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 Monday, January 04, 2016
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LESSON NOTES

APPROACHING THE KING (Matthew 6),
 Lord's Day, January 10, 2016
 A Beginning Study of the "Sermon on the Mount"



OVERVIEW

One of the greatest sins¹ I have ever committed was preached about by Jesus the Christ in Matthew 6. Here's what happened...

I was at Staples purchasing some ink for one of my photographic printers. Fumbling through my credit cards, I was looking for the AMEX Gold Card associated with my photo company—*Photos At Your Place*. It was almost identical to the AMEX Gold Card I was carrying for purchases for my church, *Myrtle Lake Baptist*. I wanted to make sure I was using the correct AMEX card. Midst all this stuff in my wallet was a Staples Tax-Free card for Myrtle Lake.

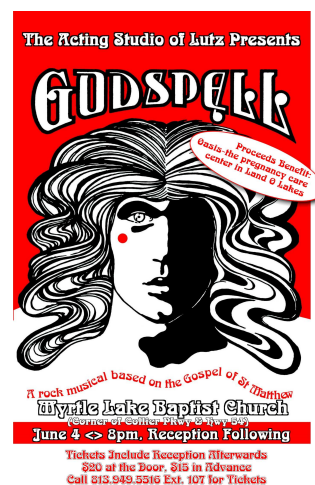
Noting the sales tax exemption card, the cashier said, "Oh good. You won't have to pay sales tax on the ink." I said, "Oh no, this ink is for me, not my church." She said, "You're a good man." Then I did it! I said, "Thank you."

No greater blasphemy has ever come out of my mouth. This is sin of the highest order, taking credit for righteousness instead of giving the Lord God praise for His effect on me.

Regarding Matthew 5-7, a commentator from Lifeway once wrote regarding Matthew 5-7...

"This is no lightweight 'preacher speech' delivered after dinner on the grounds. It was a manifesto for upside-down living. It was basic citizenship for residents of the kingdom of God. And for the disciples, it was nothing less than rewriting the rulebook for what it means to truly [*sic*] follow Jesus."

I commend their statement and challenge you to consider this as we begin a study of the "sermon on the mount." So many have



¹Yes, some sins are greater than others. For an inspired commentary on the issue, consult John 19:11.

heard/read/watched these three chapters in Matthew (e.g., Godspell) that they will think they “know them.” Trust me, neither they nor we do. Unless you fully recognize, intellectually *and* spiritually, the theology being taught by Jesus as revolutionary, you do not fully know Matthew 5-7.

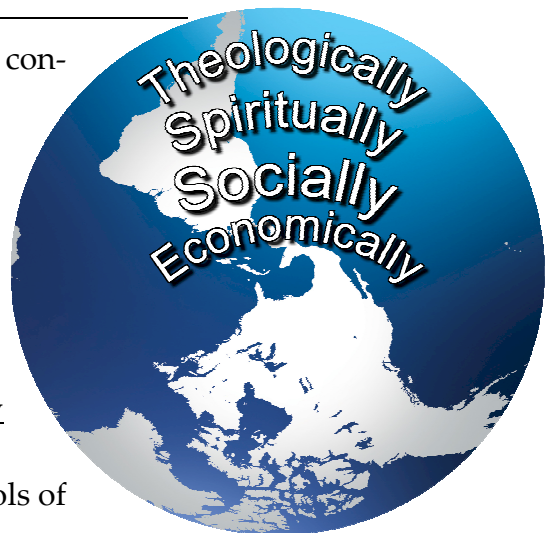
Jesus’ sermon was and is shot over the bridge of the religious right. The orthodox of their time, the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, were so enamored by their orthodoxy, they failed to see they had turned God’s Law into a mishmash of human hypocrisy and human exaltation. That is, if I know the Law and practice the Law better than anyone else, I am righteous. Balderdash! This is the key message behind the teachings of the Lord God Jehovah we find in the Scriptures we call the “New Testament.” No wonder the poor were enamored, the rich threatened, and the religious right incensed. Jesus put it on the line. He turned the world upside down: theologically, spiritually, socially, and eventually economically.

Theologically, Jesus revealed the meaning of the plural pronoun used in Genesis 1:26. Spiritually, Jesus proclaimed real spirituality was connection to the great I AM, not our narcissistic knowledge of God and self-exalting obedience to the commands of the I AM. Socially, Jesus tore the curtain from top to bottom, forever eliminating any human barrier between humans, and between humans and the Lord God Jehovah. Economically, Jesus destroyed the presumably causal linkage between God’s blessing and material gifts. A whole new meaning of “blessing” became evident to all who would listen to the Son of God in Matthew 5.

