

MILE

7

## TRANSFORMED – Our Lives Renewed to be Like Christ (a DISCIPLESHIP Journey)

Mile Marker 7 ... “A Transformed Heart (Part 1) – A Righteousness from ‘Beneath the Surface’”

*“Righteousness” vs. “Hypocrisy” in Matthew*

God’s Word declares this reality of transformation to be an all-encompassing reality, not just a compartment of our lives as followers of Jesus. Our commitment to Him should infiltrate *every* part of who we are and influence *every* area of our lives. Again, to quote Dallas Willard, the goal of spiritual formation “*is to bring every element in our being, working from the inside-out, into harmony with the will of God and the Kingdom of God.*” Here, we transition from the mind to another internal aspect of who we are: **a transformed HEART**. Our transformation is not an external makeover along the lines of mere behavior modification; it’s a *total* inside-out makeover, including our hearts.

### First, a General Reflection

Before we get to a couple of specific heart-related emphases (the main focus of Mile Markers 7 and 8), it is appropriate first to step back and consider the heart more generally. Towards the end of Mile Marker 5, we identified the importance of the heart in this inside-out progression of transformation. Now is a good time to come back briefly to a few texts we highlighted then. As you re-read them, pay attention to the role of the HEART. **RE-READ Proverbs 4:23; Mark 7:20-23 and Luke 6:43-45.** When God’s Word uses such “HEART” language, it refers to our “**basic control panel.**” It is the central command center from where our motivations, desires, attitudes, feelings and values emerge; Biblically, it’s also where our thoughts happen (what we call “the mind” – see MM6) and where our choices are made (what we call “the will”). Even more, what is happening internally (good or bad) becomes *determinative* for what will be evident externally. That’s why it is also necessary for the Spirit’s true work of transformation to renovate and renew us on these levels ... from within.

In light of that, there are really many different heart characteristics that come about as the result of this transformation. It’s **a heart of compassion** – we externally show love to those who need it, moved by a heart of care and concern. It’s **a gracious and merciful heart** – we externally extend such things to others from within. It’s **an honest heart** – we externally confess our shortcomings and failures from a genuine heart that recognizes our sinfulness. It’s **a generous and giving heart** – we open our hands and lives for others motivated by a heart to do so. It’s **a faithful heart** – we are devoted to God and His will as well as to others because it’s what our hearts desire.

*What changes when we see such characteristics in an “inside-out” way?*

*What are some other ways that a transformed and Christ-like heart becomes the basis for what our lives of faith express (e.g. think the fruit of the Spirit)?*

## **A Specific Emphasis – Righteousness from “Beneath the Surface”**

For this mile marker, we focus on the basic theme of **RIGHTEOUSNESS**. Paul frequently uses the word to talk about our “right standing/relationship” with God; it’s what He declares to be true about our status with Him through our faith in Christ. There’s another way God’s Word can speak about this idea (for example, in the OT, in Matthew’s Gospel as well as some other places in the NT): **“righteousness” as a way of living that conforms to the right standard, specifically God’s standard.** In other words, *a RIGHTEOUS life is one lived according to what is right in His eyes.* Now, while that may *seem* to be an external type of focus (what we *do*), Jesus consistently helps us think deeper ... to get to the HEART of the matter.

This certainly fits with our overall emphasis on the heart (*e.g.* remember the texts read earlier!). We can only truly exhibit real righteousness externally when it’s flowing from an internal reality. Of course, such a focus on a deeper-level righteousness can be a challenge for us, especially considering how obsessed our culture conditions us to be with the external appearance of things – the surface.

***In general (i.e. in a non-spiritual sense), what pieces of evidence would you identify to highlight our culture’s obsession with external appearances?***

This broader fixation on the external appearances somehow becomes even more prevalent when it comes to spiritual things. In fact, *especially when it comes to “religion,”* it is easy for us to be consumed with such externals.

***What are some ways where you see this pre-occupation with external appearances on display even when it comes to a life of faith in Christ?***

***Why do you think it is so easy spiritually to become focused on the external appearances?***

Unfortunately, being in Christ doesn’t exempt us from this danger. Without a doubt, even in Him, we are susceptible to this very real and very dangerous spiritual sickness – a right external appearance that is masking a much different, much more corrupt internal heart reality. As we’ll see from the Gospel of Matthew, it’s the target of Jesus’ most ruthless and consistent critique. It’s also what He challenges within us as He calls us to a real, genuine righteousness that comes from beneath the surface – indeed, a *deeper* righteousness that comes from the heart.

## The Wrong Approach – Jesus’ Teaching on HYPOCRISY in Matthew

Before we focus on the right approach (what it *should* look like), let’s spend some time on Jesus’ diagnosis of this spiritual sickness – in a word, it’s the wrong approach He calls “HYPOCRISY.”

