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Matthew 5:18 - 5:20: Law and Prophets (Part 2)



Sermon on the Mount - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg examines Matthew 5:18-20 and its various interpretations. He explores the idea that the ceremonial law is descriptive of a future righteousness, whereas the moral law is prescriptive of actual righteousness. He also suggests that Jesus fulfilled at least the ethical and moral aspect of the law through love, which extends to commitments and faithful dealings with others. Gregg touches on the precarious position that law-following individuals are put in after 70 A.D when parts of the law become impossible to fulfill. Ultimately, he emphasizes the importance of understanding what it truly means to fulfill the law and live a righteous life.

Transcript

We'll continue now looking at the same passage that we began talking about in our last session, which is Matthew 5, verses 17-20, and in general, it's an introduction to Jesus' teaching on righteousness, what it means to live a right life before God, what God acknowledges as righteousness, and of course the law has got to be dealt with, figured in here, because the law of Moses was really the standard throughout the entire Old Covenant order of what righteousness is. Let me just say this. I admit that much of my interpretation of what Jesus said comes from hindsight.

I'm not sure that I would have understood it the way I do now if I were only sitting there in the audience listening to him. But in hindsight, realizing that the temples have been destroyed since then, the epistles of Paul and the Council in Jerusalem and all these other things have transpired since Jesus gave this sermon, it is in the light of these later developments that it is, to my mind, incumbent on us to interpret his meaning. Now, this would not be a legitimate thing to do if it did violence to his words, to do so.

I mean, if there was some... if it was required for us to just kind of twist his words or throw them out or something in order to make them fit later developments, I think that in that case we'd have reason to question the validity of the later developments. But there's no need to twist it. It's just that these words have been given or have been applied various ways by different interpreters.

I think that the later developments help us to understand which of those interpretations works best. When he said, do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

As I said, after considering some other possibilities, I feel that he means I did not come to invalidate the law and the prophets, the Old Testament. I didn't come to invalidate the Old Testament scriptures, but rather to fulfill them, establish them and bring about the fullness of what they anticipated. They gave a picture of a reality, and I'm bringing the reality.

And that reality relates to the laws in a couple of ways. One is the ceremonial laws, which were really more or less a picture of something spiritual, have been fulfilled in that that spiritual thing has come, that they pictured. And the moral laws, which were more a description, a prescription I should say, of how people should live.

It was pretty hard to live that way, but even the way that they were understood was poorly understood, and God had a deeper kind of righteous behavior in mind than what the Jews generally understood. You see, the ceremonial law was descriptive of a future righteousness, and moral law was prescriptive of really a future righteousness. When I say of a future righteousness, I don't mean that the Jews in the Old Testament were not required to keep the moral law.

It's just that there were limits to how much they understood what it required, and therefore there were limits on their performance as well in many cases. There were notable exceptions. There were people who are described, even in the Old Testament era, as having kept the law blamelessly.

John the Baptist's parents, for example, are described that way. Before Jesus even came, they were said to be blameless according to the law. Saul of Tarsus said that, or later when he was Paul, he said that his conduct had been blameless in those respects.

But even then, I'm suspicious that that is speaking of blamelessness in terms of outward observance. There may have been heartfelt sincerity too, but certainly no one could ever claim that he had never been angry at someone else or never looked at a woman's lust after her doing some of these other things that Jesus later lays out. All people have violated such things.

But these provide the new standard that we're to understand as the heart of God and his thought of what righteousness really is. It's a spiritual thing. It's not merely outward.

Now, Jesus came to fulfill and give this inward spiritual part to the law. It did not bring an end to everything in the law fully, but it did fulfill it all. And that's what we get to in verse 18.

He says, Assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or one tittle

will pass from the law till all is fulfilled. I mentioned in our previous session the difficulty in the structure of that sentence, because the basic thought is one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law during a considered designated period of time, which is described as until. But unfortunately, it's twice described as until, and what follows the until is not exactly identical, at least in wording, in the two instances.

