

Lesson #1 – Introduction – Matthew 5:17-20

Opening

- Let's begin by establishing some definitions.
 - What is inerrancy of Scripture? Scripture, in its original languages is without error. We will talk more about this later...
 - What is faith?
 - Faith is strong belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual apprehension rather than proof.
 - According to Hebrews 11:1, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
 - In short, faith is the act of believing.
 - What is religion?
 - An organized system of principles used to worship a god or a group of gods.
 - What differentiates the different religions of the world?
 - The object of worship – there are a variety of different gods
 - God (Yahweh / Jehovah)
 - Allah
 - Buddha
 - Wealth / success / power
 - Fame / celebrity
 - The means of worship – the beliefs and rules used to worship said god
 - What is Christianity?
 - If we plug Christianity into our definition of religion, all we have to do then is identify the object and means of our worship.
 - So, what is Christianity? A system of principles based completely upon the Bible, that show us how God wants us to worship him.

- If the beliefs and rules of Christianity are based on the Bible, it would follow then, that most Christians would know their Bible inside and out.
 - To quote Vizzini from Princess Bride, “You’d like to think that, wouldn’t you?”
 - “A Pew Research poll in 2010 found that evangelicals ranked *only a smidgen higher* than atheists in familiarity with the New Testament and Jesus's teachings. "Americans revere the Bible—but, by and large, they don't read it," wrote George Gallup Jr. and Jim Castelli, pollsters and researchers whose work focused on religion in the United States. The Barna Group, a Christian polling firm, found in 2012 that evangelicals accepted the attitudes and beliefs of the Pharisees—religious leaders depicted throughout the New Testament as opposing Christ and his message—more than they accepted the teachings of Jesus.”¹
 - The Sermon on the Mount is a great example of this.
 - Today, when people say they love the Sermon on the Mount, it is usually because they have not read it.
 - The Sermon on the Mount is at the same time the most popular sermon and the most misunderstood sermon.
 - “In the last sixty to seventy years, evangelical Christians have sought to show the world that they are not very different from the world and can be liked by the world. Jesus makes us very happy. He may give us health and wealth. The Sermon on the Mount tells us that is not Jesus’ business.”²
 - Romans 12:1-2 – “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

¹ <https://www.newsweek.com/2015/01/02/thats-not-what-bible-says-294018.html>

² Ferguson, Sinclair. Sermon on the Mount – Ligonier Lecture Series, DVD, chapter 1.

- “Jesus’ business is to deconstruct our lives and put those lives together by the power of the gospel in such a way that we would be different enough in our likeness to Jesus that we might get a taste of the opposition that he himself experienced.”³
 - Our divine transformation takes place only when we find ourselves bowing down to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and not to that of our own selfish wants and desires.
 - The central message, according to Sinclair Ferguson is, “If Jesus is not Lord of all, then he is not Lord at all.”
- In the same vein, Eugene Peterson says that “most religion is idolatry.”
 - There is a great difference between cultural religion and the Christian gospel.
 - Therefore, it follows that as Christians, we are to become intimately familiar with the Word of God.
 - And that is why we are here.

Scripture

- Matthew 5:17-20 – “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. ¹⁸For 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. ¹⁹Therefore 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. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”
 - “The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of the Lord lasts forever.”
- Three Points
 - Jesus did not come to abolish the Old Testament law.

³ ibid.

- God demands meticulous observance of the Old Testament law.
- There is a contrast between the righteousness required by the God and that exemplified by the scribes and Pharisees.

Introduction: The Law

- In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is re-establishing and upholding the original intent of the moral law of God in the Old Testament.
 - Up to this point in his sermon, Jesus hasn't discussed the law.
 - But, beginning in verse 17, Jesus is correcting abuses of the Old Testament law that were rampant in the New Testament.
 - Jesus is not abolishing the Old Testament, nor is he merely expanding on it.
 - In the Sermon, the law (the Torah) was not the object of Jesus' attention. The traditions (Mishnah) (interpretive additions) were his focus.
 - The Pharisees have essentially made the law external only. Jesus is reminding them (and us) that the law of God is internal as well.
 - Every aspect of the Jewish lives and religion were regulated by the law of Moses.
 - The Pharisees had detailed out how to obey over 600 regulations of Moses.
 - The Mishnah was an oral tradition of commentary on the Mosaic Law that introduced additional, man-made rules that "built a fence" around the Mosaic Law so people wouldn't even come close to breaking God's commandments.