*Initially, how would you define HYPOCRISY?*

Most frequently, we use this nasty label (it’s *always* a loaded word) to refer to some kind of INCONSISTENCY. More often than not, it’s used to describe how people talk one way when their actions speak another message – an inconsistency between speech and actions. As much of a problem as that can be, when Jesus uses the word in Matthew, He does so to highlight another kind of inconsistency. Let’s check it out ...

**READ the following texts from Matthew 6:1-6 and 16-18 (note the label “hypocrites” in vv. 2, 5 and 16); Matthew 7:1-5 (v. 5); 15:1-9 (v. 7); 22:18 and 23:1-36 (especially vv. 13, 15, 23, 25, 27 and 29).**

*Based on how the word appears in Matthew’s Gospel, what seems to be Jesus’ target when labeling something as HYPOCRISY?*

Originally, the Greek word referred to the realm of drama and theater. (*Side note: our English word is actually rooted in the very Greek word used here in Matthew’s Gospel.*) In the 1<sup>st</sup> century world, a “HYPOCRITE” was an actor or pretender – one who played a role in the telling of a story; often, a mask would even be worn to help portray the right appearance. There was no nasty connotation when used in this realm ... it was what an actor was supposed to do. And yet, it was much different when Jesus used this word to label the religious leaders. In essence, He called them spiritual actors, even worse “pretenders.” They put on the religious façade of piety and righteousness to show the right impression. All the while, beneath the surface was a much different heart reality.

The words from Matthew 23:25-28 best capture the reality of HYPOCRISY as Jesus critiques it – **it’s an inconsistency between an outward appearance (externals) that gives one impression and a heart reality (internals) that is much different.** Let’s make sure we see the problem clearly: it’s entirely possible – and even easy – for us spiritually to project the right appearance, but have hearts that are far away from where they need to be. It’s a very real and very dangerous spiritual sickness.

Reflect on the following statement based on the theme of hypocrisy in Matthew 23 ...

“Of all the people that Jesus came across in His life, the “hypocrites” are the ones who consistently receive His harshest rebuke. It’s a reminder that God is a God who looks on the heart – His x-ray vision sees right through our masks. Perhaps we would do well to hear Jesus’ message in Matthew: the road to Hell is filled with those who appear right.”

***How does this theme challenge you personally on a heart level?***

## The Right Approach – Jesus’ Teaching on REAL RIGHTEOUSNESS in Matthew

Jesus expressed consistent frustration with those who were going through the external motions without the right heart. What Jesus wanted was externals flowing from what was truly right internally. He wanted a kind of righteousness that didn’t just give the right appearance of a life right with God, but one that came from a *HEART* that was truly right with God too!

It’s the focus of Matthew 5:17-48, part of “The Sermon on the Mount.” **READ Matthew 5:17-20.**

Given what we know about the 1<sup>st</sup> century reputation of the Jewish leaders, Jesus’ words would have sounded impossible: “*a righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law?!*” No worries, just “be smarter than Einstein” or “be a better cook than the Pioneer Woman.” That might be how the people would have responded to His words. No biggie, right☺?! We begin to think that the expectation is that we will go beyond the most meticulous obedience possible. That is true ... just maybe in a different way than we typically think.

Usually, our tendency is to think about a **QUANTITY of righteousness** – we will obey more commands than they did and do more things than they did. But, maybe the point is less about QUANTITY and more about **QUALITY**. It’s not about more surface-level right actions, but a kind of right living that goes deeper ... to the heart of the matter. We don’t want to minimize the challenge of these words (after all, see Matthew 5:48!); and yet, we want to make sure that we allow Jesus to challenge us in the way He intended to challenge us – towards the right goal!

In 5:21-48, Jesus goes directly to the level of the heart (**if you feel like over-achieving, READ Matthew 5:21-48**). These six instances – “test cases” – all highlight a deeper heart-level. In 5:21-26 and 27-30, it’s not just external behaviors that are the problem (*i.e.* murder and adultery), but the heart-level issues (*i.e.* anger and lust). In 5:31-32, it’s not just accepting the existence of the external command on divorce (what *can* be an easy out), but pursuing the right heart-level faithfulness. In 5:33-37, it’s about choosing to have a heart of integrity, not hiding behind oaths and vows. In 5:38-42, it’s about having a heart to “turn the other cheek” instead of seeking direct retaliation. In 5:43-48, instead of settling for loving those who are easy to love, it’s having a heart to love even enemies.

In one way or another, each of these “test cases” offers the same basic challenge: **real, genuine righteousness goes beyond the surface requirement to address the heart behind it all.**

***As you reflect on these words from Jesus, what are some specific categories in which you need to strive for this kind of deeper, heart-level righteousness that goes beyond just the level of externals?***

***Instead of just modifying external actions, what are some ways we can practically address what is “beneath the surface” – the heart of the matter (as one writer puts it, how can we major in “spiritual cardiology, not just dermatology”)?***