



# DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

JESUS AND THE LAW • MATTHEW 5:17-30 10.2.22 •

## MAIN POINT

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Jesus fulfilled the Law for His followers, and gives them the power to live joyfully obedient to it.

## INTRODUCTION

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As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**How do you usually respond to rules? Do you tend to be a rule-follower or a rule-breaker?**

**What are some rules or laws that you always make sure to follow?**

**Are there rules or laws in which you look for loopholes? When you do this, are you concerned with the spirit of the law, or with how the law affects your life?**

We all have rules and laws that we care more about than others. There are rules that we will not break in any form. There are other laws that we may not like as much, and we tend to find ways around them and justify our behavior. This inconsistency reveals a deeper problem—a heart problem. God doesn't want us to just obey His Law, He wants us to do so because our lives have been radically transformed by the grace and mercy of the gospel—Jesus' work in us.

## UNDERSTANDING

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Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

If we think of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) as an explanation of the kingdom, then by Matthew 5:17, Jesus has told us who God's people are (vv. 3-12) and what their place is (vv. 13-16). In verses 17-48, Jesus explained how wide and deep God's rule is in His people's lives. Sitting on the hillside that day, listening to Jesus' teaching, the Israelites heard a new interpretation of the Law that focused primarily on a changed heart, not outward actions and following rules.

**READ MATTHEW 5:17-20.**

**What did Jesus mean by saying He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets?**

When Jesus said "the Law and the Prophets," He was talking about two sections of the Old Testament. During His ministry, Jesus was accused of preaching a new religion, because His teaching often went against the common beliefs of His day. Jesus loved the Law and the Prophets—He created them, and He came to keep them perfectly and bring God's promises to His people.

**Why wasn't the way the scribes and Pharisees obeyed the law sufficient?**

**What was Jesus trying to communicate when He said we must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees? How did this teaching raise people's expectation of righteousness?**

In verse 20, Jesus said that the kingdom belongs to those whose righteousness outshines that of the scribes and Pharisees. The scribes were the keepers of Scripture (in this case the Old Testament), and the Pharisees were the teachers of the Law and were considered to be the pillars of righteousness in Jewish communities. But their righteousness was largely external and superficial—Jesus demands something deeper.

**READ MATTHEW 5:21-26.**

In Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus cleared up what the law of God is and the extent of God's rule over our lives. As He stated the common understanding of a law, He explained what God's laws actually require: "You have heard it said . . . but I say." Jesus spoke with the authority of God Himself.

**How does Jesus' interpretation of murder (v. 21) show what kind of righteousness He is looking for?**

**Is that interpretation encouraging or discouraging to you? Why? Is it possible for you to achieve that level of righteousness?**

At first, this passage might seem like bad news—that no matter how hard we try, we will never live up to God's standard of righteousness. But remember that Jesus has kept the Law perfectly. Because He has, the burden of performance is lifted from us.

**What is the relationship between anger at others and your worship of God?**

Anger often is rooted in pride, perceived hurt, bitterness, hatred, malice, vengeance, and the like. So guard your heart; be merciful, never murderous. Jesus understood

that the relationships we have with people reflect and affect our relationship with God. If we live in a way where we are at odds with others because of anger, then we are not prepared to give ourselves fully to God.

**READ MATTHEW 5:27-30.**

**How did Jesus explain the commandment not to commit adultery? How was this different from the teaching of the Pharisees? How did this raise expectations for His followers?**

**What is lust? How does Jesus define it? Is there anything too important to lose if it causes you to lust?**

Jesus emphasized the point by telling them to put out the right eye or cut off the right hand if it leads to sin. Nothing is too precious to eliminate from our lives if it causes us to lust, though the point is that sin comes from our heart rather than flesh and bone. Disciples should put a stop to thoughts and behaviors that contribute to immorality. But they cannot do it on their own.

**Do you fight lust in your life to the degree that Jesus insists? How? Is the Spirit part of this process?**

**What does Jesus' harsh stance regarding lust teach you about His work on the cross?**

## **APPLICATION**

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Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What is your reaction to the expectations Jesus gave in this passage? Will you think about where you are on the road to growing in Him? We are called to imitate Christ in our lifestyles and attitudes. We are also to live lives that others can imitate. Fortunately, Scripture offers many practical ways to grow spiritually (always powered not by us, but by the Spirit).

**What is most surprising to you about the expectations Jesus gave in today's passage?**

**Why is it so easy for us to fall back on our own efforts in our walk with God, rather than relying on Him? What can you do this week to intentionally fight that tendency?**

**How can Jesus' teachings on righteousness, anger, and lust help you share the gospel this week? Does someone specifically come to mind with whom you can share the gospel?**

## **PRAYER**

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Pray and thank God that His love for you is not dependent on your performance for Him. Thank God for the life and death of Jesus Christ who fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. Ask Him for the faith to believe what He says to be true about you in Christ. Pray that God would reveal the areas of our lives that remain in sin. Pray that God would reveal that sin, so that we can confess sin and be reconciled to God and to one another.

## **COMMENTARY**

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5:17. Jesus said He hadn't come to destroy the Law or the Prophets (meaning the Old Testament Scriptures). Evidently some thought He was throwing out the law. After all, Jesus violated the harsh, manmade rules for keeping the Sabbath. He also ignored traditional washing rituals (not required in Scripture) that emphasized outward rather than inward cleansing (see Mark 7:1-16).