A Crash Course on Jewish Religious Law

- The Torah are the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy that Moses received directly from the mouth of God.
- The Oral Torah includes the explanations and examples of how to interpret the law that God gave Moses. Unlike the Torah, Moses did *not* write these down. The Oral Torah was passed down from Moses to Joshua and then to the rabbis in an unbroken chain until the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.
- The two main sections of the Oral Torah are the Mishnah and the Gemara.
 - The Mishnah is made up of the traditions of the Oral Torah.
 - The Gemara is made up of the Rabbinic commentaries on the Mishnah.
 - These two parts of the Oral Torah make up the Talmud, the pre-eminent text in Judaism.

- Keep in mind, the Pharisees did not add to God's law out of a malicious mindset. Their intent was likely very good as they took obedience to God's laws very seriously.
- The things necessary to obey the laws (interpretive additions) eventually became laws themselves. They began to carry as much weight as God's word.
- The Pharisees tried to not only follow the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Law, but the thousands of new commandments that were passed down through the rabbis in order to clarify the original 613 commandments.
- They were living in a culture where if you wanted to be really spiritual, you needed to go further than God had told you to go. (We will discuss this at length in a few moments.)
- The real issue with interpretive additions is that they run counter to the rest of Scripture.

- Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, clarifies what the law always meant. Much of what he had to say contradicted the Oral Torah, or interpretive additions.
- “Jesus knew the law could tell us how to live, but it could not empower us to live.”⁴
 - The law can tell us what to do, but it cannot motivate us to do it.
 - Romans 8:3-4 – “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”
 - The gospel gives us the power to fulfill the law and to make it our delight.
 - We, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, can fulfill the obligations of the law.
 - Not only can we fulfill the law, but we can delight in it.
 - This goes against our human nature – we often delight in breaking the law (especially as teenagers.). However, in Christ, we delight in obeying the law out of our sense of love and devotion to him.
- Four views on the Old Testament / New Testament / Jesus Christ Relationship
 - The Old Testament doesn’t matter – Marcionism
 - Problem is that it denies the inerrancy of Scripture
 - None of the Old Testament applies unless it is reaffirmed in the New Testament
 - Problem is that it denies the inerrancy of Scripture
 - All of the Old Testament applies unless it is rebuked in the New Testament
 - Problem is that it denies the inerrancy of Scripture
 - All of the Old Testament is relevant for Jesus’ followers (2 Timothy 3:16)
 - We need Christ to correctly interpret it.
 - We also need the Holy Spirit in our hearts to prompt us to obey it.
- Jesus says several things about the relationship between Christians and the law.
 - The law still has significance – Christ came to fulfill the law.

⁴ ibid

- If the law were not important, Jesus would not have had to come and endure suffering at the hands of his creation.
- The Old Testament law functions as a spiritual litmus test
 - It condemns those who claim to be only New Testament Christians, and then jettison the Old Testament law.
 - How we think about the law is an indicator of how we think about God.

Jesus did not come to abolish the Old Testament law

- JC Ryle feels that these verses in Matthew 5 deserve some of the closest attention of all of Scripture.
 - These doctrines lie at the heart of Christianity.
- While Jesus came to discontinue the observance of the ceremonies of the Old Testament law, he did not come to abolish the laws themselves.
 - In the Old Testament, the law required a blood sacrifice as atonement for sins. Jesus provided this, so that we no longer need to sacrifice a spotless male goat every time we sin.
 - “The Levitical sacrifices served as anticipatory accomplishments of the redemptive facts of the Old Testament facts.”⁵
 - Jesus, in these verses was displaying the relationship between the Old and New Testament; between the law and the gospel.
 - The Old Testament instructs us on man’s relationship with God.
 - However, this instruction is not complete.
 - In J.C. Ryle’s Commentary on Matthew, Bishop Ryle says, “The Old Testament is the Gospel in the bud, the New Testament is the Gospel in full flower. The Old Testament is the Gospel in the blade; the New Testament is the Gospel in full ear.”⁶
- Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. (Matthew 5:17)

⁵ John Murray, Principles of Conduct. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957.). 150-151.

