



Matthew 5:17-48

Route 66

Pastor Scott Hubbard
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“The Law”

Matthew 5:17-20

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, 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. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 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.”

Exodus 20:1-17

“And God spoke all these words:

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

“You shall have no other gods before me.

“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

“You shall not murder.

“You shall not commit adultery.

Exodus 20:1-17 continued...

"You shall not steal.

"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

The Ten Commandments (also known as the Decalogue) are ten laws in the Bible that God gave to the nation of Israel shortly after the exodus from Egypt. The Ten Commandments are essentially a summary of the 613 commandments contained in the Old Testament Law.

The first four commandments deal with our relationship with God.

The last six commandments deal with our relationships with one another.

The Ten Commandments are recorded in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-7.

1) *"You shall have no other gods before me."* This command is against worshiping any god other than the one true God. All other gods are false gods.

2) *"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."* This command is against making an idol, a visible representation of God. There is no image we can create that can accurately portray God. To make an idol to represent God is to worship a false god.

3) *"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name."* This is a command against taking the name of the Lord in vain. We are not to treat God's name lightly. We are to show reverence to God by only mentioning Him in respectful and honoring ways.

4) *"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."* This is a command to set aside the Sabbath (Saturday, the last day of the week) as a day of rest dedicated to the Lord.

5) *“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.”* This is a command to always treat one’s parents with honor and respect.

6) *“You shall not murder.”* This is a command against the premeditated murder of another human being.

Murder - Sanctity of life.

Matthew 5:21-26

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”

Psalm 4:4

“When you are angry, do not sin.”

Ephesians 4:26-27

“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

7) *“You shall not commit adultery.”* This is a command against having sexual relations with anyone other than one’s spouse.

Adultery - Sanctity of relationships.

Matthew 5:27-32

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

8) *"You shall not steal."* This is a command against taking anything that is not one's own, without the permission of the person to whom it belongs.

9) *"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor."* This is a command prohibiting testifying against another person falsely. It is essentially a command against lying.

10) *"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."* This is a command against desiring anything that is not one's own. Coveting can lead to breaking one of the commandments listed above: murder, adultery, and theft. If it is wrong to do something, it is wrong to desire to do that same something.

Many people mistakenly look at the Ten Commandments as a set of rules that, if followed, will guarantee entrance into heaven after death. In contrast, the purpose of the Ten Commandments is to force people to realize that they cannot perfectly obey the Law.

Romans 7:7

"What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law."

Romans 3:23

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"

Romans 6:23

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Oaths

Matthew 5:33-37

"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

Eye for Eye

Matthew 5:38-42

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”

Love for Enemies

Matthew 5:43-48

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

How can we be as perfect as God? What did Jesus mean?

Some people might view the command to be perfect as a proof text for sinless perfection. However, several passages of Scripture acknowledge the ongoing struggle with sin in a Christian’s life (**Galatians 5:17; Romans 7:15–20; 1 John 1:8–10; Philippians 3:12**). Jesus’ words cannot be used to defend the doctrine of sinless perfection, as Scripture consistently conveys a different message. We will never be perfect, in the sense of “sinless,” in this life.

Let us consider the overall context before delving into what it means to “be perfect.” Jesus begins His sermon by pronouncing blessings on unlikely recipients (**Matthew 5:3–12**). He then declares that His followers are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, emphasizing the importance of good deeds (**verses 13–16**). Next, He turns His attention to the law, making it clear that His standard surpasses mere observance of the law’s letter (**verses 17–47**). Our thoughts and motives matter, too. That’s why Jesus equates lust with adultery and hatred with murder. He also emphasizes love for enemies, non-resistance, the permanence of marriage, and the avoidance of oath-taking.

In **Matthew 5:48** Jesus continues setting the standard higher than we are wont to set it. The literal interpretation is likely what Jesus intended. We are called to be absolutely perfect, matching the perfection of our heavenly Father. Every aspect of our being should align with God’s ways, including our deepest thoughts. The Greek word used, *teleios*, conveys a sense of maturity, completeness, or attaining a goal. In this context, the goal is to meet God’s standard, not simply settle for human morality. A follower of Christ cannot take an attitude of “I’m good enough.”

This realization should frustrate any honest person, for who can achieve moral perfection? Who hasn't experienced coveting, lust, or hatred? The idea that we can be perfect like God seems hyperbolic. Moreover, the Bible clearly states that we are *not* perfect. We are all sinners and have fallen short of God's standard (**Romans 3:9–20; 1 John 1:8; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Psalm 14:2–3**). How, then, do we reconcile the command to be perfect like God with the truth that we're not?

The answer lies in the gospel. Jesus is the only One who has lived a perfect life, and it is through Him that we meet God's standard. Rather than *earning* righteousness, we are *declared* righteous because of Christ. As Paul states,

We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God freely and graciously declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. (**Romans 3:22-24, NLT**).

2 Corinthians 5:21 further demonstrates the substitutionary atonement of Jesus: "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*"

Because we are made perfect through Christ, we should live accordingly. Our lives should exhibit God's righteousness and holiness due to our identity as His people. Christ's standard becomes a way of life as we obey His teachings. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we find the strength to love our enemies, uphold our relationships, overcome lust and hatred, and follow the other commands in Scripture.

In obeying the command to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect, we cannot lean on our own righteousness, which falls far short. We must rely on Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit within us. "*Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,*" says the Lord Almighty" (**Zechariah 4:6**).