

# Sermon on the Mount

## Lesson 3 – Thesis Statement – Christ and the Law

### Matthew 5:17-48

Many have called the Sermon on the Mount an ordination message for the newly chosen twelve apostles. Though it was preached on a specific mountain at a specific time, this is a wonderful example of what Jesus taught every day! Let's sit at the feet of Jesus and learn too!

Jesus laid the foundation for His sermon with the nine Beatitudes. These were the heart attitudes God desired for all those that followed Him. Now, He moves on to make clear His intention, relationship, and interpret the Law.

**I. Thesis Statement – Christ's followers require a greater righteousness, one that exceeds outward obedience to the law.**

**“Think not that I am come to destroy (Lit. “abolish, oppose) the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.”<sup>18</sup> For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” Matthew 5:17-18**

- “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets:” – That day every Religious Leader hearing Jesus believed He was undermining and breaking the Law of Moses and their tradition. Christ's open defiance of the Sabbath traditions and claiming deity had already put them into action, seeking ways to discredit Him with the people. In this sermon, Jesus' desire was to make it very clear to all the listeners, including the Jewish Elite, He had not come to do away with the Law of Moses, but to give them God's interpretation of the Old Testament.
- “but to fulfill.” – Christ's work was founded in the Law. Every sacrifice, Holy day, and offering was pointing to His ministry and work. Every prophet and psalmist wrote of Him! Jesus came to finish the work spoken on every page of the Old Testament. (John 1:17) Nothing would be lost, not the slightest mark of a pen or letter until He fulfilled it all! Please realize, it's not all fulfilled today in 2023! Ladies, there's yet more to come!!

**“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:19** Jesus continues to “set up” the teachings to follow. The Rabbis had long been giving their versions of compliance to the law, but Jesus is about to lay out God's intentions. Christ begins here with an ageless challenge, **those who teach must also be doers of what they teach!** Seems obvious, but among the Religious Leaders of the day, it was not normal, and I'm afraid all too often ignored today! All of us who give a Bible study, disciple a new believer, and teach our children, are admonished to be doers of the very things we are teaching! It's a challenge to our souls! Here Jesus promises a heavenly reward, here we see how God views those who seek to not only teach His word but also carefully obey it! He sees them as **great!** Be challenged! Be an “obeyer”!

**“For I say unto you, That except your righteousness (Lit. love and obedience from the heart) shall exceed the righteousness (Lit. love and obedience from the heart) of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall**

**in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:20** This was an extremely shocking statement. One commentary likens it to a bomb thrown out into the audience! They must have wondered how Jesus of Nazareth could say such a thing. The scribes and Pharisees were held up as the most religiously pure and righteous in all of Judaism! No one there thought they could be more pious than the great ones of the law. But Jesus stated all must be greater than the righteousness of Pharisees and scribes to enter heaven! This was astonishing and very disturbing! We can be sure, Christ had everyone’s close attention. Understand, the point of Jesus’ statement was the heart of man. It’s always been the heart God desired: a heart of faith, love, devotion, and obedience toward Him. When selecting a king for Israel, it was David’s heart God saw and Samuel could not. Without a heart of faith in the work of Jesus for us, no one will enter the kingdom of heaven! No perfect adherence to any code or rule, ritual or standard, will ever gain acceptance into heaven. Paul, the former Pharisee, will reflect Christ’s words when he wrote, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Titus 3:5-7; Read Romans 3:20-26

**II. Christ and the Law – Six Contrasts between the external demands of the law and the internal attitude of the heart desired by God.** Jesus now starts into the meat of His message. Matthew recorded two of the Ten Commandments and four other Old Testament directives given by Moses. Jesus dealt with each one, pointing out God’s intention and how the people had miserably fallen short! The Rabbis had not taught them carefully and fully and over the centuries God’s Word had been distorted. Most scholars believe Jesus would have systematically moved through each of the Ten Commandments and perhaps many other laws, but these are the ones we have before us. Most of the listeners did not read so they learned the commands of God from others so we have the phrase, “Ye have heard. ....” I love the phrase Jesus will use as He gave His mind on each topic, “But I say unto you.” He was now giving them God’s perspective! Please realize the weakness of the law was it only called out the act, not the fundamental cause – the heart and mind that form the sinful act! Let’s look at Jesus’ words and see if we are seeking to obey from the heart or comply only outwardly!

A. “Thou shalt not kill” – Number 6 of the 10 Commandments - Exodus 20:13

**“Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: <sup>22</sup> But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. <sup>23</sup> Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar (Lit. act of worship), and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; <sup>24</sup> Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. <sup>25</sup> Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. <sup>26</sup> Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.” Matthew 5:21-26**

Law Said: Those who committed pre-meditated murder would be judged by the civil courts of the people. God called for convicted murderers to be executed.