So the question is, how long does this statement hold true? Is it still true? What does it mean? Well, first of all, one jot and one tittle. Some of you may not be familiar with those words except from this passage, but a jot is actually a reference to the Hebrew letter Yod, which was the smallest of the Hebrew letters. In fact, the most accessible way to see what one of those looks like is you could turn to Psalm 119, and there's an example of each of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet before each set of eight verses, and just prior to Psalm 119, verse 73, you can actually see in your Bible what a jot looks like.

It's practically a dot, practically a speck. There's not much to it. It's the tiniest of the Hebrew characters.

And a tittle, there seems to be some dispute as to what a tittle was, but most believe it was sort of a, it was either a flourish, which would be what some people would have in their handwriting style. It would be just sort of like when different people use cursive writing, you know, they do slightly different things from other people, some a little fancier than others. But I think that most scholars would agree that a tittle refers to a pen stroke that was not even a complete character, but more a mark that distinguished one character in the Hebrew alphabet from another that looked almost like it.

Like a capital C and a capital G in English are very similar looking, but there's a single line that distinguishes them, or a capital O and a capital Q are identical with the exception of a little stroke of the pen. And so also with certain Hebrew characters, some of them were very close in appearance to each other, but a single stroke wouldn't distinguish them, and that stroke would be called a tittle. So when Jesus says not one yote or one tittle, he means not the slightest detail, it's simply a hyperbole really, because of course there have been things changed in the law.

Unfortunately through copious errors and so forth, he's not saying that there will be nothing changed in the way the law is written or the way it's preserved in writing. Just like when he said don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, he's using a figure of speech that is not literal, because hands don't know anyway. Likewise when he says not one yote or one tittle will pass from the law, actually some have in the copying of the laws, there's been a great deal dropped out here and there.

But he's referring more to the detail of the law, every detail of God's commands will hold true until what? Well the first clause says until heaven and earth pass away. If that is taken by itself, and if the other clause at the end of the sentence were not present, we would have to simply be inclined to say well I guess all the law, every part of it, every

little bit is still binding until the end of the world, until heaven and earth pass away. And that hasn't happened yet, because there's still a heaven and earth that have not yet passed, the same one that was here when he was here.

And for that reason we would have to say everything in the law still is binding. And that would put us in a very difficult predicament, because there's no temple anymore and we would be required by God, by Jesus' own statement, to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem, to offer animal sacrifices in the temple through the Levitical priests, to give 10% of our income to the Levites, and so forth. None of this is practiced today, nor can it be.

There simply isn't a temple, or Levites, or altar, or sacrifices. It's gone. It has passed away.

And if his statement simply meant that every detail of the law will remain in force until the end of the world, then he has put us in a very, very precarious position, because we cannot keep some parts of the law for the simple reason that they required structures and infrastructure that does not exist anymore. And so that makes it doubtful that that is his meaning. But it means something.

That's what makes it troublesome. What does it mean, till heaven and earth pass away? Now the other until, I'll try to answer the question I just asked, but we need to look at the other one to get the information. Until all things are fulfilled.

That is, till all the law and the prophets are fulfilled. Not one jot or tittle will pass. Now, there are evidences we have in scripture that some things at least, if not all things, have been fulfilled.

There's even a suggestion by Jesus that all things have been fulfilled now. If you look over at Luke, chapter 20, excuse me, 21, I would imagine our students here would get tired of seeing this verse, because I've brought it up on so many different occasions to make various points, but especially this point. In Luke 21, beginning at verse 20, Jesus said, When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.

Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let those who are in the country not enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. Now, unless we bring to this text a grid that it does not provide, it is an obvious fact that Jesus is predicting here the Roman invasion of Jerusalem and its destruction in 70 A.D. The disciples are told when they see Jerusalem surrounded by armies.

Some of them lived to see that time, and it did happen. But what's interesting about it is that Jesus said that these, meaning the days of the invasion of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., these are the days of vengeance, that all things that are written may be fulfilled. Now,

Jesus said not one jot or one tittle of the law or the prophets will be done until all is fulfilled.