CONTEXT: HISTORICAL, RELIGIOUS, AND POLITICAL

In order to understand Matthew 5-7, you must understand the contexts in which Christ came to this earth as Jesus of Nazareth. Among some of the key issues, be sure you understand the implications of:

1. The time between the Hebrew Scriptures and the “New Testament.”
2. The criteria for what constituted the canon.
3. The dramatic changes occurring in Judaism, especially why those changes were erupting (e.g., the pig in the temple; or, the ongoing debates between the Hillel and Shammai schools of Scripture interpretation).
4. The writings between the Hebrew Scriptures and Matthew — there was a lot of “scripture-writing” going on, but it was not recognized as guided by Holy Spirit. Distinguishing between the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha is critical.
5. The history of the Herod’s which affected the Palestine of Jesus’ time.



KEY ISSUES AND CONTEXTS—PREPARING TO STUDY MATTHEW 5-7

1. Context. After being led into the desert by Holy Spirit, Jesus has just survived a 40-day fast and several encounters with Satan. Relying upon Scripture, Jesus was eventually served by His angels and then proceeded to choose a few good men as students. His teaching, preaching, and healing was so popular throughout Syria that large crowds came south to Galilee to hear Him. Matthew and Luke record one of those times when Jesus “taught the crowds.”²
2. Matthew 5:1-6—Upon seeing the crowds, Jesus went upon on a hillside, and sat down like all teachers sit. His disciples came close, perhaps to hear better so they could repeat the teaching to the crowds. Here is the opening salvo:
 - ⌘ Closer to God³ are those who are poor in spirit. They may be poor in your eyes, but I say they have the kingdom of heaven.
 - ⌘ Closer to God are those who mourn. You may be embarrassed by them now and look away from them because they are sad, but they will be comforted.
 - ⌘ Closer to God are the meek. You may think nice guys finish last, but the meek shall last for they shall inherit the earth.
 - ⌘ Closer to God are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. You may think they are fanatics, but they will be filled in ways you, who thirst after pragmatism and rationality, can never or ever will be filled.
3. Matthew 5:7-12—He continued His teaching ...
 - ⌘ Closer to God are those who show mercy [grace]. You may think the merciful are weak, but they will be given grace when others will not.
 - ⌘ Closer to God are those whose *raison d'être* is pure. You may not always see their reason for being, but God does and they will see God Himself.
 - ⌘ Closer to God are those who seek peace (the Greek here, “eh-ray-nayn” [εἰρηνην] connotes “reconciliation,” not just an absence of conflict or war). You who enjoy, if not live for, the grittiness and passion of conflict may attribute the reconcilers as wimpy, but the Lord God calls the seekers of reconciliation His children.

²Opinions differ regarding whether this Sermon is a summary of what Jesus taught on one occasion or a compilation of teachings presented on numerous occasions. Thirty-four of the verses in Matthew's record occur in different contexts in Luke than the apparently parallel Sermon on the Plain found in Luke 6:17-49. Some of the differences are important. For example, Matthew speaks of being poor in spirit, whereas Luke is clearly talking about being poor in the traditionally material sense.

³The meaning of “blessed” was adulterated as much then as it is now. Too often we use the phrase “blessed by God” as a synomic phrase for “gift from God.” Not all gifts from God are blessings, because some can become a curse if they separate us from the Lord God. Similarly, not all gifts are curses, but become blessings, because they bring us closer to the Lord God Jehovah. Being close to God is the real meaning, both theologically and pragmatically of “blessing;” being separated from Him is the curse.

⌘ Closer to God are those who suffer for doing and being God's example of doing and being right. Those who suffer because of this? They inherit the kingdom of heaven. Yes, you are closer to God when they insult you for My sake than when they praise you. You are closer to God when you suffer or are lied about because of Me. Take the time to rejoice! Why? Your reward in heaven is great, and you're in great company. These same spiritual morons persecuted My prophets before you were ever here on earth.

4. Matthew 5:13-16—Here's what all this means. Given that you are indeed merciful, poor in spirit, meek, sufferers for righteousness, and even mournful for Me, you are the salt of the earth. You make things taste better; you preserve the word; you keep pure what has been given to the whole earth. But remember—salt which loses its abilities is not good for anything, except to be used as filler for a road! People trample and urinate on that road.

Similarly, given that you're merciful, meek, suffer for righteousness, and have a pure reason for being, you are the light of the world. You enlighten by lighting up the world with righteousness and exposing the evil in the world. You are the light. Make sure your light shines. After all, people don't put a light under a bowl; they put it up high so everyone can see. When you shine in this way, Father God can be praised because your acts of righteousness are seen by the light you show.

