

Matthew 5:19-20: Living the Law - Part 2

So we are unpacking this very significant section on Jesus's sermon and building on what we saw from last week. These 4 little verses are significant, if you remember, because it is here that Jesus helps us understand how we should view the OT in relation to him and also how we should view the OT in relation to us as Christians on this side of the cross.

Almost every phrase in this section has huge theological implications in one way or another. But the biggest takeaway from last week was that we are no longer under the Law of Moses - the Old Covenant. We are now under the Law of Christ, which are those commands we see primarily in the NT. That change happened at the cross: our greater High Priest Jesus gave us a better sacrifice, a better covenant, and a better Law to live by.

And my goal last week was to simply gel down what Jesus says here into 4 main points:

- 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

The first 2 points we got from simply reading the passage. The second 2 points we got from reading other passages that were talking about the same basic issue to help us understand what Jesus is saying.

By the way, this is a very important principle in understanding the Bible: When we come to a passage that's hard to understand or maybe written in a complicated way (like the prophets or even many of Jesus's teachings), our first instinct should be to ask "Are there other passages that talk about this issue?" **And** more to the point: Do they talk about this subject in a clearer way so that we can understand our passage better?"

If you have a Bible with cross references, that's what those are for. They're not perfect and they're not exhaustive, but basically the idea is to point you to other passages that speak to roughly the same subject so you can have better idea about what the whole of Scripture says.

So hopefully we have a good foundation on **Vss. 17-18** from last week: Jesus upheld the OT Law until the cross and fulfilled it at the cross.

Now we can work our way through the next 2 verses. The next 2 verses create something of a problem for us. If we're not under the OT Law - which Jesus is clearly talking about - then do we need to worry about the threat of **Vs. 18-19? Read**

You see that logic? If we're not under the Law, then does the threat of being greatest or least in the Kingdom based on the Law apply to us? And if our righteousness is not based on the Law, then do we need to worry about the bigger threat in **Vs. 20? Read**

Do we as believers need to worry about these warnings? My short answer is yes. If Jesus was calling people to keep the OC Law completely and from the heart up until his death, he certainly is calling his people to keep the NC Law - the Law of Christ - after his death and resurrection. In fact, what I think we'll see is that we are more responsible now, than they were then because we have been given greater revelation. So I think we take the principle of this passage and apply it to us as being under a more comprehensive covenant.

So when you're talking to your neighbor or whoever and they ask you what the sermon was about this week here it is: We're not under the OT Law anymore, but we are even more accountable to the keep the NT Law of Christ inside and outside. So let's walk through how we get there.

1) Those who were alive at the time of Jesus were required to keep the whole OT Law until his death/resurrection.

That seems to be the plain meaning of **Vs. 18-19. Read**

So the Law - what Jesus refers to as “these commandments” - was technically in force until all was accomplished, until the heavens and earth proverbially passed away. When was all accomplished? At the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus’s followers were required to keep the OC Law until his death and resurrection and ascension but after that were freed from the OC Law because it was completely accomplished.

Side: You might ask “Well, isn’t there more to be accomplished at the second coming?” The answer is yes, sort of.

What Jesus accomplished in his death, resurrection and ascension really set in motion God’s Kingdom that will be fully realized at the second coming. It’s like setting off fireworks that are all connected in a chain waiting for the grand finale. Jesus’s death and resurrection is what starts the chain reaction - all has been accomplished to redeem the Church and spread the gospel. And what’s happening now until the second coming is that we are patiently working and waiting and looking forward to the grand finale of his second coming. But his death and resurrection and ascension is what started that and secured that.

So there’s a sense in which we’re waiting for the consumption of Jesus’s Kingdom, but Jesus has done everything at the cross to secure that.

The next point might feel a little unrelated at first, but stick with me.

2) The more revelation God gives a person, the more accountable they are to God.

This is true of all people, whether they are believers or not. We will look specifically at believers in a minute but this is true even for unbelievers. **Turn to Matt. 11** for a minute. If you were to imagine of all the people in the Bible who are in hell now, who would be the ones who are suffering the worst? Where is judgment the hottest? I think a lot of people would point to Sodom and Gomorrah. Entire cities dedicated to the lowest form of homosexual depravity imaginable. Actually Jesus, the worst is not for them. Other people will have it worse. Take a look. **Read 20-24**

So here’s what’s gone on: Jesus has gone around preaching and doing miracles and people keep rejecting him. People in Chorizan and Bethsaida and Capernaum. And Jesus compares them to Sodom and Tyre and Sidon. Sodom we know about, but Tyre and Sidon in the OT were treacherous as well. Jesus says the judgement for those wicked cities is going to be light compared to Chorazin. Why’s that? Because Chorazin and Bethsaida actually saw the Son of God face to face, heard him preach audibly, watched his miracles and still rejected. Sodom and Tyre didn’t have that kind of revelation. So they will be judged, but not as severely as the others.