Now, we talked in our last session about how the law can be fulfilled, but how are the prophets fulfilled? Well, simply by the event. Jesus' statement there, unless it is hyperbole, which it could be, all things might not mean literally every last thing, but there's no reason presents itself to my mind immediately why this must be hyperbole. I can't think of anything in the Old Testament that has not been fulfilled in 70 A.D. or before.

Maybe you can, but I can't. And therefore, I am inclined to think Jesus was telling essentially the truth, that in 70 A.D., when Jesus judged the apostate system of Judaism and brought an end fully to the old covenantal system, that all things were fulfilled. Now, Jesus said not one jot or tittle will pass from the law until all is fulfilled, but certainly some things passed away in 70 A.D., and interestingly enough, Jesus, in a way of anticipation of it, said that that will happen so that all things will be fulfilled, that were written.

I find it interesting that the Apostle Paul, when he traveled and made Gentile converts, he did not subject the Gentile converts to the law, but we read nowhere of him ever teaching the Jewish converts to give up the keeping of the law. He might have, we just don't read of it. We don't know exactly what special instructions Paul might have given to Jewish converts.

We know this, that when Paul wrote to the Gentiles in Colossians, he said, don't let anyone judge you about keeping Sabbath, but when he wrote to the Roman church, which clearly had a number of Jews in it, he said, some of you keep one day special, some don't, just do what you're fully persuaded in your own mind to do, indicating that the Jews who apparently kept Sabbath, with his blessing, could continue doing so. The Gentiles, with his blessing, could not do so. He didn't state Jew-Gentile there, but it's almost certain that the people who had convictions about keeping a holy day would be the Jews in the congregation, and those who wouldn't would probably be Gentiles, but the point is that during Paul's ministry, he was accused of teaching Jewish people not to circumcise, and when he came to Jerusalem and met James, James said, you know, it's been said of you that you're telling Jewish people not to circumcise their children and to forsake the law of Moses, and to make sure that everyone knows that this isn't true of you, I want you to go and pay the fees for these men who have this Nazareth vow, and Paul said, okay, and did it.

Now, I don't know if Paul was just being sneaky, or if Paul was agreeable with James. I'm not teaching the Jews to forsake the law. The Gentiles, I don't put them under the law, but I don't teach the Jews to forsake it.

And this may be, we don't know if this is the case or not, because it's simply, there just

isn't enough data in Scripture to let us know, but it's possible that even Paul, the staunch defender of justification by faith, may well have encouraged Jews. We don't have any record of his writing to Jews along this line, but he may have encouraged Jews to keep the law as long as the law sustained. We know that he took a Nazareth vow himself very late in his ministry, and even very late in his ministry as a Jew, he went to keep the feasts in Jerusalem as much as he could.

As a man traveling as far from Jerusalem as he did, he wasn't able to make it to all of them, but it is possible that even Paul, who's told us so much about our not being under the law, still, as much as possible, observed the law when it would not be offensive to someone else to do so, for him to do so, and he may well have felt that Jewish believers maybe should keep the law. We don't know whether he's thought that or not. James thought so, and so did some of the others in Jerusalem, apparently.

After Jerusalem fell, no one could argue that way. No one could argue that anyone had to keep the law in the sense of ceremonial law, because it just wasn't an option. It couldn't be done.

It was gone. It had vanished away, like the writer of Hebrews said. And that being so, there is a possibility that when Jesus said, to all be fulfilled, he was speaking of the last furthest out point of all being fulfilled, to be at 70 A.D., that the law would still be observed by the Jews, largely up to that time, even the believing Jews, although Gentiles would stand in a different standing.

Now, I'm not so sure I would agree with this interpretation I've just given, because I'm not really sure that the Jews, after Jesus died, were required by law to keep Passover, for example, and to keep the ceremonial thing. But we do know that the Christians in Jerusalem, including the apostles, typically did worship at the temple, and apparently did temple things, like take Nazarite vows and so forth, which required sacrifices as part of the ceremony. And so there does appear to have been a keeping, whether of necessity or not, of much of the ceremonial law by the Jews, who were believers in Jerusalem, at least until 70 A.D. But with the destruction of the temple makes it clear that Jesus' words about not one jot or one tittle will pass until, that that until had arrived, because a fair bit did pass at that time.