KEY TEXT ISSUES—MATTHEW 6

Matthew 6:1-4. *Acts of righteousness are only righteous when conducted for righteous reasons.* When you are doing good things that others can see, make sure you are doing them to honor Father God in heaven. If you do “good stuff” so you can be viewed as righteous by others, it’s neither good nor righteous—it’s blasphemy. The Lord God will not reward you for such behavior.

So? When you give to the poor—don’t broadcast it on Fox News. Sure you’ll be honored by people on the streets and at church, but... Here’s the truth (“amen”)—those who show off how good they are to others to get their approval? They’ve already received their reward.

MATTHEW 6:1-4

“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”



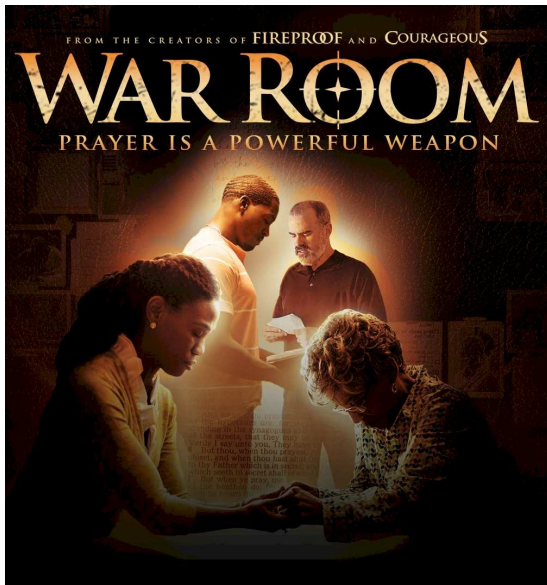
So? When you give to the poor—don’t let other people know about it—in fact, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. LOL. Seriously, Father God knows, and what He knows done in secret will reward you.

- Q How do you avoid doing good so that you won’t be seduced by their praise, instead of His praise?
- Q What “trumpets” today are used to announce “good deeds?”
- Q To what extent is IRS code⁴ relevant to your giving?

⁴<https://www.irs.gov/Charities-&-Non-Profits/Charitable-Organizations/Charitable-Contribution-Deductions>

Matthew 6:5-18. Similarly, when you pray, do so to Him, not for others to admire. People, who love to be seen, pray to Father God in ways that cause others to admire them. Amen. Just like those who give to be admired by others, they too have their reward already, and in full.

What about you? Go to your War Room—close the door to all the nonsense outside and focus on Father God. You may not see Him, but He is there seeing what you do in secret, and He will reward you.



And, by the way—don't babble on like pagans who pray as if prayer were some magical incantation. Lots of words do not a powerful prayer make. Words from the heart to the Father are power indeed. Consider this as a way of praying...

- ⌘ Father God—You are in heaven; your authority is indeed holy.
- ⌘ May Your influence come here on earth just as it is in heaven.
- ⌘ Please give us what we need today, forgive our shortcomings, and help us forgive those who have shortchanged us.
- ⌘ Finally, Father God, keep us away from temptation—deliver us from Satan.

Remember, if you forgive people when they sin against you, Father God will also forgive you. If He, the Holy God of the Universe, can forgive with all your nonsense, you can forgive as well.

MATTHEW 6:5-18

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹“This, then, is how you should pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us today our daily bread.

¹²Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

¹⁴For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

¹⁶“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

But, if you don't forgive others, Father God will not forgive you of your sins. Get over yourself—you're not perfect, nor are they.

So, when you decide to take time out from food, TV, movies, chocolate, or whatever to focus on the Lord God, don't put on a "look at me, look how holy I am" face. For those who show off when they're fasting? They have received their reward, already. All of it.

When you've decided to fast—just do it. Keep yourself clean, positive and don't mention anything about missing binge watching, or chocolate, or food. Just do it. God knows what you're doing—He sees what is done in secret and He will reward you with His presence, Holy Spirit.



