

LESSON 6: JESUS AND THE LAW

Matthew 5:17-20

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** Today we continue our study of the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher that ever lived...Jesus' sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7; cf. Lk. 6:20-38; 11 & 12).
2. Recall the background for the sermon, Matt. 4:17.
3. **3** In the first part of this sermon Jesus described the citizens of His kingdom (Ex. 6:7; 19:5-6; 1 Pet. 2:9-10):

A. Their character (radically different from the world, an absolute and enduring requirement):

- ☛ *"poor in spirit"*
- ☛ *"meek"*
- ☛ *"merciful"*
- ☛ *And, to top those off, we'll be persecuted by the world "for righteousness sake"!*
- ☛ *"mourn"*
- ☛ *"hunger and thirst for righteousness"*
- ☛ *"peacemakers"*

B. **4** They must put that character to work in the world!

(1) **** Salt of the earth:**

- ☛ **Important, valuable and essential** (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 4:24; Gal. 2:20),
- ☛ **Preserves from decay** (Jn. 17:15-16; 1 Jn. 2:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:10; Gen. 18:16-33; Prov. 14:34),
- ☛ **Produces its effect without fanfare** (Titus 3:1-2; Matt. 6:1, 5, 16; 1 Pet. 3:1-4),
- ☛ **Makes people thirsty** (John 4:13-14),
- ☛ ****Stabilizing influence** (1 Cor. 13:4-5; Matt. 5:9; Rom. 12:16; Phil. 2:3-4),
- ☛ **Serves as an irritant** (Rom. 12:2; 1 Pet. 4:3-4; Eph. 5:11),
- ☛ **Presence or absence cannot be ignored** (e.g., Barnabas, Acts 4:36 vs. Alexander the coppersmith, 2 Tim. 4:14).

(a) **** The corrupted disciple is absolutely worthless to the Lord or himself!** (5:13b)

(b) Thus, we need to constantly examine our "saltiness" and act accordingly (Phil. 1:27; 1 Pet. 1:13-16; 2:11-12; 3:4; 2 Pet. 3:11).

(2) **** Light of the world:**

- ☛ **Removes darkness, makes things visible** (1 Jn. 2:11; Jn. 12:35-36; Jn. 1:7-9; Matt. 28:18; Col. 3:17; Titus 2:6-8; 2 Cor. 4:4; Mk. 16:15; Phil. 2:15),
- ☛ **Guides us** (1 Jn. 1:7; 2 Jn. 4; 3 Jn. 4; Lk. 1:79; Matt. 17:5; Heb. 1:1-2; 10:29; Psalms 18:28; 119:105; Prov. 6:23; Jer. 10:23; Prov. 14:12; 3:5-7; Col. 2:8 [NASV] Acts 17:11; 1 Pet. 4:11),
- ☛ **Is necessary for life** (Jn. 1:4-5; 8:12; Jn. 1:9; 1 Thess. 5:5-8).

****We cannot think for a moment we can fade into the background! Why light a light then cover it up? It becomes useless. So, why become a Christian if you don't reflect the light of Christ to the world? You're useless! When Jesus was in the world He**

was the light, but now He's counting on us to be the light. What an awesome privilege and responsibility! Matt. 5:16

4. **5** Jesus now corrects rumors about His view of the Law of Moses and describes the righteousness one must possess to be in His kingdom.

II. Discussion:

I. **6** Misconceptions about Christ's relationship to the Law of Moses:

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."
(Matt. 5:17)

- A. ****** "Do not think" probably implies there were rumors circulating about Jesus' teaching (i.e., that He was a radical revolutionary bent on overthrowing the existing order).

(1) Jesus had already had at least two serious "run-ins" with the scribes and Pharisees (Lk. 6:1-5, 6-11; cf. Jn. 5:16-18).

(2) The scribes and Pharisees were looked upon as the epitome of piety and religion. For example, it was a proverb among the Jews that "If only two men were to enter heaven, one would be a scribe and the other a Pharisee."

(3) So, in the eyes of the average Jew, to be at odds with the scribes and Pharisees was tantamount to being at odds with the law of God!

- B. Thus, He had been accused of wanting to "destroy" the law.

(1) The rumor mill must have been quite active that His teaching was so in opposition to the Law of Moses that He was out to dissolve, demolish, overthrow, render vain, and to deprive it of success.

(2) Literally "to bring [it] to nothing" (Thayer).

- C. **7** But, the exact opposite was actually the truth!

(1) His purpose was to "fulfill" the law and the prophets.

(2) When one "fulfills" something it is not destroyed, but rather "completed" or "consummated" (Thayer).