And so I am of the opinion that the ceremonial law was fulfilled in the first century. I am inclined to believe it was fulfilled when Jesus died and rose again. But if one would argue that among the Jews there was still some requirement there, judging from the behavior of the early Christians in Jerusalem, then I would say, well, then the furthest point of fulfillment would be 70 A.D., when Jesus said all things that are written will be fulfilled.

And it did happen. And since that time, it would appear that the ceremonial aspects of the law, everything that is not of an abiding moral nature, that dictated by the character of God himself, that I personally think that those things are no longer binding. But why

does Jesus say until heaven and earth pass away? Because that's the stick in the mud here.

I mean, that's the thing that makes it sound like even after 70 A.D., even until the end of the world, not one thing is going to change. Now, there are several ways that that phrase can be dealt with. One is to take it quite literally and just say, well, all the law is still with us.

But that would require ignoring some things like 70 A.D., because not all the law is still with us. There are other ways to understand it. One person I knew paraphrased it sort of this way.

It's not exactly the words, and whether Jesus' words can really be forced to this construction, I don't know. But one person suggested that what Jesus was saying is that it would be easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one jot or tittle of the law to pass away before it was fulfilled. Now, that's not what the words actually say here.

However, Jesus in another passage said something that was almost exactly like that in its construction. I think it was in Luke 16, if I'm not mistaken. Yeah, Luke 16, 17.

Luke 16, 17, Jesus said, it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail. Okay? Now, that construction, it's easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail. If that thought was imported into this passage, and that's what apparently this preacher was doing when he used it that way, he said that we should probably paraphrase Jesus' remark in verse 18 here to be, it would be easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one jot or tittle of the law to pass away before it's fulfilled, until it's fulfilled.

Well, that's an ingenuity or an ingenious way of looking at it, but it's not very satisfying to me for the simple reason that Jesus said until heaven and earth pass away. So there are two other possibilities. Either of them make reasonable sense to me.

One of them is more likely to make more sense to you than another, but from my whole frame of reference, both of them seem possible to me. One of them is that heaven and earth passing away is a figure of speech for the passing away of the old covenant order. I'll give you a little personal note here.

I came up with this on my own years ago as a possibility. From reading Isaiah, chapters 65 and 66, where you first read of the new heavens and the new earth, and I'd always understood that to mean, well, I first had understood it to mean just a reference to a literal heavens and earth that will replace this heavens and earth when Jesus comes back, and I must say I have difficulty divorcing myself from that scenario too. I still believe it, but as I studied Isaiah more and came to conclusions on other bases about the fulfillment and the timing of the passages that are described here, I came more and

more to think that what we had in this section of Isaiah was a description of the passage of the old covenant and the institution of a new covenant from chapter 60 on in particular and even before that.

And in Isaiah 65, 17, it says, For behold, I create new heavens and new earth, the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. So there's an old heaven and old earth that is by implication passed away and a new heaven and new earth has taken its place. Also later on in chapter 66, verse 22 of Isaiah, For as the new heavens and the new earth which I make shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your descendants and your name remain.

And I would have no trouble just applying these to the future eschatological new heavens and new earth if not for the general context of the whole section, including the verses before and after and everything. And while I don't have time to go into all my reasoning, it crossed my mind several years ago reading this that the new heaven and new earth spoken in Isaiah almost sounds as if he's talking about the new covenant being instituted as a new creation, as it were. And then of course, I remember that Paul had said in 2 Corinthians 5, 17, If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation.

Old things are passed away. Behold, all things have become new. Heavens and earth, creation, a new one, the old one's gone, and so forth.

I'll just say this, that it crossed my mind as a possibility that the passing away of heavens and earth here might be a figure of speech, like so many of the other things in this passage, that refers to the passing of an old order and the institution of a new one. You know, Jeremiah said, or God said to Jeremiah, and I wish I remembered exactly where it is, I think it's chapter 33, but I'm not real sure about this. God said there that if the sun and the moon and the stars should cease, then would Israel cease to be his people.

Here it is. It's Jeremiah 31. And interestingly enough, it's right after the passage about establishing a new covenant.