The more information a person has about Jesus and the gospel, the more liable they are for their rejection of him on the day of judgement. **Look at Acts 17:29-31.**

This is Paul preaching in Athens. Remember they had all these altars to different gods and even an altar to an unknown god. And Paul is saying: this unknown God, is actually the God of the universe. But watch his argumentation. **Read**

So he says “I’m here to tell you that the true God is not a piece of metal or stone. Your ignorance is over - God was gracious before - but now you’re commanded to repent.” Think about that. When you tell someone the gospel who has never heard it before, you know what happens? They immediately become even more accountable to the God of the universe because now they have greater revelation. They now know the gospel of Jesus Christ. They were like Sodom and the Athenians: they were ignorant. But now they know. And if reject this, judgment will be more severe. **Read 32**

Five minutes before this they were ignorant. They were still under God’s wrath, but they didn’t know any better. But now they are mocking the glorious Son of God who was raised from the dead. They are mocking the death and resurrection of the man to whom they will give an account. Paul says they can’t point to their own ignorance anymore. This is true with unbelievers, but it’s also true with believers.

Look over at **Hebrews 2**. The book of Hebrews takes this idea and applies it to Christians in the form of warnings. And the argument was basically: In the OC you were required to be faithful. And if you weren't faithful there were consequences. The NC is greater than the OC, and therefore the consequences are also greater.

In Hebrews 1 the author was talking about how much greater Jesus is than the angels. In chapter 2 he basically applies that to the OC and NC. The OC was given from God through angels to Moses then to Israel.

The NC was given directly from Jesus to us so we are more accountable and therefore need to pay closer attention to our lives. So watch the argument here. **Read 1-4**

He's saying if there was judgment for God's people in the OC for disobedience, and that covenant was given by angels, how much more judgment will there be in the NC that was given by Jesus himself? And we know for sure it was given by the Lord because of all the signs and miracles from the Holy Spirit that accompanied the preaching of the NC.

Don't get me wrong, we're saved by grace alone. The blood of Christ alone is our grounds of justification. But the covenant that we have is so much greater and given by Jesus himself and so the stakes are higher.

That's why he says "don't drift away." This is bigger than the OC and therefore there will be more judgement. Drifting away gives us the sense of something floating on water that just sort of slowly leaves us. The warning is not someone who is engaged in outright apostasy. It's not the person who has fallen headlong into disgusting sin or someone who has straight rejected Jesus. It's the person who just kind of slowly goes off and does their own thing. They let their spiritual life just drift off.

They probably still claim to be a Christian, still claim to love God, but they don't really pray or fellowship or have any sort of personal spiritual life. He says in **Vs. 3** they just sort of neglect their salvation. It's like the former HS football star who just sort of neglects going to the gym and neglects the sport but relives the glory days.

There will be no escape for that person. There will be just retribution because there was just retribution in the OC. They are accountable for more in the NC.

Turn to Heb. 10. So we saw what happens if someone just sort of gives up on Jesus, they drift away. This is what happens for someone who outright rejects Christ. And I'll tell you it's scary. And he uses the same contrast between the OC Moses gave and the NC Jesus gave. And he's warning believers to make sure they're in the faith and make sure they don't go on sinning deliberately because of the severity of judgment that will come about if they continue in sin. **Read 26-31**

Wow. I thought God was gracious? He is. But you can actually outrage the Spirit of grace. Isn't that interesting? The Holy Spirit is defined by grace but he can be outraged. How do you do that?

Go on sinning deliberately. This isn't sin by accident, where you unintentionally messed up. This is calculated sin. Doing things you know are sin, know are a violation of God's Law, and do them anyway. If it was punished by death under the OC, it'll be worse in the NC.

Do you hear the gravity of that? You might ask: Are these believers he's talking to or unbelievers? Does God pour out vengeance on believers? It wouldn't seem like it. But at the same time in **Vs. 30** he says that the Lord will judge his people. I think what is happening here is that the author is writing to a whole group of people who consider themselves believers. They might all be or might not. So he just gives a blanket warning in the strongest possible terms to everyone against unrepentant sin. The accountability we have to God in the NC is not less than with Moses. What is it? It's more.

So when we go back to **Matt. 5** where Jesus is talking about keeping every joy and title in the OC being the basis for judgement we can't look at that and go "Ah, we're good." We're not under that one so we're fine. No,

the principle still remains and, really, we're under more revelation and more responsibility aren't we? Look back there at **Matt. 5:19. Read**

So God expected his OC people to keep the entirety of the OT Law. Every iota and dot. That's like the smallest possible part of a letter. You know the difference between a capital P and a capital R - that little line? Keep that. Every single part down to the letters. In Hebrew the S looks like a W. And the difference between an S and Sh sound is a dot. If the dot is on the top left it's one sound, if it's on the top right it's another sound. Jesus says every little stroke, every little dot of the Word of God we are accountable for.

