

## Sermon notes for David: Matthew 5:17-20 A Disciple's Heart...Honors God's Law

After Jesus coaches his followers in their identity and mission (Matthew 5:13-16) these next verses begin the explanation of the radical righteousness that flows from a heart completely transformed by the power of the gospel (Matthew 5:17-48)

*“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

The “iota” and “dot” (Greek) are loosely translated from “jot” and “tittle” (Hebrew)



### Tracy's notes for RCF DNA Groups:

In today's lesson we will unpack Matthew 5:17-20, a transition section in the SOTM. In these verses Jesus declares the continuing authority of the Old Testament laws. Immediately following this, Jesus teaches six commands, emphasizing the radical righteousness that God requires from our heart.

The Old Testament Laws, found in the first five books of the Bible, are God's gracious instructions to man. They explain “how” His people are to live. They clearly lay out His standards, so that we know what is expected of us. **A disciple's heart honors God's law.**

Q? Can you name three federal or state laws that you tend to “fudge” on? Why do you? Share your answers with your group.

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***heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:17-20***

In these verses Jesus is saying; God’s moral laws will remain in effect until he returns and makes everything new. In the meantime, as citizens of God’s Kingdom you are to live in accordance with his laws. God is perfect and he never changes, therefore his standards are perfect and never change. To disregard God through disobedience, or teaching others to, is an offense to God. God is not content with merely external obedience. He requires that your obedience flow from a heart with pure motives.

(Moral laws are different from the legal and ceremonial laws, which are no longer binding.)

In Mathew 23:23-27 we see the tendency of man’s heart to reframe God’s commands in an attempt to ease a guilty conscience. These men performed outward acts of obedience, while their heart remained rebellious. By doing this, they were dishonoring God’s laws.

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”*

**Nurture: Listen to each other’s hearts.**

1. Truthfully, in what situation have you found God’s commands burdensome?
2. Describe a scenario where you obeyed God outwardly but inside you were kicking and screaming?
3. In what area of your life do you tend to disregard God’s command’s and justify your behavior?

**Action: Pray together.**

If you have areas in your life where you are "technically" obeying God but your heart is not honoring his laws, share them with your group. Ask the Holy Spirit to change your heart by showing you God's goodness. Ask the Spirit to show you how God's way is better. Thank Jesus for perfectly obeying God's law on your behalf. Thank Jesus that he lovingly declared, "not my will, but yours be done" and went to the cross in your place. Praise Jesus because he is returning to set up his eternal kingdom where joyful obedience will flow from every citizen.

If you aren't a fan of God's laws and have a hard time believing that they are good and best, be honest and share that with your group. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what it is about God's character that you don't believe or understand? Ask the Spirit to help you see why God's instructions for life are the best. Thank Jesus for his example of total obedience to God's law. Thank Jesus for his gracious gift of salvation he paid for on the cross. Praise God because one day everyone who loves and honors him will be with him for eternity.

#### **NOTES FROM ESV GOSPEL TRANSFORMATION BIBLE**

The Mosaic Law is God's truthful, eternal word that continues to stand as a witness to his character and his glorious, redemptive work among his people (Psalm 19:7-11; Romans 7:12.) This does not mean, however, that it is to be observed by God's people after Jesus' coming in the same way that it was observed among his people before Jesus came. When Jesus says that he came to "fulfill" the Law and the Prophets, he means that both the Law and the Prophets (euphemism for the entire OT) pointed to his teaching. They brought the purposes of God to a certain point in the Story of God's redemptive work among his people, and Jesus' teaching then picked up their message and completed it.

The Mosaic Law was intended to govern Israelite society during the time when it functioned as a nation-state. It had to include legislation for governing all those who lived within the boundaries of political Israel, whether their hearts had been transformed by God or not, and thus whether they were part of the people of God or not (Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38.) So, for example, on the question of divorce, the Mosaic law had to make a provision for people whose hearts were hard and were unconcerned about God's original purposes for marriage (Matthew 19:8.)

In contrast, the Sermon on the Mount shows what the eternal principles that undergird the Mosaic Law look like in a society of people who have turned away from the attractions of sin and have decided to follow Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount then, does not describe how governments should seek to establish a just society, but how believers in Jesus Christ should live within a sinful world.

The “scribes and Pharisees” encounter severe criticism here from Jesus throughout Matthew’s Gospel. Their basic problem lies in the contradiction between their hearts and their outward professions and acts of piety (Matthew 15:8, 23:3-7.) This contradiction was revealed especially in their neglect of the law’s fundamental concern with justice, mercy, and faithfulness in favor of demonstrating to others their superior expertise in the law’s minutia (Matthew 23:23.)

Exceeding the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, then, is a matter of obeying God from a fundamentally changed heart. This is a heart that reaches beyond the legalistic boundaries of the law to its compassionate purposes, while simultaneously recognizing its own spiritual poverty apart from God’s mercy (Matthew 5:3, 6-7.)

### HUGHES

Then in verses 17-20 Jesus gives a summary description of the radical righteousness of the kingdom, also introducing six great examples of how this righteousness is in continuity with the Old Testament Law. Each example is introduced with a variation of Christ’s formula, “You have heard that it was said ... but I tell you...” (see vv. 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43).