Because Jeremiah 31, verses 31 through 34 is that I will make a new covenant with my, you know, passage. And immediately after the announcement that God would make a new covenant, he says in verse 35, Thus says the Lord God, who gives the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, who disturbs the sea and its waves roar, the Lord opposes his name. If those ordinances depart from before me, says the Lord, then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before me forever.

Thus says the Lord, if heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I also will cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says the Lord. Now, seen one way, God has cast off Israel. Seen another way, he hasn't, because he's preserved the remnant in the form of the church.

But as a nation, he's pretty much put them aside. And he said that that would only happen if the sun and the moon and the stars and their ordinances could be discontinued. It's, I believe, a hyperbole.

I believe it's a figure of speech. Some people would say, well, no, you've got to take that literally. That's, I guess, everyone's own choice.

But I guess it's interesting that in connection with the announcement that he's going to make a new covenant, and it won't be like the old covenant, that he mentions the possibility of the heavens and the earth passing away being equal to the possibility of Israel being rejected as a nation, which I think it did. When the new covenant came, I think Israel was rejected as a nation. And so just that this imagery would exist in such passages was one of those things that kind of fed my suspicion on one occasion, that heaven and earth passing away might be a reference to the passing away of the old order.

To my delight, I found that a number of older writers, and this is much later because I never read these writers, but just this morning I was just reading another old Puritan writer named John Brown, a book called *The Saints and Discourses of Our Lord*, which is three volumes long, and which Charles Spurgeon said was one of the greatest commentaries on the saints and discourses of the Lord. I was reading what he had to say about this passage, and to my amazement, he said that, he said it's quite obvious that the passing of the heavens and the earth is a reference to the passing away of the old covenant order, and the institution of the new covenant. Well, just because he said so doesn't make it true.

But what makes it amazing to me is that I have had such a strange idea myself once, you know, and then I find someone who lived hundreds of years before me thought it was obvious, you know, thought that was an obvious thing. A similar thing happened to me on another occasion once when I got this brilliant revelation that Genesis chapter 1, in addition to being a description of how things were made, was a spiritual picture of the new creation, and how God says, let there be light, and Paul said, God who has shown the light out of darkness, called the light out of darkness, has shown it in our hearts. We give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And I went, in my own study and thinking, I went through each of the days of creation and saw some spiritual parallel in the Christian life of the new creation, of Christians' new creation. And I thought, oh wow, that's a brilliant new insight, never heard anyone say it. And then I picked up a Tozer book several years later, *The Divine Conquest*, and in the introduction he says, anyone with the slightest inkling of spiritual insight would see in Genesis chapter 1 a picture of the Christian life.

And I thought, oh man, I guess I didn't have any inklings for a long time. But it's always kind of exciting when something new and novel comes to your mind and then you find

someone who wrote a long time ago who said the same thing, and to their mind it was obvious. Anyway, I say all that just to say this is a possibility.

I don't expect it to be obvious to you unless you've gone through all the same things in your journey I have. It's reasonably acceptable to my mind, but it may not be as equally to yours, that the statement, till heaven and earth pass away, could be the same metaphor that is used in Isaiah and in Jeremiah and so forth. In fact, when Jesus talked about the fall of Jerusalem, he said the sun and the stars will fall and all that kind of stuff.

It's almost like it's the end of the universe when he comes back, or I mean when he came and destroyed Jerusalem. But anyway, on this view, Jesus would be simply saying until the end of the old order, until the fulfillment of all, everything will remain intact, unchanged. And the heaven and earth passing away would simply be 70 AD, basically when the old order fully passed away.

And a new order had replaced it, and there was no more of the old around anymore. And that would be also when all is fulfilled. That would make perfectly good sense if one could get around the use of the strange metaphor.

And some may have trouble with that more than I do. But that would mean, his statement would be that everything in the law will remain intact until the old order passes, and the new order takes its place, the fulfillment of all things. And the Christian, in retrospect, would recognize that the ultimate, total, final punctuation mark on that fulfillment was the destruction of Jerusalem.