And relaxing even the least of them would be a measure for judgement. And we have a greater Law don't we? We have a greater Law in the Law of Christ. We have more mercy, more grace, more revelation, more power through the Holy Spirit to obey. But in no way can we coast.

Now there's a connection Jesus makes here that we also need to make as we transition from **Vs. 19 to 20**. Here's the connection: Your view of the Bible will affect your holiness.

If you have a low view of the Bible, you will have a low view of holiness. If you have a high view of the Bible, you will have a high view of holiness.

Or to use Jesus's words: What we do with even the smallest command or smallest prohibition will affect our righteousness. That's why Jesus here transitions from our view of the Word of God - specifically the OT as it relates to him - to holiness. They are related.

3) Jesus calls his followers to internal righteousness, not simply outward religion. Read 20

We usually think of the Scribes and Pharisees as these disgusting hypocrites - and we find out later that they were. But the average Jewish person listening to Jesus would have been floored by this statement: How in the world are we going to be more righteous than those guys? This would be like Jesus saying you have to be more righteous than all the pastors you know.

Some people try to solve this by saying: See, we can't be that righteous, so what Jesus is really getting at here is that we need the imputed righteousness of Jesus that comes to us by faith alone. I actually disagree with that.

It's true that the only way we'll enter heaven is to trust in Christ for our righteousness. To trust in the great exchange that he bore our sins on the cross and that God credited us with his righteousness solely through believing in him. But when Jesus talks about righteousness in Matthew's gospel, it is almost always talking about personal holiness. Holiness that is not just on the outside, but on the inside.

We see that in the next section, don't we? It's not just "Don't murder" it's don't be angry or insult one another. So it's external **and** internal.

He says it's not just "Don't commit adultery" it's also don't lust in your heart. It's not just don't retaliate, it's show mercy and kindness.

Look over at **Matt. 23:25-28**. This is the chapter where Jesus absolutely destroys the religious leaders for their hypocrisy in a series of 7 woes. These are 7 categories of judgement he's pronouncing on them. But notice how he talks about their righteousness. **Read**

See, the problem with the Pharisees was that their righteousness was all external. It was all a show. On the outside they looked awesome. On the inside they were filled with wretchedness.

If you've ever been to a well-kept cemetery, they really are very beautiful. The lawns are all trimmed and watered, they have these beautiful monuments, it's granite and marble everywhere. I was doing a funeral several years ago down in Spokane at a cemetery and I was thinking "man, this is just gorgeous here." I could spend a lot of time here. Just me, the Lord, these beautiful monuments and 10,000 dead bodies all around me.

That's what Jesus is saying. The Pharisee look so amazing on the outside. But they are rotting corpses on the inside because it's all a show.

So here's what we need to understand: It's actually not that hard to be more righteous than the Pharisees. Jesus isn't calling us to some crazy, over the top standard that is completely unattainable in this life.

He's just saying don't be a hypocrite. Don't tell people not to murder, then hate them in your heart. Don't call people to be honest in their financial dealings then skim a little off the top for you. Don't harp on people for addictions then drink ten Red Bulls every day while you play video games for 8 hours. Don't gossip to your friends about someone you know who is a gossip.

He's calling to a life of integrity. A life where our inside and our outside match.

You say, well my life is just a hot mess right now. Then let it be a hot mess. It's okay to acknowledge that and be real with people while at the same time desiring to pursue holiness and walk with Jesus. There are some people who sort of revel in how messed up their lives are; that's not biblical.

But I feel the need to remind everyone from time to time that we've all got problems of one kind or another and so as the body of Christ we should be able to bear one another's burdens because we all have them.

And if people judge you let them judge. You know what you do to people who judge you wrongly? Love them. Because they need to be reminded of the grace of Jesus, too.

But you know who loves people who are a hot mess? God. He loves the tax collector who is so broken over their sin, so so publicly repentant over their mess of a life that they can't even look up to heaven. All they can do is beat their chest in shame and sorrow. That's the one God justifies. It's the Pharisees who look great on the outside but are rotting corpses on the inside who judge the tax collector who go to hell. Does Jesus want our external obedience? Of course. But he also wants our heart. And when we understand that that is the righteousness that Jesus is calling for - a wholistic, unhyprocritical righteousness - then we understand what Jesus is getting at.

You want in the Kingdom of heaven? Trust in Jesus alone for your righteousness. But make sure that you're pursuing a Jesus on the inside as well as on the outside by keeping all the laws, from the greatest to the least.

Pray