NETFLIX

- Q Why do some love to hear ourselves pray in public at church or elsewhere? What's up?
- Q Why do some refuse to pray in public at church or elsewhere? What's up?
- Q Why is prayer in one's war room so powerfully effective?
- Q How should you respond to a person who asks for a prayer or two for their sick child? A better grade on an exam? A parking space closer to Macy's door? Should you ask "How can I pray for you?" When should you not pray for someone, especially the pagan?
- Q To what extent is this prayer in Matthew 6 a model for private prayer or for public prayer?
- Q Which of these items do often neglect in your prayers, private or public? For what component is the most difficult to pray?
- Q What happens if you don't end your prayer with "...in Jesus name?" And, what's with this "Amen" thing at the end? [Hint: look up "amen" in Scripture.⁵ It's not what you think. In fact, Jesus the Christ used it a lot, but since He didn't use it "properly," it's rarely translated as "amen;" e.g., see Matthew 6:2.]
- Q Why is it useful for Christians today to ignore the Scripturally supported and documented practice of fasting by Christians in the distant and recent past?
- Q Why is it important that our praying, fasting, giving, etc. is done "in secret?" Remember Porter's First Law of Theology—God is smart.⁶

⁵<http://biblehub.com/interlinear/matthew/6-2.htm> "Amen" is a Hebrew word meaning, "truly" or "let it be" or "verily." It does not mean "I agree" or "we agree." The Greek transliteration is αμην (ah-mane).

⁶See <http://TheScoop.DThomasPorter.com/?p=114> To wit: God is not very smart, for "very" implies a non-existent continuum. God is smart, period, in the absolute. Therefore, we can better understand God's revelation in history, the natural world, and in Scripture if we continually ask—Why did God allow that in history? Why did God create the world with such beauty, and trauma? Why did God give us these commands in Scripture? With every answer, we learn how and why... God is smart. "God is smart" thus becomes a potent hermeneutic.

5:1-7:29 The Sermon on the Mount is the first of five great discourses in Matthew (chs. 5-7; 10; 13; 18; 24-25). It contains three types of material:

- (1) beatitudes, i.e., declarations of blessedness (5:1-12),
- (2) ethical admonitions (5:13-20; 6:1-7:23) and
- (3) contrasts between Jesus' ethical teaching and Jewish legalistic traditions (5:21-48).

The Sermon ends with a short parable stressing the importance of practicing what has just been taught (7:24-27) and an expression of amazement by the crowds at the authority with which Jesus spoke (7:28-29).

The Sermon on the Mount's call to moral and ethical living is so high that some have dismissed it as being completely unrealistic or have projected its fulfillment to the future kingdom. There is no doubt, however, that Jesus (and Matthew) gave the sermon as a standard for all Christians, realizing that its demands cannot be met in our own power. In this respect, it demonstrates the power of the Law; that is, a full recognition of the Law's demands crushes us, making us understand how dependant we truly are upon the Lord God Jehovah. It is also true that Jesus occasionally used hyperbole to make his point (see, e.g., the note on 5:29-30. Even a blind man can lust).

5:1 *mountainside*. The exact location is uncertain. It may have been the gently sloping hillside at the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee, not far from Capernaum.

See also Luke 6:20-49 Luke's Sermon on the Plain, apparently parallel to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). Although this sermon is much shorter than the one in Matthew, they both begin with the Beatitudes and end with the lesson of the builders. Some of Matthew's Sermon is found in other portions of Luke (e.g., Luke 11:2-4; Luke 12:22-31,33-34), suggesting that the material may have been given on various occasions in Jesus' preaching. See Mt 5:3-12. The Beatitudes go deeper than material poverty (v. 20) and physical hunger (v. 21). Matthew's account indicates that Jesus spoke of poverty "in spirit" (Mt 5:3) and hunger "for righteousness" (Mt 5:6).

The new law, like the old (Ex 19:3), was given from a mountain.

sat down. It was the custom for Jewish rabbis to be seated while teaching (see Mk 4:1; 9:35; Lk 4:20; 5:3; Jn 8:2).

disciples. Lit. "Learners." Since at the end of the Sermon the "crowds" expressed amazement at Jesus' teaching (7:28), "disciples" may here be used in a broader sense than the Twelve. Or perhaps the Sermon is addressed to the Twelve with the crowds also listening.

5:5 *meek*. This beatitude is taken from Ps 37:11 and refers not so much to an attitude toward people as to a disposition before God, namely, humility. *the earth*. The new promised land (cf. Rev 21:1).

5:8 *heart*. The center of one's being, including mind, will and emotions; i.e., one's *raison d'être*, one's reason for being. The "heart" in Biblical language is the center of the human spirit, from which spring emotions, thought, motivations, courage and action—"the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

⁷Adapted, revised and edited by D. Thomas Porter from Compton's Interactive NIV © 1996.

5:9 *peacemakers*. Those who promote reconciliation, as far as it depends on them (Romans 12:18). In so doing, they reflect the character of their heavenly Father and so are called “sons of God.”

5:10 *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. A present reality as well as a future hope.