Jesus Said: Before God, anger without a cause carries the danger of judgment. This is not necessarily the same level of punishment but guilty to stand before courts! He is not saying execution, but judgment. (Anger defined: seething, brooding bitterness, and resentments – “Without cause” defined: brought about by trivial disagreements, groundless surmises, insults, assaults on rights, very easily provoked to violence, damaging to

both parties emotionally, mentally, and spiritually) This anger plays out by a damaging tongue. - “Raca”/“fool” – two levels of personal insults. Rom. 12:18-20; 1 John 4:20; 3:14-15

Illustrations: Two ways anger affects one’s life: 1) In Worship – Stop seeking to worship. Drastic action must be taken to restore the broken relationship immediately. Ps. 66:18; Prov. 15:29 2) Becoming a destructive issue - Anger can lead to civil litigation. We all know people who have been in a courtroom because of unresolved anger. The two parties were not able to work through a situation and eventually had to stand before a judge to have them decide. Lawyers will almost always encourage one to settle “out of court.” That seems to be the best outcome for each party in the long run. Here we have the same wise advice from Christ.

B. “Thou shalt not commit adultery” No. 7 of the 10 Commandments – Exodus 20:14

**“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: <sup>28</sup> But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. <sup>29</sup> And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.” Matthew 5:27-30**

Law said: This commandment dealt with the sanctity of marriage, the act of sex outside of marriage.

Jesus said: A lustful look at a woman is an adulterer in the heart! The law said, “no sexual act” – Jesus said, “no lustful look”

Illustrations: “pluck it out”/“cut it off” - The illustrations of Jesus showcase the drastic measures that must be taken to control sinful passions. He does not ask a man to mutilate himself, but Christ certainly had the attention of all the hearers with these graphic word pictures! Sexual sins, and adultery specifically, are destructive; the hurt and the damage caused are far-reaching and long-lasting! Jesus is pointing out one must actively, painfully, and completely do all they can to rid themselves of the lustful look otherwise, destruction, loss, and regret awaits! James 1:15; Col. 3:5-10; Rom. 6:12-13; Rom. 13:14; 2 Tim. 2:22

C. “writing of divorcement” A directive of Moses – Deuteronomy 24:1

**“It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: <sup>32</sup> But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery : and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery .” Matthew 5:31-32**

Law said: A document of divorcement was put in place because Israel had taken on the ways of the cultures around them. Marriage and women were treated lightly and disrespected. This was a safeguard so men could not break up their family with merely a word, but a written document had to be made and the cause of fornication noted.

Jesus said: Divorce is not the heart of God. It has always been God’s desire to see one man and one woman joined together for life. The directive of divorcement was not a command but an allowance. God desires whole families, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The Bible has several incidences of forgiveness and restoration despite sexual sins. Gen. 38; Hos.3; John 8

Illustration: Christ uses the dramatic again by associating adultery to those who remarry after a divorce. The word “adultery” would have been both offensive and surprising to the crowd! Once someone was divorced for any reason, they often felt free to marry another, Jesus is putting the brakes on such liberal thought. He will connect coveting, divorce, and remarriage in Luke 16, and will teach divorce again in Matthew 19.

D. “Thou shalt not forswear thyself” A directive of Moses – Number 30:2

**“Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: <sup>34</sup> But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: <sup>35</sup> Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup> Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay (Lit. Yes/No): for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.” Matthew 5:33-37**

Law said: What you promise to God you should keep. Don't “forswear” or perjury/break your oath.

Jesus said: Swearing truth should not be needed, one should be honest in all communication. A simple yes or no should suffice! Anything else cometh from the Evil one. (About 50% of English translations end verse 37 with “Evil One” or “Devil.”)

Illustrations: In verse 34, we find examples of the ridiculous verbal tactics the Jews were known to use in trying to prove truthfulness. This is still common today, swearing “on a stack of Bibles,” “my mother's grave” “hope to die” These phrases are used to emphasize and strengthen a promise. At the time of Christ, many swore using God's person or character. Other phrases were constructed in such ways to allow an easy release from a vow. We do find oaths within the Scripture; they are not forbidden, but flippant, profane, careless use of God's name and character is wrong. We should always be truthful and honest. James 5:12

E. “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” A directive of Moses – Ex. 21:24, Lev. 24:20

**“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: <sup>39</sup> But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil (Lit. evil men): but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. <sup>40</sup> And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. <sup>41</sup> And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. <sup>42</sup> Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away (“ask them not again.” Luke 6:30).” Matthew 5:38-42**

Law said: The law could demand equal retribution for an injury. Punishment had to meet the crime. Too often judgments had become a license for vengeance, and this directive was protection from over-penalty.