And certainly things had all passed away since then. Yes, go ahead, Steve. Maybe, 2 Peter chapter 3? That is a hard one.

I have met authors, or read authors, in the years that have followed, that have actually taken that position. The people who are, what they call them, fully realized preterists, which I am not one. But they would take everything about the coming of the Lord as being about the destruction of Jerusalem.

And they would include 2 Peter 3. I must confess, I have not been able to follow them in this, for a variety of reasons. But I am not so sure I never will. I am not so sure they won't ever convince me.

But yes, taking 2 Peter chapter 3, verses 10 through 12, he says, The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. The heavens will pass away with a great noise. The elements will melt with fervent heat.

Etc. The new heavens, new earth is mentioned in verse 13. There are some who think that Peter is talking about the coming of the judgment on Jerusalem.

And the end of the old order, and its replacement by nothing remaining but the new

order. I will say that Peter's remarks on it have been sort of the last holdout for me. When I look at Revelation chapters 21 and 22 about the new heavens and earth, I have seen for years in there parallels to the church age.

I mean, you have got the new Jerusalem there and the new earth. And it has got 12 foundations that have the 12 apostles' names on them. You know, the church is built on the foundations of the apostles and prophets.

And its description is so much, I mean, taken seriously, strikes me as being a picture of the New Testament church. Although my approach to that material about the new heavens and new earth, whether it is in Revelation, Peter or Isaiah, my approach has been that there is in a sense a literal new heavens and new earth to be expected when Jesus comes back. But we have already tasted of the powers of the age to come.

We are already in the new creation spiritually if we are in Christ. So that I kind of have both, I have my cake and eat it too, you know, in a sense. Some would say no, only one of those two things is right.

But the way I am currently thinking, there is a new heavens and new earth yet to be anticipated. But the powers of that age have already come to us. And we have tasted the powers of the age to come.

And so that is where I am standing about that. It is a good question, definitely a valid question. I have asked it many times myself and I have not been able to answer it with complete certainty from my own satisfaction.

But that is one way of looking at this. When Jesus said, until heaven and earth pass away, until all be fulfilled, not one daughter or kid will pass from the law. That would satisfy all the demands of the passage and of later developments in church history or in Israel's history and so forth.

Another possibility is to say that even today nothing in the law has really passed. But some things have been transformed in their mode of expression. That Jesus fulfilled them and once he fulfilled them, it is sort of like this.

You build a framework out here. If we wanted to lay concrete in this garden area out here, which we don't, but if we did, we have a framework up there. And that framework tells us what size the pad is going to be.

It defines its shape and size and so forth. It basically defines the patio. But until you pour in the cement, you don't really have the patio.

But once you do pour in the cement, after the cement hardens, you can get rid of the boards. The cement will hold its shape without the frame. And it's been thought by many that the way we can understand it is that the law was the frame.

It defined the size, shape and dimensions of righteous living externally. Jesus came and he poured, he filled it full. He poured in the cement and once the cement hardens, you can kick away the frame.

You don't need it anymore. And the simple reason is because by nature, by new nature, by the Holy Spirit living in you, you fulfill the righteous requirements of the law. But there are things about the law that were just part of the frame, part of the temporary scaffolding.

And once the building was done, inside the scaffolding, you can pull the scaffolding away. This is one way of understanding it. So that it's not so much that the law has passed, it's that its inward part has come.

Some of the structures that it took or the temporary forms it took have passed away, but the law is still here. For example, God told Solomon, when Solomon dedicated the temple, God said, Solomon, I'm going to dwell in this temple forever. But that temple is not there right now.

Did God lie? God told the house of Levi, the house of Aaron and Levi, He said that, He says, I'm going to, you shall not like a man to walk before me forever. The sons of Levi shall be priests before me forever. But they're not now.

Haven't been for a very long time and I don't think they ever will be again, to tell you the truth. Did God lie? Basically, He said circumcision is a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham forever. Forever is the term that was used.

Many things are said to be forever. Sabbath keeping is said to be forever. The land of Israel belonging to the people of Israel is said to be forever.

