

## Matthew 5:17-18: Living the Law - Part 1

So I'm going to be honest with you, this is a difficult passage on many levels. As a teacher and preacher I take the warning in **James 3:1** very seriously: not many of you should desire to be teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. What teachers say, how we say it, clarity, accuracy, authority are all on the table when we stand before the Lord Jesus as we are judged on what we say.

And Jesus says something similar here in **Vs. 19. Read**

So teachers are called to a higher standard because we teach and influence others; and our place in the Kingdom of God is based on faithfulness to God's Word. The Bible makes it clear there is some sort of hierarchy in the New Earth based on faithfulness in this life.

Maybe you're saying, "I'm glad I'm not standing where you are." That might be true, but Jesus makes it clear that it's not just on teachers. **Whoever** relaxes the one of the least of these commandments - that's anyone who follows Jesus. All of our places in the Kingdom will be based on faithfulness to God in this life.

You say, "Well I'm just happy to get in." Me too, but in **Vs. 20** Jesus makes it clear that our keeping of his Law or not and our pursuit of righteousness or not might just keep us out. **Read 20**

So we can't just say "I'm trusting in Jesus for salvation but I'm coasting the rest of the way into heaven" or "I don't need to worry about the more difficult issues in the Bible." No, Jesus is calling all of his followers to have a righteousness that exceeds the the most well-respected religious leaders of Jesus's day.

And if our righteousness doesn't exceed them, he says says you will never enter the Kingdom. No heaven. And he uses the strongest possible negative in Greek. It's a double negative. In English double negatives cancel each other out: "I'm never not going" - that means I'm always going. In Greek it's just the opposite: double negatives increase severity: οὐ μὴ - you will never **ever**, in no uncertain terms, get in. There's not a chance in the world we're getting in to heaven unless our righteousness exceeds the scribes and the Pharisees.

Now, I don't know about you, but when my eternal life is being threatened by Jesus himself based on how righteous I am and what I do with the Law, I tend to pay attention.

So what's he talking about here? What Jesus is talking about here is how the OT relates to him. And I would say even how the OT relates to his followers and how his words relate to his followers. Maybe this section seems fairly straightforward to you, but these are actually huge issues for us as believers and there are a lot of implications.

Have you ever wondered what to do with the OT as a NT Christian? How are we to understand it? How do we apply it? It can feel like a bunch of stories and laws from a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away. Now, the NT also presents some of those same difficulties, but the OT especially has a been a point of difficulty for Christians.

How do we view the OT Law? There are laws prohibiting Israel from planting 2 types of crop in the same field or wearing different types of fabric or which birds are clean? Do we keep those? I think our instinct is to say no. But then are we relaxing the least of the commands?

At the same time I think we'd all agree that we hold to at least 9 out of 10 of the 10 commandments - the exception being keeping the Saturday Sabbath holy. So we have this strained understanding about what to do with the OT. But the OT is approximately 75% of our Bible - and really the NT is largely made up of OT quotations. So to some extent Jesus here is telling us how to understand the Bible itself as it relates to him and following him.

Now, we're going to unpack this section over the next 2 weeks. And I want to try to make this section as simple as possible to understand. But let me give a little bit of background that you probably already know just to remind us of why Jesus would ever touch on this issue in his sermon.

Remember Jesus is an itinerant preacher. He's going from place to place throughout Israel. He's healing people, casting out demons. He's preaching over and over and becoming a rising star in Israel. But the religious leaders are skeptical. They're sending people to listen to Jesus and ask him questions. He's not on Youtube and people can't just drop everything and chase him around all over Palestine to listen to what he says. He constantly on the move and he's preaching with authority.

And one of the questions that is likely being asked among the people and especially the religious leaders of the day is: Does Jesus keep the Law? Or is Jesus here to undermine the Law? Part of the reason for that question is because Jesus does a lot of his miracles on what day of the week? Saturday - the Sabbath. Israel was forbidden from working on the Sabbath and yet Jesus seems to do a lot of work on the Sabbath. Almost as if he's trying to make a point.