⁶ J.C. Ryle, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. (London: Marshall Pickering, 1989), 35.

- There is an antithesis here – abolish vs. fulfill
 - Abolish means to dissolve or undo
 - Jesus came to stop the observation of the Old Testament ritual law. However, he did not come to get rid of them.
 - We are to think of the Old Testament ritual law as anticipating the redemption of Christ. That is, they should remind us of what Jesus accomplished during his time on earth.
 - Fulfill means to complete
 - It does not mean merely to keep or obey
 - Jesus came to realize the full measure of the intent and purpose of the law and prophets.
 - Jesus came to magnify the law.
- It follows then, that Jesus' followers are not to eliminate the law, but to uphold it.
- The law was not Jesus' ultimate focus in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount. The Pharisees' interpretive additions (that is, the Oral Torah) were his focus.
- "For Matthew then, it is not the question of Jesus' relation to the law that is in doubt, but the law's relation to him!"⁷
 - Jesus is not contradicting the law, but rather, endorsing it.
- Jesus is not engaged in extending, annulling, or intensifying Old Testament law, but in showing the direction in which it points, on the basis of his own authority."⁸
 - This new teaching moves beyond the law: the heart of men.
 - Scripture uses the word "heart" to mean "the whole inner man, the core of our total being, the wellspring of all we do."⁹

⁷ R. Banks, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law: Authenticity and Interpretation in Matthew 5:17-20," JBL 93 (1974): 226-242.

⁸ Longman and Garland, Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew and Mark, 177.

⁹ Hughes, 213.

- “Jesus presents himself as the eschatological goal of the Old Testament and thereby its sole authoritative interpreter, the one through whom alone the Old Testament finds its valid continuity and significance.”¹⁰
- What does this mean for us?
 - Jesus obeys where we disobey.
 - Jesus bears the punishment for our breach of God’s holy law. He does this to cleanse our hearts and to set us free from our bondage and guilt.
- Jesus’ teaching about the Old Testament is to be obeyed.
 - We are to obey every detail of the Old Testament law.
 - Therefore, we are not to jettison or unhitch the Old Testament from the New because we claim to be “New Testament Christians.”
 - This would be like someone deciding not to obey items in the constitution because they are a 21st century American.
 - Jesus is upholding the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures right down to the smallest stroke of the pen.
 - He is stating that we are still required to obey the Old Testament law.

God demands meticulous observance of the Old Testament law.

- Jesus, in verses 18-20 warns against relaxing and distorting the law.
 - Matthew 5:18-20 – “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.”
 - In verse 18, Jesus says that not one iota (jot) or dot (tittle) will pass away from the law.

¹⁰ ibid

- These refer to the smallest strokes of the Hebrew alphabet, indicating that the Old Testament is completely trustworthy, down to the smallest detail.
- In verse 19, when Jesus uses the phrase “these commandments,” he is referring to the Old Testament ceremonial law.
 - Jesus, in these two verses is not giving us the right to pick and choose which commandments we are to observe.
- It is possible to agree with all that Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount and yet not live accordingly.
 - When Jesus says, “For I tell you,” (or “truly, truly, I say to you”) (in verse 18) he is providing us with a clue that what he is about to say is really important.
 - This is Jesus’ way of saying, “Here’s the deal”
- How long are we to obey the Old Testament law?
 - Verse 18 clues us in, “until all is accomplished.”
 - In other words, until this world no longer exists.
- “Our relation to the kingdom of heaven is defined in terms of our relation to the (Old Testament) law.”¹¹

There is a contrast between the righteousness required by God and that exemplified by the scribes and Pharisees.