Jesus said: Don't seek vengeance and retaliation against evil men. This was based on the loss of rights or malicious, unfair, or unreasonable treatment. The directive of Ex. 21:24 was based on the evil heart of man to desire retaliation, Jesus is removing all retribution the Old Testament allowed, He is saying the better way was to meekly endure the oppressor and in doing so put them to shame. Rom. 12:21

Illustrations: 1) “turn to him the other” – a slap in the face in any culture at any time has been seen as a personal insult – Jesus said turn to them the other – don't fight back as the natural man. 2) “let him

have thy cloak” – if one takes your coat, give him your cloak also, which was worth more money. 3) “go with him twain” – this is an example of the loss of cultural illustrations - Roman soldiers could at any time compel a man to help – ex. Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross of Christ – Jesus said if you are to go a mile, willingly go two! 4) “Give to him that asketh” – Christ is saying, we should live generously and quickly to give, not expecting anything in return. Ps. 112:5

F. “Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy” A partial directive of Moses – Lev. 19:18

**“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. <sup>44</sup> But I say unto you (“which hear” Luke 6:27), love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, (“and lend, hoping for nothing again;” Luke 6:34) and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; <sup>45</sup> That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust (“for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.” Luke 6:35). <sup>46</sup> For if ye love them which love you, what reward (“thank” Luke 6:32) have ye? do not even the publicans (“sinners” Luke 6:32) the same? (“And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.” Luke 6:34) <sup>47</sup> And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?” Matthew 5:43-47**

Law said: Moses did direct the children of Israel to love their neighbor, but nowhere in Scripture is there an instruction to “hate thine enemy.” This was a popular saying at the time of Christ. The Romans were the hated enemies of the Jews, and they felt every right to hate them!

Jesus said: “love your enemies” That day on the mountain Jesus would have gotten many sneers, disgusted glares, raised eyebrows, and surprised looks, but not as many as this statement would have generated! To love one’s enemy, to love the Romans, the Gentiles, the Samaritans, the publicans, went against the very fiber of being Jewish! But actually, Christ is teaching hate should be against the very fiber of a God follower! Ex. 23:4-5; Prov. 25:21-22 Jesus goes on and gives examples how love for an enemy should look. 1) Bless vs. curse – love in word 2) do good vs. evil 3) lend without needing it returned vs. withhold 4) pray for persecutors

Illustrations: 1) **God the Father** is our illustration of this principle. He gives the **sun and rain** on both the good and evil person, the one who praises Him as well as the one who curses Him. He is **kind** to the unthankful and evil people. Ps. 145:9; Rom. 5:10 2) **God’s followers should do the same.** Why all this love? “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven:” A clearer rendering would be, “That you may prove/show/demonstrate that you are the children of your Father which is in heaven.” It was normal for Publicans and sinners to love, give, and do good to their friends. But God’s people should be different, seen as “children of their Father,” found to be different because they love their enemies!

### III. Jesus’ Application to Believers

**“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Matthew 5:48**

How can I be perfect? Please realize, this verse is connected to the rest of the thought. God is perfect in love and He shows perfect love to those who are His enemies. He is perfect in love to all men. We are not capable to love perfectly as God loves, we still have a sinful nature, but as believers, we have power over our default of sin by the Holy Spirit living in us! Rom. 6:11-14 So, this “perfect” means mature and complete – we have this wonderful standard of the love of God, and as a believer the Holy Spirit gives us the power to love this way too!

1. **In Character** – We can show love in our daily life. By our words, actions, and attitudes! Jesus gave several ways here in the Sermon on the Mount - giving kind words, praying, speaking respectfully both to them and about them, and being generous. Paul will restate many of these thoughts in Eph. 4:31-5:1.

2. **In Holiness** – While Character is reflected outwardly, Holiness is dealing with the spirit. Showing love is generated from a heart of holiness – this is an evidence of true salvation! I John 3:10, “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

3. **In Maturity** – Growth in our walk with God is demonstrated by our love for others. I John 2:5-6, “But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.” Here we have the measuring cup of our spiritual maturity - Our love for others – patience, generosity, forgiveness, kindness. Is your spiritual maturity “measuring up” by a heart of love for others?

4. **In Love** – As John penned 1 John, he must have remembered the day as a newly chosen disciple, sitting near the feet of Jesus, and taking in the wonderful message we now know as the Sermon on the Mount. John wrote much of how God’s love should be seen within the life of true believers. Let’s finish by reading I John 3:13-18; 4:7-21