There's a whole bunch of things in the Old Testament law that God said would be true forever, but which today, apparently, are not applicable. But maybe not applicable is not the right word for it. Maybe applicable in a different sense.

The way some would describe it is they've transformed from a ceremonial to a spiritual mode. That the temple of Solomon is given place to the temple of the Holy Spirit. It's the same phenomenon, but has passed from the ceremonial symbolism to the spiritual reality.

That the priesthood of the Levites is now given place to the priesthood of the believers. That the Sabbath observance is given place to the spiritual rest. That the land of Canaan is now given way to the spiritual land that Abraham looked for, whose builder and maker is God.

He looked for a building, not a land with foundations, not an earthly one, a heavenly. What else did we mention? Circumcision. Circumcision is given way to spiritual

circumcision, circumcision of the heart.

But the suggestion then is that many of these things in the law were said to be permanent forever. And they are, in a sense, forever. Even the passage of the temple, even the passage of the Jewish structures, has not brought an end to them in principle.

They continue in another mode. That the carnal ordinances, as Paul referred to them, are no longer applied in some kind of legal fashion. But that the spiritual realities have come.

They have basically given way to the spiritual thing. The shadows are passed. Because the light has come and the substance is here in the light.

And so the idea would be that the law really has not passed away at all. But it has changed in a sense. That the laws of clean and unclean, the laws of sacrifice, the laws of temple ordinances and so forth, that all those things have come into a spiritual mode now.

They still exist, but now they are spiritual. So we don't offer animal sacrifice. We offer ourselves as a living sacrifice.

And we present our bodies. And we offer up spiritual sacrifices, even praise to God, the Bible says. That we are a spiritual priesthood and a spiritual temple.

And there is spiritual circumcision. There is spiritual sabbatical keeping. And there is spiritual, there is a spiritual land of promise.

Everything has become spiritual, what was once ceremonial. And in that sense, you could take till heaven and earth pass away, absolutely literally. You could say, well, you know, the law is valid.

In its new mode. Until the end of the world. But then it's not clear what he means till all be fulfilled.

He might in that case mean, because all will be fulfilled, it will continue in its new mode forever. So I could see that as a possibility. I've always found this passage difficult, but probably the interpretation I find the easiest is the one that some would find the hardest, probably most people find the hardest.

And that is just take heaven and earth passing as a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. That would settle all the problems of the grammar, I think, and of the structure of the sentence. It would fit everything as far as I'm concerned.

But it would be, I think most American Christians especially would find it difficult to shift from the idea of the end of the world to the end of the Jewish order in a phrase like heaven and earth passing away. But, you know, it's interesting that Jesus said when he was talking about the destruction of the temple in Matthew 24, he said heaven and earth

shall pass away, but my word shall never pass away. And different ways of looking at that.

He might have even been using the expression on that occasion with reference to the destruction of the temple. If you're wondering about that verse, I think it's verse 32 or something. Let me see here.

Matthew 24. Let me find that. Okay, verse 35.

Matthew 24, 35. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away. But he said in the previous verse, Assuredly I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled.

What's interesting here is we have all these things fulfilled and heaven and earth passing away put in juxtaposition with each other here and associated with what would happen in that generation. So, that might even further support the idea that when Jesus said till heaven and earth pass away, he means really till the end of Jerusalem and that's just a Hebraism, just a prophetic figure of speech. Very possible.

Now, let us move along. Having just left you with options, which is the best I can do with this. Before I say this, I cannot tell you what option is necessarily the right one, but I think I should say something about which options I don't think are right.

I don't think it is right to take these words of Jesus and somehow construe them as to say that everything in the law is still valid in the original way. I mean, sure, it's still valid in a new way, but that we still need to circumcise our sons and we still need to eat kosher food and we still have to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem and we still have to offer animal sacrifices and we still have to keep the Sabbath and the holy days and the new moons. And we, I mean, these, Jesus was not saying that as near as I can tell.

I mean, for reasons I've given, I personally think that that is the one interpretation that doesn't work well. Some of the others work better. And my own preferred interpretation is that Jesus said, I didn't come to invalidate the law, I came to fill it full and until the end of this order, until the end of the Old Testament order, when heaven and earth passed away, as it were, so to speak, everything is going to still be intact until everything has been fulfilled.