5:13 *salt*. Used for flavoring and preserving. *loses its saltiness*. Most of the salt used in Israel came from the Dead Sea and was full of impurities. This caused it to lose some of its usefulness as a flavor enhancer or as a preservative.

5:15 *lamp*. In Jesus' day people used small clay lamps that burned olive oil drawn up by a wick. The ancient lamp was a small clay saucer with part of its rim pinched together to form a spout from which protruded the top of a wick fed by oil contained in the saucer. (Examples of seven-spouted lamps come from the time of Moses.) The ruins of Beth Shan and Megiddo have yielded examples of a metal pedestal topped by a ledge designed to carry a lamp. The classic representation of the shape of the tabernacle lampstand comes from the time of Herod the Great and may be seen on the Arch of Titus in Rome. The lamps were to burn all night in the tabernacle, tended by the priests. Oil for the lamps was to be supplied by the people; the light from the lamps represented the glory of the Lord reflected in the consecrated lives of the Israelites—Israel's glory answering to God's glory in the tabernacle (Exodus 29:43). See Exodus 27:20-21.

bowl. A bowl that held about 8 quarts of ground meal or flour.

5:16 *Father in heaven*. Matthew uses the term "Father in heaven" or "heavenly Father" 17 times, whereas Mark and Luke use the term only once each, and John does not use it at all.

5:17 *the Law*. The first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures.

the Prophets. Not only the Latter Prophets--Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which we call Major Prophets, and the 12 Minor Prophets (lumped together by the Jews as "the Book of the Twelve")--but also the so-called Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings). Taken together, "the Law" and "the Prophets" designated the entire Hebrew Scriptures, including the Writings, the third section of the Hebrew Bible. See 13:35, where Matthew introduces a quotation from the Writings (Ps 78:2) with "what was spoken through the prophet."

fulfill. Jesus fulfilled the Law in the sense that He gave it its full meaning. He emphasized its deep, underlying principles and total commitment to it rather than mere external acknowledgment and obedience.

For further reading about “Fulfill,” see *Appendix A: The “Fulfillment” of the Law*

5:18-20 Jesus is not speaking against observing all the requirements of the Law, but against hypocritical, Pharisaical legalism. Such legalism was not the keeping of all details of the Law but the hollow sham of keeping laws externally, to gain merit before God and praise from others, while breaking them inwardly. It was following the letter of the Law while ignoring its spirit. Jesus repudiates the Pharisees' interpretation of the Law and their view of righteousness by works. He preaches a righteousness that comes only through faith in Him and His work. In the verses that follow, he gives six examples of Pharisaical externalism.

5:18 *smallest letter*. One word in Greek (*iota*), which we use when we say, "It doesn't make one iota of difference." It is the nearest Greek equivalent to the Hebrew *yodh*, the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

least stroke of a pen. The Greek word for this phrase means "horn" and was used to designate the slight embellishment or extension of certain letters of the Hebrew alphabet (somewhat like the bottom of a "j"). In modern typography, it's called a serif. For example, Times-Roman is a serif font, and Arial is a non-serif font.

5:21 *it was said*. The contrast that Jesus sets up (vv. 21,27,31,33,38,43) is not between Hebrew Scriptures and His teaching (He has just established the validity of the Law in the Hebrew Scriptures). Rather, it is between externalistic interpretation of the rabbinic tradition on the one hand, and Jesus' correct interpretation of the Law on the other.

murder. Several Hebrew and Greek verbs mean "kill." The ones used here and in Ex 20:13 specifically mean "murder."

5:22 *Raca*. May be related to the Aramaic word for "empty" and mean "Empty-head!"

hell. The Greek word is *ge(h)enna*, which derives its name from a deep ravine south of Jerusalem, the "Valley of (the Sons of) Hinnom" (Hebrew *ge hinnom*). During the reigns of the wicked Ahaz and Manasseh, human sacrifices to the Ammonite god Molech were offered there. Josiah desecrated the valley because of the pagan worship there (2Ki 23:10; see Jer 7:31-32; 19:6). It became a sort of perpetually burning city dump and later a figure for the place of final punishment.

5:23-26 Two illustrations of dealing with anger by means of reconciliation.

5:26 *penny*. The smallest Roman copper coin.

5:28 *looks at a woman lustfully*. Not a passing glance but a willful, calculated stare that arouses sexual desire. According to Jesus, this is a form of adultery even if it is "only in one's heart."



5:29-30 Jesus is not teaching self-mutilation, for even a blind man can lust. The point: we should deal as drastically with sin as necessary.