**Look** over at **John 5** really quick. This is where Jesus heals the guy who can't walk at the pool of Bethesda. Remember he had been there 38 years and there was this old wives tale that if you were sitting there and the water all of a sudden got stirred up, whoever pulled themselves into the pool first would be healed. So you had all these handicapped folks waiting around for the pool to move and if it did they all clamored over each other in the vain hope they would be healed. Jesus comes along and says "Hey you, paralytic, get up and go home." He does that on the Sabbath. And here's the response. **Read 15-18**

So this is one of many, many miracles Jesus does on the Sabbath and rather than rejoice in the healing, in the minds of the Jewish leaders Jesus is breaking the Sabbath. And if he breaks the Sabbath - one of the chief aspects of the Law - what else is he doing to undermine the Law of Moses? So this question of how Jesus relates to the OT Law is huge. In fact, he actually addresses that issue right here in **John 5:39-47**. And there's a lot of overlap between this passage and the one in Matthew 5. **Read**

So do you get the connection? They're looking for eternal life in the OT - that's what he means when he says "the Scriptures." And Jesus says actually it's there, but only if you understand that Moses was pointing to Jesus. So if someone truly believed Moses and the OT, then they would believe Jesus now. Jesus and Moses are not at odds. The astonishing claim Jesus makes here is that if you don't believe in him, it's actually because you don't believe in Moses's writings because he wrote about Jesus. He makes the connection both ways: to believe Jesus is to believe Moses and to believe Moses is to believe Jesus.

So **back** in **Matthew 5**, Jesus grabs that bull by the horns when he says: I'm not here to abolish - to destroy the Law. I'm not a spiritual anarchist. I'm here to show you what the Law is really about. The Law and the Prophets - that's a phrase that just means the whole OT - they all point to me and if you're going to follow me you need to live not just by the letter of the Law but by the Spirit of the Law.

Now, I want to make this as simple as possible. There's a lot of theological freight here that we could spend a lot of time unpacking. There has been a lot of ink spilled on these 4 verses and very few scholars agree with one another on every aspect of all these verses. When you read through commentaries and listen to scholars there is an infinite variety of answers to all of these. It's a like a choose your own adventure for Bible nerds with dozens of forks in the road. So here's what I think we can know for sure and we'll look confirm these truths from other areas of Scripture.

- 1) Jesus upholds the OT Law until the cross
- 2) Jesus fulfills the OT Law at the cross
- 3) Jesus gives a new Law after the cross
- 4) That Law of Christ is better than the Law of Moses

So here's our game plan. I want to unpack this section. Then we're going to look at a whole bunch of passages that say basically the same thing. Then we'll come back to see if this all lines up.

### 1) Jesus upholds the Law until the cross. Read 17-18

So the first obvious thing to point out is that Jesus is not doing away with the OT Law. He says twice he's not here to abolish the Law. Whatever else any person listening to Jesus could conclude it's that he sees himself in absolute alignment with Moses.

But he gives a timeline in **Vs. 18**, doesn't he? He gives a point at which the Law is done away with. **Read**

Now, if you notice closely it seems as though there are 2 ending points of the Law. "Until heaven and earth pass away" is the first. "Until all is accomplished" is the second. I think those are actually the exact same event: the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Why do I think that? First of all, "all is accomplished" most everyone agrees is the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus's death and resurrection and, really, his ascension is often looked on as one massive event in the Bible. And that event is what most people think he is talking about when he says "all is accomplished." I mean, Jesus' last words were "it is finished." Everything he had been working for was achieved on the cross, confirmed at the resurrection, and accepted by the Father at his ascension. So all is accomplished is the death, resurrection, ascension of Jesus.

What about heaven and earth passing away? Is that the second coming? No, I think that's actually talking about the death, resurrection, and ascension as well. Why is that? For a couple reasons. I don't think Jesus is saying that there's some kind of optional ending for the Law. I don't think he's saying it could be at his death and resurrection or it could be at the second coming. That would be strange to have 2 very different ending points.

Second, although there are places where "heaven and earth" language refers to the second coming, there are quite a few places in the OT where "heaven and earth" and "day and night" being destroyed are used not in a literal sense, but in the sense of some major change for God's people (Jer 31:35-36; 33:20-21, 25-26; Job 14:12; also positively Ps 72:5, 7, 17 France, R. T. *Matthew*). Same thing with the sun, moon and stars falling. That's not talking about astronomical events - that prophetic language for God's changing things in a major way.

We even use "heaven and earth" as language from something big happening. They're going to have to move heaven and earth to ever complete the north south freeway on 395. What does that mean: there's going to have to be some massive changes in order to get that done.

Well, what massive change happened in Matthew's gospel? The death and resurrection of the Son of God. So Jesus upholds the Law until the cross. At the cross, everything changes.

### 2) Jesus fulfills the Law at the cross. Read 17-18

One thing for sure we need to understand is that the entire gospel of Matthew is focused on Jesus being the fulfillment of the Law. 15 times in the gospel we hear "thus is was fulfilled."