- Jesus’ new teaching moves beyond external obedience to the law: the hearts of men.
 - **Hebrew definition of heart – the core of our being.**
 - In Judaism, the heart was defined as the “center of the personality, embracing an individual’s mind, emotions, and will.”¹²
 - **God wants our hearts, not our external obedience. Therefore, he is a God after man’s own heart. Flush these out!**
 - Jesus, throughout the Sermon on the Mount focuses on our motivation, that is, our hidden, innermost thoughts.

¹¹ John Murray, Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 152.

¹² Longman & Garland, 212.

- **Breakdown of sections of Sermon on the Mount we will be studying**
 - **Six antitheses**
 - **Three areas of piety**
 - **Three metaphors**
 - In his discussion of the sixth and seventh commandments, he teaches that murder and adultery can be committed in the heart.
- Let's take a moment to talk about the hearts of men:
 - Ivan Turgenev has written, "I do not know what the heart of a bad man is like, but I do know what the heart of a good man is like, and it is terrible."
 - Pascal said, "Man is great insofar as he is wretched."
 - One of the purposes of the Sermon on the Mount is to expose the state of the believer's heart.
 - It provides us with an honest picture of the heart of man – and it is not a pretty picture at all.
 - The hymn, "From the Depths of Woe" contains the line "secret sins and misdeeds wrought." This is what we all have in our lives.
 - However, this is precisely where need to see ourselves.
 - The first step in getting help is realizing that you need help.
 - The first step in receiving salvation is realizing that you are a sinner in need of God's grace.
- In verse 20, Jesus states that more than just simple external obedience is required in order to fellowship with God and conform to his will
 - Jesus is illustrating the greater righteousness that he demands from his disciples.¹³
 - Christian discipleship requires more than external obedience of the law
 - If we are to be Jesus' disciples, we must give him all of our hearts
 - If Jesus is not our Lord of all, he cannot be our Lord at all (Sinclair Ferguson)
- In verse 20, Jesus provides us with the principle of exclusion from the Kingdom of God.

¹³ Craig L. Blomberg. NAC: Matthew. (Nashville: Broadman, 1992.). 106.

- The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees does not qualify them for the Kingdom of God.
 - It brings them to the threshold of the kingdom.
 - However, it must be supplemented by going further.
- The demands of the Kingdom of God are far greater than anything that the scribes and Pharisees could even understand: the heart.
 - “Christian righteousness surpasses pharisaic righteousness in kind rather than degree.”¹⁴
 - “Christian righteousness is greater than pharisaic righteousness because it is deeper, being a righteousness of the heart.”¹⁵
 - “The righteousness which is pleasing to God is an inward righteousness of mind and motive.”¹⁶
 - This righteousness is evidence of the new birth, and everyone must be born again in order to enter into the Kingdom of God.
- The “you have heard it said” are not a contrast between the teachings of the Old Testament law and the teachings of Christ.
 - When Jesus said, “you have heard it said,” he was not referring to the Old Testament law, or he would have said, “the Law and the Prophets have said.”
 - Jesus is referring to the “interpretive additions” to the Old Testament law.
 - We must conclude that Jesus is contrasting his own understanding and application of the Old Testament law with that of rabbinic tradition.
 - These traditions occur throughout the Talmud beginning with the phrase, “Our Rabbis have taught...”

Personal Application

- Jesus is upholding, establishing, and clarifying the law.

¹⁴ John Stott. Christian Counter Culture – the Message of the Sermon on the Mount. (Downers Grove: IVP, 1978.) 75.

¹⁵ Ibid. 75

¹⁶ Ibid. 75

- We ought to emulate Jesus in this way.
 - We should acknowledge its goodness.
 - We should uphold it.
 - We should guard against abuse of it.
- As Christians, we should be careful not to fall into the trap of Pharisaism – being more concerned about external obedience rather than the condition of the heart.

Discussion Questions

- What is the difference between the written law and the oral law?
- What are some modern cultural examples of items we have added to God's law?
- How can we be diligent in our awareness between God's law and additions to it?