5:32 *except for marital unfaithfulness*. Neither Mark 10:11-12 nor Luke 16:18 mention this exception. (See also Matthew 19:3) This last part of the question is not in the parallel passage in Mark (10:2). Matthew possibly included it because he was writing to the Jews, who were aware of the dispute between the schools of Shammai and Hillel over the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. To wit:

- ⌘ Shammai held that "something indecent" meant "marital unfaithfulness"--the only allowable cause for divorce.
- ⌘ Hillel (circa 60BC – 20AD) emphasized the preceding clause, "who becomes displeasing to him." He would allow a man to divorce his wife if she did anything he disliked—even if she burned his food while cooking it.

Jesus clearly took the side of Shammai (see v. 9), but only after first pointing back to God's original ideal for marriage in Genesis 1:27; 2:24. [See more information in *Appendix C, "Except for Marital Unfaithfulness."*]

5:33-37 Hebrew Scriptures allowed oaths except those that profaned the name of God. Jesus would do away with all oaths, in favor of always speaking the truth.

5:38 The so-called law of retaliation, as its contexts show, was actually meant to limit the punishment to fit the crime. By invoking the law of love, Jesus corrected the then, and currently, popular misunderstanding of the law of retaliation.

5:39 *resist*. Here it probably means in a court of law. *strikes*. The Greek verb used here means "slaps you with the back of the hand." It was more of an insult than an act of violence. The point is that it is better to be insulted even twice than to take the matter to court.

5:40 *tunic . . . cloak*. The first was an undergarment, the second a loose outer one.

5:41 *forces*. The Greek verb comes from a Persian word meaning "press into service" and is used in 27:32, where the Roman soldiers pressed Simon into service to carry Jesus' cross.

5:42 Probably to a general requirement to give to everyone who asks, but a reference to the poor (cf. Dt 15:7-11; Ps 112:5,9).

5:43 *hate your enemy*. Words not found anywhere in Hebrew Scriptures. However, hatred for one's enemies was an accepted part of the Jewish ethic at that time.

5:44 *pray*. Prayer is one of the practical ways love expresses itself (cf. Job 42:8-10).

5:45 *the evil and the good*. God shows his love to people without distinction.

5:46 *tax collectors*. Traditionally known as "publicans," these were local men employed by Roman tax contractors to collect taxes for them. Because they worked for Rome and often demanded unreasonable payments, the tax collectors gained a bad reputation and were generally hated and considered traitors.

5:48 *Be perfect*. Christ sets up the high ideal of perfect love (see vv. 43-47)--not that we can fully attain it in this life. That, however, is God's high standard for us.

6:1 *acts of righteousness*. This verse introduces the discussion of three acts of righteousness: (1) giving (vv. 2-4), (2) praying (vv. 5-15) and (3) fasting (vv. 16-18). *reward from your Father*. Spiritual growth and maturity or perhaps a heavenly reward of some kind.

6:2 *announce it with trumpets*. Perhaps a reference to the noise made by coins as they were thrown into the temple treasury. Or the phrase may be used figuratively to mean "make a big show of it." *hypocrites*. The Greek word means "play-actor." Matthew uses the word 13 times (Mark, twice; Luke, three times). Here it refers to those who fake being pious. *their reward in full*. The honor they receive from people is all the reward they get.

6:3 *do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing*. A great metaphor teaching that one should not call attention to one's giving. Self-glorification is always a present danger.

6:6 *room*. The Greek word means "storeroom." Unlike most of the rooms in the house, it had a door that could be shut.

6:7 *babbling like pagans*. They used long lists of the names of their gods in their prayers, hoping that by constantly repeating them they would call on the name of the god that could help them. Jesus is not necessarily condemning all long prayers, but meaningless verbiage in praying.

6:12 *debts*. The meaning is the same as "sins." Jesus taught this truth on other occasions as well (Mt 18:35; Mk 11:25). The prayer is a pattern for believers, who have already been forgiven for their sins. Jesus speaks here of daily forgiveness, which is necessary to restore broken communion with God.

6:16 *fast*. See my footnote on Matthew 6:16.

6:17 *put oil on your head and wash your face*. Jews put ashes on their heads when fasting. That is, maintain your regular appearance. Fasting should not be done in an ostentatious way.

6:19-21 The dangers of riches are often mentioned in the NT (e.g., v. 24; 13:22; 19:22; Mk 10:17-30; Lk 12:16-21; 1Ti 6:9-10,17-19; Heb 13:5), but nowhere are they condemned in and of themselves. What Jesus condemns here is greed and hoarding of money. The challenge, however, is just like the presence of gun changing everything, so does the presence of money. Money is an artifact whose meaning is not insignificant.

