

## **Briefing Document: Matthew Lesson 68 Our Attitude Behind Our Actions**

**AM Message-May 24, 2026**

### Executive Summary

The following briefing document synthesizes a message delivered during a Memorial Day weekend service. The central theme explores the transition from external religious behavior to internal righteousness, as taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. The transcript highlights that while humans often judge based on outward appearances, God evaluates the heart.

Key takeaways include:

- **The Internal Standard:** Jesus raises the moral bar by teaching that thoughts and attitudes are just as significant as physical actions.
- **The Fulfillment of the Law:** The message argues that Jesus did not set aside the Old Testament law but stripped away human traditions to reveal its original, pure intent.
- **Six Specific Illustrations:** The text examines six areas—murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and love—where Jesus redefines the standard from a behavioral one to an "attitudinal" one.
- **A Call to Reflection:** The document concludes that because thoughts are as important as deeds, individuals cannot be justified by their own efforts but must rely on God's grace and a transformation of the heart.

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### Memorial Day and the Cost of Sacrifice

The service opened with a tribute to those who served in the military, specifically recognizing the significance of Memorial Day.

- **Recognition of Freedom:** The speaker notes that the freedoms enjoyed—such as the freedom to speak, pursue dreams, and worship—are the result of the unsparing sacrifices made by veterans.
- **Personal Remembrances:** The transcript mentions specific individuals, including Master Sergeant Alex Harvey, who was killed in Athens, Greece, in 1986, and Bob Martinez, an attaché at the Athens embassy. These stories emphasize that the debt to heroic men and women can never be fully repaid.
- **The Biblical Definition of Love:** The sacrifice of soldiers is framed through the words of Jesus in *John 15:13*: "*Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.*"

## The Priority of the Heart

A major portion of the message focuses on the difference between how people evaluate themselves and how God evaluates them.

### External vs. Internal Values

Many people value themselves and others based on external appearances and visible religious behaviors. However, the transcript cites several scriptures to show that God is a "heart evaluator":

- *1 Samuel 16:7: "For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."*
- *Jeremiah 17:10: "I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings."*
- *1 Kings 8:39: "...then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men)."*

### The Role of External Behavior

While the heart is the priority, external behavior still matters. If a person claims to be a child of God, their outward actions serve as a representative picture of God to the world. However, these actions are only valid if they are an outgrowth of "internal righteousness."

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### Analysis of Matthew 5:21–48

The speaker identifies Matthew 5:21–48 as a critical section where Jesus interprets the Old Testament law for His followers. This section is titled "Our Attitude Behind Our Actions."

#### Raising the Standard

Jesus uses a specific teaching technique, repeating the phrase "You have heard that it was said" followed by "But I say to you." This shows He is not changing the law, but elevating it back to its original divine standard, which had been lowered by the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees.

### The Six Themes of Attitudinal Law

Jesus provides six illustrations to show that God's standard is generated by attitude:

1. **Murder and Anger:** It is not enough to avoid the physical act of murder. In God's eyes, carrying hate or anger in the heart carries the same guilt as the act itself.
2. **Adultery and Lust:** External purity is insufficient if the heart harbors unclean desires. *Matthew 5:27-28* states: "You have heard that it was said to those of old,

*'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*

3. **Divorce:** The standard for marriage is raised beyond legal paperwork. The speaker notes that Jesus teaches against divorce except for cases of sexual immorality, emphasizing the responsibility of both parties in a relationship.
4. **Oaths and Truth:** Instead of relying on various oaths to prove one is telling the truth, a person's word should be their absolute bond.
5. **Retaliation:** Rather than "an eye for an eye," the citizens of God's kingdom are told not to resist an evil person and to "turn the other cheek."
6. **Love for Enemies:** The most revolutionary thought is the command to love one's enemies, not just one's neighbors.

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### Living Under the Divine Standard

The document concludes with the realization that living by these principles is impossible through human sinful nature alone.

- **The Failure of Self-Justification:** The Jewish leaders of the time had lowered the law's standards so they could achieve their own "external" righteousness. Jesus exposes that while they appeared righteous, their hearts were full of murder, lust, and hate.
- **The Importance of Thoughts:** The message stresses that thoughts are just as important as deeds. If a person thinks an impure thought, it is as if they have committed the act in the eyes of God.
- **The Need for Grace:** Because the standard is so high—requiring a righteousness that exceeds that of the most religious people (the Pharisees)—individuals must look to God's grace. As noted in *Titus 2:11-12*: "*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age.*"