

**Sermon on the Mount—The Magnification of the Law**

**Matthew 5:20—48**

The Mosaic Law was given to Israel to show them what God expected of them. The 613 individual ordinances are always treated as a unit and never split up. The Law is never referred to as laws. The Law was good but unattainable. God knew no one would be able to keep the Law so He built into it remedial steps to take to cover man's inability to fully keep the Law. We find out from Paul that the real reason of the Law was to show Israel (and all of mankind) their need of a Savior.

**Galatians 3:24** Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

The Pharisees were the keepers of the Law. They took upon themselves to oversee Israel's obedience of the Law. They became careful Law observers because they believed God punished them with the Babylonian captivity for not faithfully keeping the Law. They didn't understand that faith was more important to God than keeping the letter of the Law. It was God's desire for Israel to come back to Him, not to focus on keeping the Law. To make sure no Israelite could come close to breaking the Law the Pharisees developed a set of laws known as the oral tradition. With it the Pharisees thought they could build a protective hedge around the Mosaic Law. This oral tradition was later written down in what is known today as the Mishnah which is today a part of the Talmud.

**Verse 20**

**Christ's standard of righteousness**

The Mosaic Law set the standard. The Pharisees and Scribes raised the standard by adding their own set of laws and then uniting with the Lawyers of that day to make the keeping of the law unbearable.

**Luke 11:46** And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.

Now Jesus comes along and tells the people that to get into the Kingdom they will be required to be even more righteous than the Scribes and Pharisees. How could anyone get into the Kingdom? The Pharisees raised the bar so high that it was impossible to obey and now Jesus raises the bar way above that. Isaiah predicted that Christ would magnify the Law and this is exactly what He is doing.

**Isaiah 42:21** The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable.

Everything the Scribes and Pharisees did was for show. The Mosaic Law and all the other laws they added were fulfilled externally. Christ now says His new standards can only be met with an internal change of heart. It was no longer going to be possible to obey the Law externally, they will now have to have a new heart before going into the Kingdom. This new heart was not something a person could obtain by himself, it would have to be given to him. This is the promise of the New Covenant.

**Deuteronomy 30:5—6** <sup>5</sup>And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. <sup>6</sup>And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

**Jeremiah 31:33—34** <sup>33</sup>But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup>And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

**Ezekiel 36:24—27** <sup>24</sup>For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. <sup>25</sup>Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. <sup>26</sup>A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

Notice that it is the Spirit who will cause men to follow the Kingdom law that was being presented by Christ. Just as we need the Holy Spirit to change us inside, Israel will need the Holy Spirit to cause them to faithfully follow all the precepts of the Kingdom Law.

## **Verses 21—47**

### **The Kingdom Law defined**

Christ sets up this section with the idea that the people need to be more righteous than the Pharisees and then He proceeds to tear down the teachings of the Elders and replaces it with what God expects. Six times Jesus says: “You have heard it said...” referring to the oral tradition of the Elders (Verses 21, 27, 31, 33, 38 & 43).

In each point Christ takes a point of law and expands on it taking it from an external compliance to an internal conformity to Christ’s standard.

### **Murder (verses 21—26)**

Obviously taken from the Mosaic Law. It was easily obeyed by not killing someone even if you hated him. Christ turns this into a heart issue by saying obedience is accomplished internally. Hating is put on the same level as killing because murder generally starts with hate. Under the Mosaic Law a person could hate but seem to show love. Under the Kingdom Law the inward intent of the heart will be what will be judged.

The thought continues by showing the importance of putting the heart above sacrifice.

**Isaiah 1:10—16** <sup>10</sup> Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah. <sup>11</sup> “What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?” Says the LORD. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. <sup>12</sup> “When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? <sup>13</sup> “Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies— I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. <sup>14</sup> “I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them. <sup>15</sup> “So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. <sup>16</sup> “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil,

Verses 25—26 show how swiftly justice will be brought upon the lawbreaker. Christ will be ruling with a rod of iron. Justice will be swift and fair. Judges will have supernatural ability to know right from wrong, truth from lies. This principle can be seen in Acts 5 when Peter knew supernaturally that Ananias and Sapphira were lying.

### **Adultery (verses 27—30)**

Jesus takes another commandment out of the Mosaic Law and elevates it to how it will be enforced in the Kingdom. Adultery is wrong but in the Kingdom even thinking about committing adultery is punishable by being denied entrance into the kingdom.

This is a picture of how God expected Israel to act. They were not to go after other gods nor were they to even think about following the gods of other nations.

### **Divorce (verses 31—32)**

The Mosaic Law allowed divorce and remarriage. If a man gives his wife a certificate of divorce she is free to marry another. However, she was no longer allowed to go back to her original husband and remarry because that would constitute adultery.

**Deuteronomy 24:1—4** <sup>1</sup>When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. <sup>2</sup>And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man’s wife. <sup>3</sup>And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; <sup>4</sup>Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is

abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

Jesus now expands on the Law of Moses by saying the only reason for putting away a wife was for fornication (any sexual sin) and that anyone who marries her will be committing adultery. God does not condone divorce but gave Israel the option of divorce because of the hardness of their hearts (Matthew 19:8).

**Matthew 19:9** And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Israel was given this command as a picture of the relationship between God and Israel. She was betrothed to God but became impure by seeking after the gods of other nations. When she did this God put her aside and gave her a writ of divorcement. If Israel embraced a foreign god to be her only god that she would be faithful to then it would be as a marriage and she would not be able to be married to God because she chose another. She, however, wanted it all by desiring not only the gods of the nations but also the true God. This is why she is said to be playing the harlot.

**Hosea 4:12** My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them: for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their God.

**Jeremiah 3:6—8** <sup>6</sup>The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. <sup>7</sup>And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. <sup>8</sup>And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.

**Hosea 2:14—20** <sup>14</sup>Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. <sup>15</sup>And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. <sup>16</sup>And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali. <sup>17</sup>For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name. <sup>18</sup>And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely. <sup>19</sup>And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. <sup>20</sup>I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD.

The Church, the Body of Christ is not in view here. We are not the Bride of Christ. That position is reserved for Israel alone. Our relationship with Christ is compared to a bride and groom (Ephesians 5) in a simile (we are LIKE a bride) but Israel is compared to a bride in a metaphor (they ARE a bride).

How do these laws of divorce affect us today? There are many churches that will take this passage in Matthew 5 and apply it to us. These commandments are part of the Mosaic Law and will become a part of the Kingdom Law but believers are not under Law (Romans 10:4). We must look at Paul’s writings to see what principles we must follow.

There are two main passages written by Paul that address marriage; Romans 7 and 1 Corinthians 7. Romans primarily concerns the Law and how it relates to the Body of Christ while 1 Corinthians give us instructions on remarriage.

**1 Corinthians 7:10—11** <sup>10</sup>And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: <sup>11</sup>But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.

Unfortunately, most people do not interpret this passage correctly. They try to reconcile Matthew 5:31 with this passage to make it say what I believe it does not. It is usually read to say that any one who is divorced is not allowed to remarry and if they do, they will be committing adultery. A careful reading will clear this passage up by noting that this passage is addressed to those who are married. Divorce is nowhere to be found in these verses. If I were to paraphrase what Paul is saying I would say this:

And for those who are married, the wife is not to separate from her husband. If she does decide to separate from him then she is not to marry another man because she is already married. Either don’t remarry or reconcile with your husband.

As you can see, God has allowed for divorce and remarriage but He much prefers us to marry once, if at all.

### **Making oaths (verses 33—37)**

The Pharisees were well known to be masters at making vows that were not binding. They would make an oath, swearing on the temple but claim it was meaningless because they didn't swear by the gold in the temple. An oath sworn by the altar would mean nothing but an oath by the offering on the altar could be enforced. They would make things up so the outcome was in their favor. We have probably done the same thing when we made a vow while our fingers were crossed.

**Deuteronomy 23:21—23** <sup>21</sup>When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. <sup>22</sup>But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee. <sup>23</sup>That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the LORD thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth.

**Matthew 23:16** <sup>16</sup>Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!

Christ now tears down their practices and simply says that you must hold to whatever you say. Let your yes mean yes and your no mean no. In the Kingdom there will be no contracts. If a man says he will do something that is all that is needed. (Will there be any lawyers in the Kingdom??)

### **Retaliation (verses 38—42)**

This is an often misinterpreted passage that is so often wrongly applied to this Church age. A proper understanding can be arrived at if this passage is read in the context of the Tribulation. Everything Jesus does is to prepare the Little Flock for the coming Kingdom. Before going into the Kingdom these people will need to pass through the fires of the Tribulation. Here they are told not to resist evil—the powers of Satan. They are not to defend themselves because it is only Christ who can deliver them from evil. This is all in line with the “Lord’s Prayer.” Christ will be the one who delivers vengeance to those who go against the Little Flock.

**Deuteronomy 32:35** To me belongeth vengeance and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.

The Mosaic Law in Leviticus 24:20 says that if someone injures someone else then they should be injured in like manner. Christ again raises the standard of the Law by saying they are not to retaliate. Three specific injustices are mentioned; strike on the face, taken unjustly to court and having your coat stolen. These are the things Christ experienced before going to the cross and they are told to follow His example.

### **Enemies (verses 43—47)**

Enemies will surround the Remnant of Israel during the Tribulation. Instead of fighting against them they are told to love their enemies and to bless those who hate them. They are told to let Christ protect them during this time since they will be unable to fend for themselves. It is through this that unbelievers may be made to see the light of Christ reflected from these believers during an extremely dark period. Fighting against them will not win them over. Christ is teaching this Little Flock to trust Him. As Peter said to Christ: “we have forsake all and followed you.” This is the position the Remnant will have put themselves into with the need to trust Christ completely for their next meal, shelter and sustenance.

### **Verse 48**

#### **Perfection**

Christ sums up His Kingdom teaching by saying they need to be perfect—as perfect as the Father is. This is impossible for anyone to achieve. This is why they needed to depend on Christ and not on themselves. They couldn't get into the Kingdom by following the Mosaic Law and now Christ has raised the bar so high that without His work in their lives no one would be able to get into the Kingdom. Christ will change their hearts so they will be qualified to enter. They will have to depend on Christ as we do for salvation.

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