(3) "Fulfilling" also means that even though something is not destroyed but "completed" or "consummated" it also is no longer binding or in force (e.g., fulfilling a contract; cf. Col. 2:14; Heb. 10:9-10).

"With the purpose of the Law completed, the Law could be removed without having been violated... (Gal. 3:13-14; 23-29)." (John Smith, *The Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 29-30)

8 "Till heaven and earth pass away" is another way of saying that 'the law or the prophets' shall not pass away until all are fulfilled in the minutest detail. The law shall last till the new order of things is brought into force; the prophets shall stand until their predictions become history... Everything else may change, but the word of God expressed by either 'the law' or 'the prophets' must stand until it has accomplished that which God intended... Jesus [said] that the law should remain in full force until it shall have accomplished that which God intended it to accomplish." (Boles, H. L., *The Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 131)

(4) I also want to add a BTW here: Some believe (e.g., based on Lk. 6:1-5) that since Jesus was the Son of God, He could do anything He wanted and justify it. Nothing could be further from the truth! Matt. 3:15; Heb. 6:18; 10:9 He must be true to His word!

- D. **9** How did Jesus "fulfill" the law and the prophets?

- (1) ** The law and the prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah (Christ):
- (a) There are approximately 330 prophecies concerning the Christ found in the Law and the Prophets (e.g., Deut. 18:15, 18-19; Isa. 7:14; 53:1-12; “as it is written”, e.g., Jn. 12:14 vs. Zech. 9:9).
 - (b) BTW: the fulfillment of these prophecies is one of the strongest proofs for the inspiration of the Scriptures and the Messiahship of Jesus. Remember, Jesus fulfilled around 330 prophecies. Consider the odds of Him fulfilling just eight:

“we find that the chance that any man might have lived down to the present time and fulfilled...eight prophecies is 1 in 10^{17} . That would be 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. In order to help us comprehend this staggering probability, Stoner illustrates it by supposing that ‘we take 10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir up the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that it is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man, from their day to the present time, providing they wrote them in their own wisdom.” (McDowell, J. 1972. *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, pp. 175-176)

Note: the chance of Jesus fulfilling all 330 prophecies purely by random chance is estimated to be on the order of 1 in 10^{157} . It is estimated that there are **less** atoms in the universe!
- (2) ** The very purpose of the law was to bring the Jews to Christ (Gal. 3:19, 23-25; literally “a child-leader.”).
- Gal. 3:19:** “What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.”
- Gal. 3:23-25:** “But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”
- “The *paidagogos* was not the instructor of the child; he exercised a general supervision over him and was responsible for his moral and physical well-being.” (Vine)). So, the law and the prophets gave Israel the necessary discipline to receive their Messiah.
- (3) ** The law and the prophets foretold the coming of the kingdom of God:
- (a) For example, Daniel 2:44: “...a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”
 - (b) Jesus was preaching that the fulfillment of that prophecy was now at hand (**Mk. 1:14-15**: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel.”; Mk. 9:1).
- (4) ** The law and the prophets foretold the establishment of a new and different covenant (law) for the people of God:
- (a) Foretold in the long ago that there would be a new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34).

(b) Jesus shed His blood for the New Covenant (1 Cor. 11:25) and the book of Hebrews (among others) confirms that the New Covenant is ratified and in force (Heb. 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:16-17).

(5) **10** Jesus “fulfilled” the requirements of the Law:

- (a) Perfect obedience (Heb. 10:7-9; 4:15).
- (b) Demand for justice (Gal. 3:10-14).
- (c) Demand for a perfect sacrifice (Jn. 1:29; Heb. 9:14).
- (d) Met the very purpose for which it was written (Jn. 5:39; Gal. 3:24; Jude 3).

E. **11** So then Jesus came to:

**Establish and enforce	Not to	Repudiate and deny
**Fulfill	Not to	Fill out or expound
**Accomplish	Not to	Annul

2. **12** Confirms the durative nature of God’s Word:

“For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” (Matt. 5:18)

A. ****** First, I think we fail to realize that this is one of the most jarring statements Jesus ever made, “I say to you”!

- (1) Just think how those words must have rankled the scribes and Pharisees!
- (2) Think of how the whispers must have raced through the crowd! “I say to you”!
- (3) The prophets said “thus saith the Lord” (e.g., Isa. 7:7), the apostles said “it is written” (Rom. 1:17), but Jesus said “I say unto you”! (cf. Matt. 7:29; 28:18)

******“No higher claim to an authority *strictly divine* could be advanced. For when we observe how jealously Jehovah asserts it is His exclusive prerogative to give law to men (Lev. xviii. 1-5; xix.37; xxvi.1-4, 13-16, etc.), such language as this of our Lord will appear totally unsuitable, indeed abhorrent, from any creature-lips” (Vos, 51) in (K. L. Chumbley, *The Gospel of Matthew*, pp. 93-94)

B. **13** Jesus’ point here is not, as some teach, that the “law” would never end! (1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:16-17; this is the mistake of groups like Seventh Day Adventists!).

