

40-05-11.wpd —The Behavior God Requires

Old Testament, Law, Gospel, obedience, Pharisee, Kingdom

Mat 5:17-20

To be on target with God, we must love Him and our neighbor.

INTRODUCTION:

–[Harold Berman, a Harvard law professor, said that in Western culture there's been a loss of confidence in both *law* and *religion*, because of a radical separation between the two. He says that you can't have workable rules for behavior without *religion*, because only religion provides absolutes on which morality and law can be based. This loss of absolutes, he fears, dooms Western society to *relativism in law*.]

*–What happens when people break away from the revealed laws of God? They forfeit the possibility of having *absolute truth*, and search for guidance based on unstable *social values* or the *changing whims* of popular leaders. This why some feared the *popularity of Jesus*.

**–When Christ began His ministry, the Jewish leaders saw Him as a religious *threat*. His actions contradicted their interpretation of OT Law. He healed on the Sabbath. He mixed with outcasts, prostitutes, and other sinners. He disregarded certain ceremonial customs they taught to be essential for holiness. They considered Him a *rebel*, who was going to try to overthrow and abolish the OT revelation of God. –BUT, in the 4 verses of our text, Jesus shows not only the *absolute authority* of God's Word in the OT, but also the *absolute necessity* to teach and obey God's will in the OT at a higher level than what was being practiced by the religious leaders who were accusing Him.

I. What Did Jesus Come to Fulfill? (re-read v.17-18)

A. Jesus came not to abolish but to fulfill OT laws and commands:

1. OT ceremonial laws of the sacrificial system will always stand as historical signposts, perpetually pointing to their fulfillment in the sacrifice and priestly ministry of Christ.
 - a. The Tabernacle and Levitical practices can help explain Gospel truth by illustrating the Cross and Christian living.
 - b. But now they are pictures only, since the realities they depict, Christ and His Kingdom are here for our life and experience.
2. OT judicial laws, shaped by moral principles to fit the cultural setting of the Jewish nation [laws concerning slavery, property rights, taxes, etc.], these were brought to their completion point by the

cross-cultural expansion of Christ's Kingdom. (They continue as Scriptural examples of how to deal with new cultural situations).

3. OT moral laws, outlined in the Ten Commandments, were not only fulfilled in Christ's personal life, but are also to be fulfilled in our lives, by His redemption and through the sanctifying power of His Holy Spirit.
- B. BUT Jesus ALSO came to fulfill the good laws and partial revelations of truth found within all religions and cultures.
1. All truth is God's truth, and since Jesus Christ is the "light that lightens every man coming into the world," there are elements of truth that only His full revelation can bring to fullness.
 2. [An excerpt from *The Christ of the Mount* by E. Stanley Jones might help explain this concept: "He came to fulfill. He came to fulfill the desire of the Egyptians for immortality by himself rising from the dead and saying, 'I am the resurrection and the life'; the naturalness of the Greeks, by making his way of life a well, springing up from within unto everlasting life; the love of the Romans for authority by assuming an authority over life that goes to the last thought and to the last motive; the craving among the Buddhists for the cessation of suffering by the turning of suffering into a song; the truth of submission in Islam by demanding that every thought be brought under captivity to the obedience of Christ; the reverence of the Chinese for elders by making the world a human family with God as our Father and all men as our brothers; the passion of the Japanese for loyalty by making loyalty to himself and to the Beloved Community the very center of his gospel; the desire of the Hindus for unity with the Divine by offering to men that unity with God expressed in the words, 'I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one'—Christ, God, man—perfected into one!"]
- C. Jesus "filled up" OT directives by explaining the intention of God behind them— Mat 22:35-40, One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (this is the heart of OT law)

TRANS: The moral laws of the OT point to God's will for us to love Him and to love all those with whom we share the privilege of bearing His image. This is the behavior God requires. To be on target with God, we must love Him and our neighbor. [In the Star Wars scene where Luke Skywalker drops his X-Wing fighter into the Death Star corridor, Luke hears from the Base Commander, "Stay on target, stay on target!"] This is what the OT

law tells believers: "*Stay on target, stay on target!*" Jesus made the target easy to see, but that in itself does not make it easy to keep.

II. What Level of Obedience Does Jesus Require? (v.19-20)

- A. Our obedience to the divine commands of loving God and loving our neighbor determines our place in the Kingdom of God. (v.19)
- B. Jesus *obeyed* the law of God and *taught* it to others, in that order, and He said, "*Follow Me*," because He intended us to do the same.
 1. No kingdom exists without the authority of the King's law. (This is why Jesus makes the heart of OT law His measuring standard.)
 2. Our place in God's Kingdom is based not just on *obedience*, but on how we teach others or distract them from obeying God's law. (How sobering, for we teach more by behavior than by words.)
- C. The obedience Jesus requires in His Kingdom is greater than that practiced by the *religionist* (ie., "*the scribes and Pharisees*"). (v.20)
 1. **We enter the kingdom** by having a relationship with God. (The prestige of excelling in *religion* will last only for this lifetime.)
 2. **We enter the kingdom** by having an internal heart change (The faithful religionist is busy with external changes that look good.)
 3. **We enter the kingdom** by obediently working for the King (What work can the meticulous law-keeper fail to do?—John 6:28-29, Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the **work** of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.") (Faith in Christ changes our behavior from the inside out.)

CONCLUSION:

–Faith is what keeps us **on target with God, loving Him and loving our neighbor.** [int the Star Wars scene: Luke Skywalker loses computer control, and the "*Stay on target*" voice can't help him anymore. He has to trust "the Force" in order to hit the target, and he does, blowing up the Death Star.] OT laws point to God's will, but they have absolutely no power to help us keep them.

–In John 14:1, Jesus told those raised under the OT law, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me." It is only through a faith-relationship with Jesus that we hit the target of God's will and work.

Matthew 5:17-20 (NIV)

17“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.

18I 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.

19Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same 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.

20For 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.