desire for hatred and for ill will.

If we think we can worship God while harboring malice towards a brother or a sister, our righteousness is not exceeding the righteousness of the Pharisees.

But if we, like Christ, seek to reconcile and forgive those who have wronged us, our righteousness does exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees.

It exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees, not because we have mustered enough of our own strength, but because we are taking the yoke of Christ, the one who has lived the spirit of the law. Let us remember who our master is. The same one who gave the law to Moses is the one who beckons us to see it as spiritual, because it is from Christ.

[ 6 : 15 ] Friends, let us look beyond the letter of the law and to the spirit of the law. For when we gaze upon what kind of character the law points to, all we shall see is Christ.

He is our righteousness, and he is our spiritual law. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.