C. Rather, His point is:

- (1) It would be easier for the universe to crumble and disintegrate than for God’s laws and prophecies to fail (always true regardless of the dispensation! 1 Pet. 1:23, 25).
- (2) The law would remain “till” it was “fulfilled.” A key word in this section is “till.” Jesus plainly identifies when the “law” would end (**Gal. 3:19, 23-25**; Jn. 17:4; 19:28, 30). The ASV renders this phrase “till all things be accomplished.”

D. So, until “all is fulfilled,” “all things be accomplished” (i.e., Jesus did all God purposed for Him as foreshadowed in the Law of Moses and spoken of by the prophets) the “law” would be as permanent as the heavens and the earth (Matt. 5:18). When Christ completed the law it ended, just as God intended (**Heb. 10:9**: “He takes away the first that He may establish the second.”).

“Everything in the Law must be fulfilled: not only its prefigurations and prophecies, but its precepts and penalty” (A. W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 23)

- (1) As He said in Lk. 16:17: *“It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.”*
 - (2) **14** Not even a “jot” or a “tittle” (Hebrew grammatical markings, similar to the dotting of an “i” or the crossing of a “t”) would pass away or be “ignorable.”
 - (a) It has been estimated there are 66,420 “jots” in the Hebrew Old Testament!
 - (b) Christ affirms every pen stroke of God’s Word is important!
 - (c) Certainly, doesn’t fit the view many “Christians” have of God and His laws today! (i.e., doting grandfather concept of God)
 - (3) There wouldn’t be one change until it was fulfilled, so regardless of what accusations were being made against Him, Jesus had the ultimate respect for the “law” (cf. Jn. 1:1).

******“Nothing revealed Christ’s respect for the Law any more than the fact He quoted it to settle virtually every important controversy between Himself and opponents such as the Pharisees, Sadducees and Satan himself. The figure of the jot and tittle was a memorable way to communicate His highest reverence for God’s word.” (K. L. Chumbley, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 94)
- E. **15** An important point to consider is that if the “law” remains then Jesus did not “fulfill” it, because He said it would remain “till all is fulfilled.”
- (1) If Jesus did **not** fulfill the law:
 - ☛ He failed His very purpose in coming to earth! **Matt. 5:17:** *“I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”*
 - ☛ He disobeyed God’s will! **Heb. 10:9-10:** *“then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ He takes away the first that He may establish the second. 10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”*
 - ☛ We are still under the Old Covenant! Heb. 10:9-10
 - ☛ We are not “sanctified”! Heb. 10:9-10
 - ☛ We had better start observing the Law in its strictest sense! (e.g., circumcision, animal sacrifices, 3 annual trips to Jerusalem (Deut. 16:16), etc., etc.)
 - (2) **16** If Jesus **did** fulfill the law:
 - ☛ He accomplished His purpose! Jn. 17:4; 19:28, 30
 - ☛ We are governed by a New Covenant! Heb. 8:6-13; 9:16-17
 - ☛ We cannot return to the old! Gal. 5:4; Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11
3. **17** Confirms the degree of respect all should have toward God’s Word:
- “Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5:19)*
- 18**“The Supreme Court is the final court of appeals in the United States. Once it has rendered its decision, the verdict is final and there are no more avenues of appeal. The Scriptures contain the authority for Christians. God’s decisions recorded therein are final and will not be reversed. It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for the smallest word, or the most insignificant marking of God’s Word to fail (Luke 16:17). God’s Word demands attention, respect, and certainly careful study. In Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus displays just such an attitude toward the Scriptures.” (John Smith, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 29)

A. **19** A person's treatment of God's Law would affect their standing in the kingdom.

******"The man who would break what he considered one of the least commandments of God under one dispensation would be proportionately disobedient under another dispensation, and hence would sustain the wrong attitude toward the authority of God." (Boles, H. L., *The Gospel According to Matthew*, pp. 131-132)

- (1) ****** Regardless of how "small" one of God's commands might seem in our estimation, we must observe it (**Lk. 16:10**: "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much."; **Jas. 2:10-11**: "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. I I For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.").
- (2) We don't have the right to break one of God's commands because it's a "minor" one (**Matt. 23:23**: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."; 1 Pet. 2:13; "speed limits"!).
- (3) **20** The real test of our discipleship is not what we claim, but what we do! **Matt. 7:21-23**; **1 Jn. 2:3-5**
- (4) We must first "do," and second "teach" (Rom. 2:21-24).