**Read Matt. 1:22, 2:15, 2:17, 2:23, 3:15, 4:14, 8:17**

That doesn't even include all the other places where that specific word "fulfilled" isn't used, but an OT Scripture is quoted with the same idea: Jesus fulfilled what the OT was looking forward to.

I was listening to a pastor talk about a series of sermons he preached through Matthew and he said at one point it just seemed like the main point of half of his sermons was: Jesus is the Messiah. There's a reason for that. Matthew's writing to Jews and he's going: Jesus is the one! Jesus is the Messiah!

So Jesus says, I haven't come to abolish the Law, but to what? Fulfill it. Jesus isn't against the Law because the whole Law is pointing to him. It points to him in predictions: from the tribe of Judah, seed of David, town of Bethlehem, coming out of Egypt, born of a virgin, so on.

But it also points to him as fulfilling types. He is the true Moses, the true Son of God, the true Temple, the True high priest, the kinsman redeemer, the true offspring of Abraham in whom blessing comes to the nation, and truly rules over creation on David's throne in heaven.

Are there more things that Jesus has to fulfill at his second coming? Sure, but as it relates to the OT Law, his first coming fulfilled everything Moses had set forth. There's nothing more to fulfill.

That why Jesus can say all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, therefore go make disciples. "I won, go do what I've told you to do and one day I'll establish a new heavens and new earth."

### 3) Jesus gives a new Law after the cross. Read

So the double edged sword of the SOTM that Matthew has preserved for us is that it is brief. On the one hand this is the highlight reel of Jesus's actual sermon so we have in a few pages what he took hours to preach. On the other hand, it's brief so we don't get a full explanation here of everything he said. So sometimes we have to piece things together from other places in the NT.

**1 Cor. 7:21:** We are not under the Law of Moses, we live under the Law of Christ.

**Gal. 6:2:** We are to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the Law of Christ.

We'll see more of that in just a little bit.

### 4) This Law is better than the Law of Moses.

Let's look at a couple of places.

**Turn to Matt. 27:51-54.** If you remember just as Jesus died there were several things that happened to confirm the significance of Jesus's death. That this was not any ordinary man - and people recognized the significance of these things. **Read**

So there was a massive earthquake - not just a small rumble, but a violent shaking where rocks were torn apart. There's an earthquake at his death and another in **28:2** at his resurrection.

There's a mass resurrection of saints that flood the city after Jesus's resurrection. And there's the splitting of the curtain in the Temple. What's that all about? Well, there was a massive curtain in the Temple building that separated the holy place from the Most Holy place (Holy of Holies). This curtain wasn't like the curtain on your windows, it was more like taking huge area rugs and sewing them together and hanging them up. Only the high priest could go behind the curtain to get to God, and only once a year.

Well, when Jesus died God tore that curtain in half to say that the sacrificial system of Moses was gone, because Jesus had just made the perfect sacrifice. No more need for slaughter animals because the Son of God had just been slaughtered for sins. All of the sacrifices were useless now because they only pointed to Jesus.

So we have this visual that at the Law the Law is abolished like the curtain is abolished, and the Law is fulfilled because Jesus was the true sacrifice. Let's look at some other places where we see these 4 truths.

**Look at 28:18-20.** This is the great commission and the thing I want us to focus on is what we are called to observe and teach. **Read**

So we usually focus on the go make disciples of all nations - and we should. But we are to teach them what Jesus taught us. What did Jesus teach us?

**Mark 7:19:** Jesus himself declared all foods clean - so we know we are not bound to the dietary laws of the OT. That's quite a few laws.

**Acts 10-11:** Jesus also made it clear that dietary laws are no longer in effect, but the point there is that there's no longer any separation between Jew and Gentile. And I think specifically, the point is that one does not need to be circumcised in order to be saved. Circumcision was a requirement in the OT and, really, was the defining element of what it was to be a Jew. That doesn't apply anymore.

The early church understood that the resurrection happening on Sunday meant that Jesus was to be worshipped by the church on Sunday. We see that throughout Acts as well. So there's a lot of changes that we see even with Jesus's teaching.