I think it is significant that these three sections of the sermon are increasingly personal. In the Beatitudes Christ speaks in the third person: “Blessed are the ...” But in the final Beatitude and in the metaphors he switches to the second person: “Blessed are you . . . you are the salt. . . you are the light.” Then in the applications that follow, he switches to the first person: “But I tell you. . . .”

No scribe or rabbi had ever spoken like this. They typically spoke in the second or third person. Jesus’ radical style of address concerning radical righteousness was, “I tell you.” This was radically personal and authoritative. In verses 17-20 we will see Jesus’ highly personal statement of the radical righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount as it relates to the Old Testament Law. Verses 17, 18 tell us of the radical righteousness of Christ and the Law, verses 19, 20 of the radical righteousness of Christians and the Law. We will consider the radicalness of our call – a call to strive for radical righteousness in a dark and decaying world.

“He only restored it [the Law] to its integrity by maintaining and purifying it when obscured by the falsehood, and defiled by the leaven of the Pharisees.”

Carl Henry agrees, saying, “What He [Christ] criticizes is not the law itself but contemporary formulations of the law.”

Moreover, the fact that Christ brought an end to the ceremonial laws, such as the sacrifices and dietary restrictions, does not amount to abolishing the Law but rather fulfills it.

The Law instructs us in the righteous demands of God. Through it we see how high his holiness and his standards are, and we see how far short we fall and thus desperately need God's grace.

Its man-made rules actually were unconscious attempts to reduce the demands of the Law and make it manageable. Those rules insulated them from the Law's piercing heart demands. These men were also self-satisfied. A Pharisee could stand on a corner, look at a publican, and say, "I thank God I am not like that man." Jesus was demanding a deeper obedience. The Pharisees saw obedience quantitatively (obedience to myriad little laws), but Jesus saw it qualitatively. The righteousness that Christ demands is supremely radical. It is immeasurably higher than the rabbis' concept of righteousness. Jesus closes this whole section by saying, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (v. 48).

"Blessed are those who realize they cannot make it on their own, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Do you understand and acknowledge that there is no way but that of grace? If so, then also see that Jesus' words in verse 17 are our hope: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

This is our hope because Christ did what we could never do – he fulfilled the Law. His righteousness exceeded that of the scribes and Pharisees. And because he fulfilled the Law, he can give us a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. He fulfilled the Law by leading a perfectly righteous life. He fulfilled its demands against us by dying for us.

## **FERGUSON**

Jesus explains the place the law is to occupy in the kingdom of God by saying four things.

### The Continuing Validity of the Law

Jesus had not come to ignore or abolish the sacred Scriptures.

The law does three things. 1) It expresses the character of God and his will for mans life. 2) Further is teaches us the true character of man. God's intention for man is that he live in accordance with the law of the Lord. 3) the law teaches us the character of salvation.

The requirements of the law will be fulfilled in us as we walk according to the Spirit. Rather than contradict the gospel, the law of God, properly understood, goes hand in hand with it. The Pharisees had not only failed to understand the gospel; they also misunderstood the law.

### The Present Fulfillment Of The Law

Jesus is teaching that if we want to know what the law really means, we must look at him and what he does with it because he fulfills, or accomplishes the law. Jesus fulfills the law in his doctrine or teaching. Jesus fulfills the law in

his deeds and lifestyle. The law of God was not a burden on Jesus shoulder; rather, it was written in his heart. Jesus fulfills the law in his death.

To the Old Testament believer, the law was the law. His whole life was bound by it. He did not pigeon-hole different parts of his life to be ruled by what we call the moral law, or the ceremonial law, or the civil law. There was no reason for his to do so because the state, the nation, or the church, were simply different ways of looking at the same thing. But that was no longer true after the death of Christ. Jesus' resurrection marked a new era in Gods dealings with his people. The ceremonial law had been fulfilled by Christ's sacrifice for sin, once for all time. Therefore, the ceremonial element in the law was no longer binding on the church.

Illustration. The Christian life is like one of the mighty steam engines of the railways of the past. They needed fuel for the fire for power. But they also needed tracks, to direct their energy. Love for Christ, in the power of the Spirit, is the energy of the Christian life. But that love needs tracks on which to run if it is ever to get to its intended destination. God's law provides us with those tracks. This is why many places in the NT allude to the teaching of Exodus 20. These commandments are the sacred way in which we are to walk. Rather than restrict us, these tracks give us freedom to move in a Godward direction.

#### The Deep Spirituality Of The Law

Pharisaic righteousness was skin deep; Christian righteousness is to be real. It is to be true heart conformity to the law of God. This is the practical fulfillment of the law that marks Jesus' disciples. They understand that the law is spiritual. They respond to it, not in their own strength, but in the power of the Spirit, who cleanses and renews their heart.

#### The Distinguishing Function Of The Law

Our attitude to the law of God is an index of our attitude to God himself. If we treat the law lightly and encourage others to do so, we show that we are strangers to the promise of the new covenant in Christ.

The law is not the basis on which we merit salvation, but it does provide a test to distinguish between those who belong to the kingdom of salvation and those who are outside of it. If we have been born again then God's law has been written in our hearts, and we obey it joyfully.