6:19 *moth and rust*. Representative of all agents and processes (e.g., war or inflation) that destroy worldly possessions. *break in and steal*. Houses in Palestine had walls made of mud bricks and could be broken into easily.

6:20 *treasures in heaven*. Anything done in this life that has eternal value. The phrase is the equivalent of being "rich toward God" (Lk 12:21). In this context it probably more specifically refers to using one's material wealth for good causes.

6:30 *thrown into the fire*. Grass was commonly used to heat the clay ovens of Palestine.

APPENDIX A: THE “FULFILLMENT” OF THE LAW IN MATTHEW 5:17

Be sure you efficiently review with your students Christ’s lesson regarding the fulfillment of the Law. Otherwise, His teaching on morality will be viewed as just another set of rules for human conduct, another ethical manual as it were.

Morality is more than conduct—it is also a matter of character and goals. Jesus clarified the Law by stipulating its fulfillment was more than “correct conduct.” To use His introductory phrase, “You have heard it said⁸ ... but I say to you ...,” the Christ called us to a higher understanding of the Law.

1. The Law that changes not the heart (character) is mere legalism—refraining from murder and but hating your brother is contemptible by the Law.
2. The Law that changes not the goal of behavior is sheer hypocrisy—telling the truth, because you will not have to remember what you told people, is contemptible by the Law.
3. The Law that changes not the conduct, is virtual sloth—feeling compassion toward the poor and ignoring them is contemptible by the Law.

Therefore, regarding Jesus’ teaching regarding murder/anger, adultery/lust, and divorce/flippancy, you must choose whether to focus upon:

- 1) The nature of His teaching, thereby clarifying just “what the heart” of the matter is, and potentially losing applicability for your students, **or**
- 2) The applicability of handling murderous anger, adulterous lust, and flippant divorces, and potentially losing the clarifying nature of His teaching—i.e., morality is more than conduct.

Understanding the Heart of the Law, Its Conduct, and Its Purpose within the Context of the Gospel

Understanding the purpose of the Law, especially as it relates to the Gospel is a key issue taught by Jesus the Christ in Matthew 5:17-20. Thus, it must be a critical part of your teaching regarding His teaching, especially in matters of the heart (character) and matters of purpose (goals), Matthew 5:21-32.

First things first. Whether the Law is right and true is not because God articulated the Law be obeyed. To reduce the Law, and God, to His power as limited by His ability to espouse legislation questions His infallibility and inerrancy. Furthermore, if we hold that the Law is true and right just because God commanded it, then God could have said/commanded, *without the cross*, “I forgive

⁸See also the section I’ve included from the *Bible Illustrator*, entitled “You Have Heard It Said: Jewish Laws Behind Jesus’ Teachings” by John Pothill, Professor of New Testament, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

you.” But, the cross was required. Understanding why the cross was required, helps understand the nature of the Law.

Whether the Law is right and true is not because God only commanded that which is true and right. To reduce the Law’s goodness, and thus God’s goodness, to His wisdom limits the scope and perhaps even His praise-worthiness. Furthermore, if the Law becomes a god in that it transcends God who Himself must conform to the Law, we have put an illogical and unbiblical constraint on God. Finally, such a proposition makes atonement impossible—God would be unable to change a law above Him to which He Himself must conform.

How do we reconcile this issue? Well, that is part of what Jesus was addressing in Matthew 5:17-20 and illustrating in 5:21-32. To wit, the authority of the Law—whether it is true and right—is because the authority **is** Law; the authority of the Law is neither under nor over the Law. The Law is, of course, communicated by God; it is also wise, again because it was communicated by God. But the Law is true and righteous because it reflects its Author and who He is. The authority is neither under nor over the Law; the authority is Law. The Law is right and true because it reflects God Himself.

Therefore, Jesus the Christ can say, and we can believe with all assured trust (faith), that He came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. A “fulfilled” law satisfies the Law-Giver. It satisfies the Law-Executor. It satisfies the Seeker of Justice. It satisfies the Law-breaker. This may be the greatest statement of the Gospel—the Law is fulfilled. God is satisfied.

THE LAW IS HOLY
BECAUSE GOD IS
HOLY.

So, what was Jesus saying when Matthew used the word “fulfill” in 5:17? The Greek is πληρωω (play-row-oh) which is used in Scripture with a wide range of meanings: to complete, to accomplish, to obey, to clarify, to bring to maturity, to ratify, to culminate, and/or to perfect. Thus, there are a variety of conclusions which one might reasonably draw from Christ’s statement. How you view the “difference” between the “old” and the “new” testaments will largely affect the verb you choose.