**Turn to Rom. 7:1-6.** Paul here gives an analogy about our relationship to the Law based on marriage. How long are people married? Until death do us part. Once our spouse dies we are free to remarry. Paul says that's like the Law of Moses. We were married to the Law, but then someone died. You know who died? We did. When we became Christians we were united with Christ in his death and we died to the Law. So we're no longer bound to the Law. **Read 1-6**

So we died with Christ - that's our union with Christ - and now we're not under the Law. That's why we don't keep the Sabbath, that's why we don't keep dietary laws, that's why it's okay to work on Sundays. We're not bound to the Law. And so now we serve through the Holy Spirit and bear true fruit for God.

Paul goes on to say in this chapter that the Law of Moses is good - it was given by God after all. The Law is spiritual, it does help us understand what sin is. But it cannot save us. And so Christ did away with the Law.

Why the Law? To point out sin. **Read 7-12**

You get what he's saying? The Law was actually a good thing. It helped people understand sin - like coveting - and was meant to curb that sin. So the Law was holy and righteous and good.

You know what the problem was? We are sinful. And so we'd read the Law, and our sinful nature would make the Law into a dinner menu for sin: "I'll take your coveting special, with a side of drunkenness and some idolatry for dessert," "what would you like, dear? Some sexual immorality and gossip?"

That's we do with the Law. Every time I drive by a street that has a road closed sign on it, you know what I want to do? Go down it. We're wicked. We take God's good Law and destroy it every time.

In Christ we have died to that Law and have been filled with the Spirit so we can actually do some good for Jesus.

**Turn to Gal. 3.** We could spend a lot of time here because Paul unpacks this whole reality that the no one is saved by keeping the Law. And since the Law can't save us, it can't make us more like Jesus either. It's only the Spirit of God, working through the Word of God reminding us of the grace of God in Christ that can make us more like Jesus. So for anyone who wants to follow the Law, here's what they get. **Read 10-14**

So if you want to keep the Law, you know what you get? All the curses of the Law because that's what you'd deserve. On the other hand, if you have faith in Christ, Jesus takes the curse you deserve. Isn't that interesting? If we try to keep the Law to earn God's favor we fail and get cursed. Or we can turn to Jesus who actually did keep the Law, and he takes our curse, and he gives us the blessing of Abraham. Hmm, tough decision.

But if the Law couldn't save, why did God give it? Glad you asked. The Law was given for 2 reasons: one was to point out sin and to curb it. The other was to show us our need for Jesus. **Read 19-20**

So this is what we saw in Romans. The Law pointed out sin, and was designed to curb our sin. God used angels to give Moses the Law. Moses was God's intermediary - the in between between God and Israel. But the Law was never designed to save people.

Notice one thing that I mentioned earlier. How long did Jesus uphold the Law? Until his death. Look at **19** again. **Read 19**

The offspring is Jesus. The Law was added *until* Jesus came, lived, and died. And then it changed. **Read 21-22**

So *if* a Law *had* been given that *could* impart life then we'd keep the Law for salvation. But that was never the design. Instead the Law trapped everyone under sin. Because of our sin it imprisoned us. So under the Law we were in spiritual prison. What got us out? **Read 23-29**

So the Law was like a teacher or a tutor that guided God's people to Jesus. Vs. 24: it was our guardian *until* Christ came. But once Jesus came we grew up, as it were, and we didn't need a tutor any more. That doesn't mean the Law was worthless or that Jesus is against the Law. It just means that the Law did what it was supposed to do.

When you hire a piano teacher for your kids, the goal is not to hire them forever. The goal is that your kids will learn and grow up to a point where they don't need a teacher anymore. The piano teacher is great, but not permanent. That's how we need to understand the Law. **Vs. 25:** we're no longer under that guardian.

The goal of a piano teacher is to train someone so they can actually be freed to play music. There will be some things people do as they mature that they've always done, but other things they don't do anymore because they're not necessary to the big picture goal of playing piano. And that's how we understand the overlaps and between the Law of Jesus and the Law of Moses. Some things are the same, some are different.

**Look at Heb. 7.** In Hebrews 7 the author of Hebrews lays out ways in which Jesus is better than the OC. Here specifically he talks about how his priesthood is better. Jesus is of the priestly order of Melchizedek, whereas the OT priests were of the Levites - specifically through Aaron. And twice here he notes that the change in priesthood from Levi to Melchizedek means there is a change in Law as well. **Read 11-19**

He continues the argument in chapter 8 to say that the New covenant we have in Christ is better than the OC in Moses, and therefore it is obsolete. **Read 8:13**

So Jesus gives a new Law after the cross and that Law of Christ is better than the Law of Moses. So if we're not under the Law, how do we apply it? How do we understand the OT in light of Jesus? We'll answer that next week.

**Pray**