B. If we play fast and loose with even a "minor" aspect of God's law our "goosed is cooked"! ("least in the kingdom" = lost, cf. Matt. 18:6)

******"Our fidelity to God is tested as easily in little things as in great ones; rather, nothing is little where God's authority is at stake." (Boles, H. L., *The Gospel According to Matthew*, pp. 131-132)

4. **21** Reveals the righteousness which kingdom citizens must attain:

"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:20)

A. ****** Another "jarring" statement!

- (1) Think of how cutting this statement was to the scribes and Pharisees!
- (2) Another whisper would have raced through the crowd!

B. **22** Those upon whom the people looked as the very epitome of religiosity had a righteousness that was unacceptable in Christ's kingdom! See table below.

******"It is important to note that 'exceed' refers to quality, not quantity. Kingdom righteousness exceeds legalistic righteousness because it proceeds from the heart (not hypocrisy) and trusts in God (not self); it concerns itself with the spirit, as well as the letter, of the Law. It 'accepts' the full implications of the law without trying to dodge them. It recognizes that the law's domain extends beyond the actual deed to the word, and beyond the word to the thoughts and motives of the heart. Pharisaic righteousness was an outward conformity to human traditions; Christian righteousness is an inward conformity of mind and heart to the revealed will of God' (Stott, *Christ the Controversialist*, 150 in K. L. Chumbley, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 96)

23

Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees	Righteousness of Kingdom Citizens
**Contempt for sinners (Matt. 9:11; Lk. 15:2)	Compassion for sinners (Lk. 19:10; 1 Tim. 2:4)
**Ostentatious external displays & trappings (Lk. 20:45-47)	Adorning of inner man (1 Pet. 3:3-4)
**Only public (Matt. 6:5)	Public and private (Matt. 6:6; 1 Pet. 2:13).
**Proud & harsh in judging others (Lk. 18:10-14)	Humble, dependent on God (Lk. 18:13; 1 Pet. 5:5-6)
**Sectarian (Jn. 7:48-49)	Seek true unity (Eph. 4:1-6)
24 Lessen demands of the law when it conflicted with their “pet” sins (Matt. 15:4-6; 23:16-22)	Complete surrender (Lk. 9:23; Col. 3:5ff)
**Faith in obedience (Jn. 8:39; Rom. 10:2-3)	Obedience to the faith (Rom. 1:5; 16:26)
**Sought “loopholes” (Matt. 23:16-22)	No “loopholes” (Matt. 4:4; Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11)
**Elevated tradition to the level of law (Mk. 7:8-9)	Complete rejection of human tradition (1 Pet. 4:11)
**Motivated by self-glorification (Matt. 6:1ff).	Motivated by love for God and man (Matt. 22:37-40).
25 Regularly broke God’s law and taught others to do so (Matt. 5:19, 43).	Observes all, even down to the “jots” and “tittles”! (Col. 3:17)
**Hypocritical & lawless (Matt. 23:25-28; 7:21-23)	Teaching and practice in agreement (Col. 3:17; Phil. 1:27)
**Ritualistic obedience (Matt. 23:23)	Obedience from the heart (Rom. 6:17-18; 1 Sam. 16:7)

(Adapted from John Smith, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 32)

C. **26** Example: social drinking

- (1) ** Clearly any consumption of intoxicating drink is condemned by God’s Word (Prov. 23:31-32; 1 Pet. 4:3; 1:13; 5:8).
- (2) ** Yet those with the Pharisaical brand of righteousness continue to strive to justify it (e.g., 1 Tim. 5:23: use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake).
- (3) **27** Kingdom righteousness realizes the multitude of inherent dangers in such behavior (1 Pet. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:22; Matt. 5:13-16; Rom. 14:13: not to put stumbling block in brother’s way).
 - (a) ** Pharisaical righteousness says, “What’s wrong with social drinking? What I do in my private life is nobody’s business! There’s no command that says, ‘Thou shalt not drink!’”

- (b) ** Kingdom righteousness says, “What good is there in social drinking? How will this make my light shine brighter? How will this influence my children? How will this bring me closer to God?”

III. CONCLUSION: 28

1. Lord willing, next time we'll consider more Jesus has to say about the righteousness of those in the kingdom.
2. ** How about you?
 - A. ** Do you live in a way that shows you realize God's Word “endures forever” and will be our judge? Jn. 12:48
 - B. ** What of your righteousness? Is it the kind Jesus accepts?
 - C. ** Are you humbly obedient to all that God has said?
3. Invitation (Matt. 11:28-30)

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