Jesus showed His belief in and respect of the authority of Old Testament Scriptures by announcing He had come to fulfill them. How? The message of the Old Testament relates to humanity's sin and God's promise to bless all nations through Abraham's descendants. Jesus fulfilled that promise by coming as the Savior through whom God offers the blessing of redemption to all who will receive Him.

Jesus' atoning death and resurrection also fulfilled the purpose of laws associated with animal sacrifices and the priesthood, which were pictures and illustrations of Him (so we no longer need to sacrifice animals or have human priests to go between God and us). Furthermore, His teachings did not replace the law in any way but rather obeyed or filled it full of its intended meaning.

5:18. So, is the Old Testament meaningless? Should we ignore it? Not according to Jesus. All Old Testament Scripture pertaining to Christ's first coming has been accomplished, but the prophecies related to Christ's return have not. The ethical and moral principles of the law are not only still in force but also are repeated in the New Testament.

5:19. Jesus wants us to take the Old Testament teachings seriously. Those who dismiss them and encourage others to do so will miss blessings in this life and in the life to come—they will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. This kingdom is the realm in which Christ is honored as Lord and King, that is, the realm of the redeemed. Those who obey and teach the law will be called great.

5:20. Scribes and Pharisees were viewed as spiritual giants in Jesus' day (v. 20). Scribes were viewed as experts at interpreting and applying God's law. They knew the Old Testament teachings up, down, and sideways. Pharisees were known to take extreme measures to make sure they kept each of God's commands. Jesus was not talking here about God giving the righteousness of Christ to sinners who believe in

Him (justification). No, here He meant doing right by others, saying the right words, making the right choices, doing the right things—all the attitudes and actions labeled right in Scriptures.

Scribes and Pharisees were convinced they were righteous, and most people agreed with them. They spent their lives making sure they kept religious rules, traditions, and rituals. Rabbis over centuries had been debating and defining how each biblical command was to be obeyed and how it could be broken. This resulted in a great number of rules that formed a tradition they viewed as being as important as the Scriptures. Why, then, didn't Jesus commend them for their great efforts to obey the law? Here's why: Their supposed righteousness was based on outward deeds rather than inward devotion (see Isaiah 29:13).

5:21. Jesus explained the previous verse with six illustrations often called “the antitheses.” Jesus quoted a law and then showed how the behavior of a Christian is to be greater than the letter of that law. In each illustration Jesus focused on the believer's motive and heart. You shall not murder is the Sixth Commandment. It had been said to our ancestors and was rightly accepted as a standard of behavior. It was the rule, but would it meet the test for a follower of Jesus?

5:22. Jesus traced the act of murder to its motive. “Anger” refers to a long-simmering anger that thinks badly of its object, as opposed to a flare up of anger. Though both are “temporary insanity,” Jesus had simmering anger in mind here because of its potential long-term destruction. “Brother” is clearly a fellow Christian, though this verse does not allow anger at non-Christians. “Subject to judgment” envisions a courtroom scene where the accused is judged.

Specific examples of anger include calling another believer a fool or a moron. The former word is a harsh-sounding Aramaic word and hard to translate. It is like a curse that calls into question a person's ability to think (“empty-headed” is a basic meaning). The second word focuses more on a person's moral character. Both words express extreme dislike and hatred, and that is the emphasis here. All anger is dangerous, though some is justified. But no one should carry or feed anger or allow it to grow or to devalue another person. The judgment that follows each expression of anger is serious. The Sanhedrin was the ruling council of the Jews. Why did Jesus say people would be brought before this body because of anger? He used this familiar image to point to God's judgment of sinners. He made the same point with hellfire, or literally “the fire of Gehenna,” a term derived from the name for the valley of

Hinnom southwest of Jerusalem. This smoldering garbage dump served as good illustration of hell.

5:23-24. These verses are the key to understanding the standard of righteousness for a believer. "Offering your gift at the altar" refers to when someone would hand a sacrifice to the priest. This important ritual, however, was not more important than a relationship with a fellow believer. Be reconciled with your brother shows that relationship is more important than ritual. Remember, no one could outdo the Pharisees in ritual and law keeping. Christianity, however, is all about right-hearted relationships.

5:25. A second example of the need for reconciliation is about a lawsuit. Jesus said that two people should reach a settlement before going to the judge. It also shows the importance of right relationships.

5:26. "The last penny" refers to the second smallest Roman coin. Judgment is sure for believers who remain angry at another Christian. Any time we put others outside the realm of our grace, we open ourselves to God's judgment. The examples in verses 23-26 show us the need for immediate action in dealing with ongoing anger.

5:27. Once again Jesus quotes one of the Ten Commandments, in this case the Seventh Commandment about adultery. Adultery was a terrible offense because it violated another person and broke the marriage covenant, a symbol of the relationship of God and His people.

5:28. Much like Jesus did in the previous paragraph about anger, He expounds on the commandment, showing its true meaning. Lust is a heart issue, the center of a person's identity.

5:29-30. The right side was considered more powerful and important at that time, thus to point out the right eye and the right hand as the objects of sin is an exaggeration of the act itself. The solution was equally as troubling for His audience: to cut them off. This stressed the importance of sexual purity.