If you believe Christ came to “complete” the Law, then its constraints on human behavior are lifted—they no longer bind us (discontinuity). If you believe that Christ came to “ratify” the Law, then its constraints continue to this day (hyper-continuity). If you believe that Christ came to “bring to maturity” the Law, then its constraints need to be understood fully (e.g., “... you have heard it said, but I say ...; continuity).

Implications: What About the Believer?

Jesus answers this question by answering how we are to live our lives—our righteousness must surpass those who know the Law backwards and forwards (the scribes), and even those who follow the Law to the letter, the Pharisees.

How do we live a life in the Kingdom where we know the Law has 600+ rules? And, each one must be followed perfectly (“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.” James 2:10). After all, not one jot nor tittle will be changed, but all will be ful-

filled (play-row-oh πληρωω). Just how do we do it? Jesus teaches that righteousness, following the Law, is an integrated, systemic matter of our character and our goals, **and** our conduct.

Jesus has called us to a higher, more complex plane of ethical conduct as believers—we are not only to do righteousness (conduct), and we are to seek righteousness (purpose), we are also to be righteous (character). Perhaps Peter said the latter best in 1 Peter 1:15-16:

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” (quoting in part Leviticus 11:44)

**THE LAW IS HOLY
BECAUSE GOD IS
HOLY.**

Let Holy Spirit work—follow the Law, He will show you—Don’t quench Him, let Holy Spirit do what He does—To be a viable container of Holy Spirit, you become holy.

This paradigm explains how Christians ultimately sin against God when they break His Law. In Genesis 39:9 – Joseph says, how then can I do this against God? In Psalm 51:4 – David says, against You and You alone have I sinned.

When you have sinned, you have sinned against God, not the rule/law. Hence, the seductive “usefulness” of eliminating God, in our mind, as the source of the Law, as a reflection of God’s character. It is all too easy to violate the Law when we simply view it as a violation of the law—not as what it is, a sin against God and God alone.

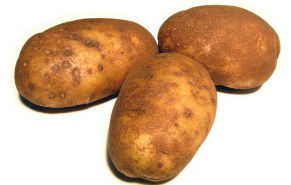
The Law

The Law is a major issue for we who call ourselves “Christian.” As early Christians we were mostly Jewish and comfortable with The Law. The Law was the law. The Law was inextricably interlaced within our culture’s values and practices. Intriguingly, however, we found its satisfaction by Jesus the Christ (Matthew 5:17) simultaneously comforting *and* disquieting. The Law teaches us that we are not perfect—even our sacrifices to satisfy The Law are inadequate—we can not meet its demands. The Law crushes any pretense of righteousness. We still feel guilty, and yet, as humans, we like “the rules” clearly spelled out. The Law met both those needs.

Unfortunately, however, The Law also provided an excuse for idolatry—people became enamored not with following The Law to please the Lord God Jehovah, but with pleasing others and themselves with hyper-active vigilance to the demands of The Law. Our Christ became absolutely livid with such abuse of The Law by the people of His time. His anger was justified beyond our hypocrisy—He knew His life must be sacrificed once and for all to fulfill His demands for justice. The Law could only be fulfilled by the perfect sacrifice by the perfect priest—by God Himself. Christ Jesus was the perfect man who offered Himself up as the sacrifice.

We often think we have evolved spiritually past this hyperactive application of “The Law.” Yet, when we consider deeply the enculturated precepts and presuppositions we bring to the new covenant, we too must worry about hypocrisy and that seductive idolatry which births itself from narcissistic rule-following. It will not be easy to get over our cultural precepts—yes, for example, there are ways to worship God that are unacceptable to us, but perfectly wonderful to Him. *He* is our measuring rod, not the feelings or opinions of others.

The Law is true and righteous not because it is God who declares what is true and righteous. Nor, is The Law true and righteous because only God knows what is definitively true and righteous. The Law is true and righteous because it mirrors its Author, His very essence. So? When we violate The Law, we are neither violating some capricious rule by a remote sovereign nor some esoteric ethical edict; we are violating the very nature of God. It’s not small potatoes.



Therefore, Jesus my Christ can say, and we can all believe with assured trust (faith), that He came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill (πληρῶσαι, Matthew 5:17) it. A “fulfilled” law satisfies the Law-Giver. It satisfies the Law-Executor. And, it satisfies the Seeker of Justice. This may be the greatest statement of the Gospel—the Law is fulfilled. God is satisfied.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "D. Thomas Felt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline.