

Sermon Notes for October 10, 1999

## What is the Relationship of the Christian With the Law of God? Matthew 5:17-20

### Introduction

#### A. MAN'S View of Law

1. In **Lexington, KY**, there is an ordinance forbidding anyone to carry an ice-cream cone in his pocket.  
In **Waterloo, NE**, barbers are forbidden to eat onions between seven a.m. and seven p.m.  
In **Zion, IL** it is illegal for anyone to give lighted cigars to dogs, cats and other domesticated animals kept as pets.  
In **Carmel, NY** a man can't go outside while wearing a jacket and pants that do not match.  
In **Hartford, Conn.** you aren't allowed to cross a street while walking on your hands.  
In **Baltimore**, it's illegal to take a lion to the movies.  
In **Nicholas County, WV** no member of the clergy is allowed to tell jokes or humorous stories from the pulpit during a church service.  
In **Green, NY** you cannot eat peanuts and walk backwards on the sidewalks while a concert is on.  
Sign in the middle of the **Royal Gorge bridge in Colorado**, the tallest suspension bridge in the world, rising 1053 feet above the water level: "No Fishing From This Bridge."
2. USGA Rules of Golf - Brad
3. **The story was told some years ago of a pastor who found the roads blocked one Sunday morning and was forced to skate on the river to get to church, which he did.** When he arrived, the elders of the church were horrified that their preacher had skated on the Lord's day. After the service they held a meeting where the pastor explained that it was either skate to church or not go at all. Finally one elder asked, **"Did you enjoy it?"** When the preacher answered, **"No,"** the board decided it was all right.

One of my favorite stories comes from a man who used to be in our church. He and his wife were close friends of our family, but they have moved to another part of the country. We really miss their joyful presence. When he was a youth worker many years ago in an ethnic community, he attended a church that had Scandinavian roots. Being a rather forward-looking and creative young man, he decided he would show the youth group a missionary film. **We're talking simple, safe, black-and-white religious-oriented movie.** That film projector hadn't been off an hour before a group of the leaders in the

church called him in and asked him about what he had done. They asked, **“Did you show the young people a film?”** In all honesty he responded, **“Well, yeah, I did,”** **“We don’t like that,”** they replied. Without trying to be argumentative, the youth worker reasoned,

**“Well,**

**I remember that at the last missionary conference, our church showed slides--”** One of the church officers put his hand up signaling him to cease talking. Then, in these words, he emphatically explained the conflict: **“If it’s still, fine. If it moves, sin!”** **You can show slides, but when they start movin’, you’re gettin’ into sin.** C. Swindoll.

4. Are God’s laws as seen in the Old Testament as outdated as some of these laws?
  - a. **Why** did God give us laws at all?
  - b. And what is to be our response to the law of the Old Testament today?
5. Dr. Frank Gabelein - **“The theological and canonical ramifications of one’s exegetical conclusions on this periscope are so numerous that discussion becomes freighted with the intricacies of Biblical Theology.” Amen!**
6. And what about the age old struggle with law and grace?
  - a. What is to be the Christian’s relationship and responsibility to the Old Testament law?
  - b. Christians are split on these areas
    1. Theonomy - Dr. Greg Bahnsen/Dr. Roosas Rushdoony
    2. Dr. Larry Richards - Professor of Christian Education at Wheaton College - **“The Christian is not under law, and grasping this principle is a vital key to transforming Bible study. God never speaks to believers in tones of law.”**

#### **B. JESUS’ View of Law**

1. Well, I wonder if Dr. Richards ever read Matthew 5:17 before?
2. Without a doubt, this is one, if not the hardest texts in all of Scripture to preach on.
  - a. Not only have churches been split over it
  - b. Denominations have been formed BECAUSE of it!
3. May God bless us as we look at this most difficult and controversial passage in God’s Word.

#### **I. The FAITHFULNESS Of The Law**

**Vs. 17: “Do not THINK that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.”**

##### **A. Jesus Had Apparently Earned A REPUTATION As A Lawbreaker.**

1. Jesus ministered during the time of the Pharisees.
  - a. The Pharisees grew up as a movement during the intertestamental period of 400 years between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament.

- b. During this time several things occurred as God was not speaking to anyone during this period.
  1. So, this group of Jews took it upon themselves to develop spiritual leadership by the addition and clarification of laws for the Jewish people.
    - a. The Talmud and Midrash were added to the Old Testament law.
    - b. Adding some 525 chapters and 4,187 extra verses to the Law.
  2. During the Babylonian exile in 587 B.C., the Jews began to learn the Aramaic language of the Babylonians.
    - a. When they returned to their homeland some 70 years later, only the religious leaders had kept up with the original Hebrew language.
    - b. Thus, the Aramaic speaking Jews were dependent on the religious leaders for spiritual guidance - usually based on their added laws, not those of the Old Testament.
    - c. Somewhat like the Catholic Church with the Latin mass.
  3. Illustrations of Pharisaical laws of the Sabbath
    - a. The rabbis looked through Scripture to find various commands and regulations, and to those they would add supplemental requirements. To the command not to work on the Sabbath they added the idea that carrying **a burden was a form of work. They then faced the question of determining exactly what constituted a burden. They decided that a burden is food equal to the weight of a fig, enough wine for mixing in a goblet, milk enough for one swallow, honey enough to put on a wound, oil enough to anoint a small member of the body, water enough to moisten eyesalve, paper enough to write a customs house notice, ink enough to write two letters of the alphabet, reed enough to make a pen, and so on and on. To carry anything more than those prescribed amounts on the Sabbath was to break the law. Since it was not possible to anticipate or provide for every contingency, much time was spent arguing about such things as whether a tailor committed a sin if he went out on the Sabbath with a needle stuck in his robe, or**

**whether moving a lamp from one place in a room to another was permissible. Some strict interpreters believed that even wearing an artificial leg or using a crutch on the Sabbath constituted work and argued about whether or not a parent could lift a child on the Sabbath. They decided that to heal was work, but made exceptions for grace situations. But only enough treatment to keep the patient from getting worse was allowed; he could not be fully treated until after the Sabbath.**

- b. **Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson** performed a rather bizarre experiment on **ants** that may supplement Paul's illustration. After noticing that it took ants a few days to recognize one of their crumpled nestmates as having died, he determined that ants identified death by clues of smell, not visually. As the ant's body began to decompose, other ants would infallibly carry it out of the nest to a refuse pile. After many tries, Wilson narrowed down the precise chemical clue to **oleic acid**. If the ants smelled oleic acid, they would carry out the corpse; any other smell, they ignored. **Their instinct was so strong that if Wilson daubed oleic acid on bits of paper, other ants would dutifully carry the paper to the any cemetery. In a final twist, Wilson painted oleic acid on the bodies of living ants.** Sure enough, their nestmates seized them and marched them, their legs and antennae wriggling in protest, out to the ant cemetery. Thus deposited, the indignant "living dead" cleaned themselves off before returning to the nest. If they did not remove every trace of the oleic acid, the nestmates would promptly seize them again and return them to the cemetery. They had to be certifiably alive, judged solely by smell, before being accepted back into the nest.
  - c. And yet, Jesus "broke" the Sabbath
    1. He healed on the Sabbath
    2. He harvested grain on the Sabbath with His disciples to eat (Matt. 12:1)
2. Thus, the religious leaders did not know His stand on "the Law"
  - a. He was not trained in their schools.

- b. He spent no time expounding their laws except to be critical of them.
  - c. It may seem that He deliberately broke Pharisaical laws.
- B. Jesus Had Apparently a Need to CLARIFY Standing On The Law**  
**Vs. 17: “Do NOT think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.”**
- 1. **The Law**
    - a. The first few books of the Old Testament - The Pentateuch
      - 1. **The ceremonial laws**
        - a. Laws dealing with worship
          - 1. The sacrificial system
          - 2. The temple, priesthood
        - b. Ceremonies REQUIRED by a holy God so that an unholy people could come before Him.
      - 2. **The civil laws**
        - a. Laws given to the people of God as an individual government - a theocracy.
        - b. These rules would apply AS LONG AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD WERE A PEOPLE
      - 3. **The moral law**
        - a. The Ten Commandments
        - b. The moral needs of man
  - 2. **The Prophets**
    - a. The major and minor prophets
      - 1. Major - wrote a lot
      - 2. Minor - wrote less
    - b. Those who foretold of the people and the coming Messiah
  - 3. **The Abolition**
    - a. Jesus clearly puts the people at rest as He says that He did not come to abolish the law or the prophets.
      - 1. Destroy - dissolve; demolish
      - 2. A traveler who stays and puts off his pack; to untie and put down
    - b. **After all, why would Jesus destroy HIS OWN WORK?**
      - 1. Granted, He was not speaking about the “additional laws” of the Pharisees.
      - 2. But instead was speaking of the very laws THAT HE WROTE!
        - a. Colossians 1:15-16 - “All things were created by and for Him . . .
        - b. Jesus was the one who wrote the original 10!

## II. The FULFILLMENT Of The Law

### A. Jesus Observes The Law EXACTLY.

**Vs. 17b: “I have not come to abolish them but to FULFILL them.”**

**Vs. 18: “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”**

1. Instead of being the rebel He is being accused of, Jesus is calling the Jewish people **BACK TO THE EXACTNESS OF THE LAW.**
2. Jesus is so **COMMITTED** to the Law that He states clearly that it must be obeyed totally and exactly - **WITH NO MISTAKES.**
3. He also says that this Law cannot be altered even in the smallest area -
  - a. The smallest letter
    1. A yodh
    2. An iota
    3. A comma
    4. The 10<sup>th</sup> letter in the Hebrew alphabet
  - b. The stroke of a pen
    1. A stroke of the pen that distinguishes two Hebrew letters Beth and Koph
    2. It is only a small stroke.

**B. Jesus Observes The Law TOTALLY**

**Vs. 18b: “not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear UNTIL EVERYTHING IS ACCOMPLISHED.”**

1. Definitions
  - a. Fulfill
    1. to make full; to fill up; fill to the full
    2. Bring to **REALIZATION**; to complete
    3. To **FULFILL YOUR OBLIGATION.**
  - b. Accomplish
    1. Come to pass; come into existence
    2. Appear in history
  - c. Illustration: If I have an acorn, I can destroy it in one of two ways: I can put it on a rock and smash it to bits with a hammer or I can plant it in the soil and let it fulfill itself and become an oak tree.
2. Applications
  - a. Instead of saying that Jesus has come to destroy the Old Testament and its laws, **HE SAYS JUST THE OPPOSITE.**
    1. One - **HE HIMSELF**, as the preexistent God and Second Person of the Trinity **WROTE THESE LAWS AND HE WROTE THEM FOR A PURPOSE!**
    2. Two - This purpose **CANNOT BE CHANGED EVEN DOWN TO THE SMALLEST PERIOD or COMMA.** These laws must be obeyed **EXACTLY AS HE WROTE THEM.**
    3. But . . . Jesus, not us, is the One who is going to fulfill and accomplish that law.
3. **WHY Jesus must fulfill the Law**
  - a. **Adam and Eve fell into sin in the Garden of Eden.**

1. They fell away from God's presence and holiness.
  2. Into a state of darkness.
  3. Adam and Eve will produce children who will be raised in darkness.
- b. **God will require an accounting for man's fall and subsequent sins:**
1. **Genesis 9:6: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man."**
  2. And either man will pay for his own sin, or another will pay for him.
- c. **But God desires to continue in a relationship with man.**
1. So He sets up a CEREMONIAL system to allow man to enter and WORSHIP.
    - a. Sacrifices being made SYMBOLIZING the need of payment needing to be made
    - b. Man would not be saved through this system, but would instead see the need for the payment.
  2. God would establish CIVIL laws for the people of God as a nation.
    - a. Knowing that a sinful people would have to be given very specific laws
    - b. Otherwise their sin would destroy them as a nation.
  3. And finally God would give His people a moral code by which to live RELATIONALLY ONE WITH ANOTHER.
- d. But during the time of the Old Testament.
4. **HOW Jesus will fulfill the Law**
- a. **Jesus will enter into this world by a virgin.**
    1. Born to be a man
    2. Without sin
  - b. **He will obey the Laws of God TOTALLY, AS THEY WERE GIVEN.**
    1. **Civil** - the government of God's people
      - a. He will observe all of the Old Testament civil laws EXACTLY as given
      - b. Being under the same requirements of other men - but being obedient
    2. **Moral** - the morality of God's people
      - a. He will keep the 10 Commandments PERFECTLY
      - b. EVEN IN HIS HEART
      - c. Galatians 4:4: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law."

3. **Ceremonial** - the worship of God's people
  - a. And then He will go to the **CROSS AS THE PERFECT, SINLESS LAMB OF GOD**
  - b. And become that sacrifice
  - c. Describe the tabernacle
- c. **THUS FULFILLING AND ACCOMPLISHING THE EXACT AND FULL REQUIREMENTS OF THE LAW.**

### III. The FULLNESS Of The Law

#### A. **THIS IS Why Jesus Makes The Statement That He Does.**

**Vs. 20: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness SURPASSES that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."**

1. How could we keep all of the laws that the Pharisees kept?
  - a. All of the Pentateuch
  - b. And an additional 4,000 more RULES!
2. **Several reasons that Jesus makes this statement:**
  - a. **One - True righteousness is in obedience to God's standards, not man's standards.**
  - b. **Two - Jesus fulfilled and accomplished God's standards by His life and death.**
  - c. **Three - My need is not to obey the law perfectly, but to put my faith and trust in THE ONE who did that FOR ME.**
    1. The Pharisees believed that it was THEIR TASK to obey the Law to get to heaven.
    2. Jesus is teaching that it was HIS task to obey the Law so that YOU could go to heaven
3. Pictures of Faith
  - a. Old Testament  
Leviticus 16
  - b. Jesus on the cross
    1. Isaiah 53: "By HIS stripes are we healed."
    2. IT IS FINISHED!
    3. **Romans 8:1-4 (read)**
  - c. Jesus is THAT scapegoat who:
    1. Totally obeyed the law for us
    2. And died for us
    3. Provides us one to identify with **WHO HAS OBEYED THE LAW**
      - a. In the days of the pioneers, when men saw that a prairie fire was coming, what would they do? Since not even the fastest of horses could outrun it, the pioneers took a match and burned the grass in a designated area around them. Then they would take their stand in the burned area and be safe from the threatening prairie fire. As the roar of the flames approached, they would



not be afraid. **Even as the ocean of fire surged around them there was not fear, because fire had already passed over the place where they stood. When the judgment of God comes to sweep men and women into hell for eternity, there is one spot that is safe. Nearly two thousand years ago the wrath of God was poured on Calvary. There the Son of God took the wrath that should have fallen on us.** Now, if we take our stand by the cross, we are safe for time and eternity.

- b. George Vandeman wrote: ‘It was **May 21, 1946. The place - Los Alamos.** A young and daring scientist was carrying out a necessary experiment in preparation for the atomic test to be conducted in the waters of the South Pacific atoll at Bikini. “He had successfully performed such an experiment many times before. In his effort to determine the amount of U-235 necessary for a chain reaction—scientists call it the critical mass—he would push two hemispheres of uranium together. Then, just as the mass became critical, he would push them apart with his screwdriver, thus instantly stopping the chain reaction. **But that day, just as the material became critical, the screwdriver slipped!** The hemispheres of uranium came too close together. Instantly the room was filled with a dazzling bluish haze. Young Louis Slotin, instead of ducking and thereby possibly saving himself, tore the two hemispheres apart with his hands and thus interrupted the chain reaction. By this instant, self-forgetful daring, he saved the lives of the seven other persons in the room. . . as he waited. . . for the car that was to take him to hospital, he said quietly to his companion, **‘You’ll come through all right. But I haven’t the faintest chance myself.’ It was only too true. Nine days later he died in agony.**”
- c. This is why our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees.
1. The Pharisees righteousness was one of THEIR obedience.
  2. The Christian’s righteousness is one of JESUS’ obedience.

## B. THIS Is What Law and Grace Are All About!

1. **During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith.** They began eliminating possibilities. **Incarnation?** Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. **Resurrection?** Again, other religions had accounts of return from death. The debate went on for some time until **C.S. Lewis wandered into the room. “What’s the rumpus about?” he asked,** and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity’s unique contribution among world religions. **Lewis responded, “Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace.”**
2. Philip Yancy - What’s So Amazing About Grace? The “mathematics of grace”
  - a. It is not that God changed His requirements.
  - b. No, **He** fulfilled the requirements BY HIS GRACE!
3. As C.S. Lewis has said - “to be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.”
4. A vagrant lives near the Fulton Fish Market on the lower east side of Manhattan. The slimy smell of fish carcasses and entrails nearly overpowers him, and he hates the trucks that noisily arrive before sunrise. But midtown gets crowded, and the cops harass him there. Down by the wharves nobody bothers with a grizzled man who keeps to himself and sleeps on a loading dock behind a dumpster.

Early one morning when the workers are slinging eel and halibut off the trucks, yelling to each other in Italian, the vagrant rouses himself and pokes through the dumpsters behind the tourist restaurants. An early start guarantees good pickings: last night’s uneaten garlic bread and french fries, nibbled pizza, a wedge of cheesecake. He eats what he can stomach and stuffs the rest in a brown paper sack. The bottles and cans he stashes in plastic bags in his rusty shopping cart.

**The morning sun, pale through harbor fog, finally makes it over the building by the wharf. When he sees the ticket from last week’s lottery lying in a pile of wilted lettuce, he almost lets it go. But by force of habit he picks it up and jams it in his pocket. In the old days, when luck was better, he used to buy one ticket a week, never more. It’s past noon when he remembers the ticket stub and holds it up to the newspaper box to compare the numbers. Three numbers match, the fourth, the fifth—all seven! It can’t be true. Things like that don’t happen to him. Bums don’t win the New York Lottery.**

But it is true. Later that day he is squinting into the bright lights as television crews present the newest media darling, the unshaven, baggy-pants vagrant who will receive **\$243,000 per year for the next twenty years**. A chic-looking woman wearing a leather miniskirt shoves a microphone in his face and asks, **“How do you feel?”** He

stares back dazed, and catches a whiff of her perfume. It has been a long time, a very long time, since anyone has asked him that question.

He feel like a man who has been to the edge of starvation and back,

and is beginning to fathom that he'll never feel hunger again.

**B. How Do You KNOW If You Are Living Under Law or Grace?**

**1. How do you know if you have your OWN righteousness?**

- a. You have a **preoccupation with your own righteousness** and how well you are doing to get to heaven.
- b. You have a tendency **to look down on other people.**
- c. There is **a lack of inner peace** in your life.
- d. You are **not being changed** to be more like Christ.

**2. How do you know if you have the righteousness of CHRIST?**

- a. Keeping God's commandments is not only an obligation, it is an **inner desire.**
- b. **I don't look down on people because I know my own sin too well.**
- c. I am **at peace** with my standing before God because my trust is in Jesus and not in myself.
- d. My greatest **desire is to be like Jesus.**

Note:

The Law is like the tracks of a train. The engine of the train is Jesus, but the power of the train is the Holy Spirit. Now, do you see why you can't make your train go? You're trying in your own power and you don't have that kind of fuel.