But of course, in my understanding, those things have been fulfilled. And therefore, those laws are not intact, not in the form that they were once observed. That's a summary of all these hours of my talking, a summary of what I said, what I think is the probable right meaning.

Verse 19 then, Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Now, difficulty.

What is meant by these commandments? He hasn't mentioned any specific commandments until now. He's just talking about the law and the prophets. Does it mean all the commandments in the law and in the prophets? It would be.

He apparently does. I mean, that's what, in the context, it would seem like he means. But that would mean that even if you break even the least of these commandments in the law and the prophets, you will be of low status, or at least regarded so, by those of the kingdom of heaven.

Now, some of the problems related to that is that, of course, we Gentiles have never really been under those laws, unless Jesus is now putting us under them. You see, that's a possibility, some would think. But until, I mean, at the time Jesus spoke this, there were no Gentiles who kept the law, except maybe a very few proselytes and so forth.

But the Gentiles who have been saved since then never were previously under the law. Either Jesus has, by these words, put us under the law, so we have to keep even the least of them. And then we have to say, what is meant by the least? But whatever it means, it doesn't, I mean, it would seem to me the most insignificant, the most unnecessary, the most trivial of the laws.

See, now Jesus did make a distinction in his teaching between laws that were less and laws that were greater elsewhere. When he said to the Pharisees, you pay your tithes, admit, and that is incoming, but you neglect the weightier matters of the law. Now, he made it clear that paying tithes, which was a matter of the law, was not as weighty as some other matters of the law, which were justice and mercy and faithfulness or faith.

And so Jesus did distinguish between more important and less important. Weightier and less weighty matters of the law. But now he seems to be speaking of those that are the least weighty, which would include in that illustration paying tithes, for example, or maybe keeping kosher or something like that.

Maybe we put the ceremonial law in the category of the least weighty and the moral law in the most weighty. But even if we do that, he's talking about the least weighty. So if we say ceremonial law is least weighty, he's still saying you still have to keep the ceremonial law.

And whoever does and teaches it will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Those who don't will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. Now, what does it mean to be called greatest or least in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus made another difficult to understand statement about being least or greatest in the kingdom.

And it's in Matthew 11, 11. 11, 11, Jesus said, Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women, there is not risen one greater than John the Baptist, but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. Now, this passage is difficult to understand, is it

not? I mean, John, of those who are humanly born, is the greatest ever, but the least in the kingdom is greater than him.

How can someone be the greatest human being alive, which all of us are born of women, even Jesus was born of a woman. How could he be of those born of women the greatest, and yet he's less than everybody in this other category, you know. Are these other people not born of women? That would be what seems to be implied.

But I think we almost have to understand, I mean, those who are not merely born of women. John, among those who are merely born of women, that is who has been born once, he's great, man, he's the best. But some who have been born twice, they've been born of women too, but they're not merely born of women like he was, they're born again.

That they are even better than him, and better not necessarily morally better, but more significant or have a higher position or whatever, higher status or more significant message or whatever. It's hard to know what better means. The only reason I bring this passage up is not to make any statements about John the Baptist, but because we here have Jesus again speaking about the least in the kingdom of heaven.

But here's the thing, in Matthew 5, he talks about being the least in the kingdom of heaven, it's not a very good thing. I mean, it's to give the impression. You know, there's those who are great in the kingdom of heaven who teach and do all these commandments, and then there's those who don't teach and don't do, or who teach people not to, and these are the least in the kingdom of heaven.

But even if they're the least, they're greater than John the Baptist according to Jesus. The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he, unless the term is not being used the same way in both places, which is another possibility. It's a difficult thing.

I will say this, some people have felt that, and these were people who have a high regard for Paul, and who have a hard time with this passage because of that, some have felt that this passage was not really original, and that some anti-Paulanist stuck it in there, because Paul clearly seemed to be teaching people that they didn't have to keep the law, and this says anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so will be called least in the kingdom of God, and that it would seem to, depending on one way of looking at it, it would seem to reflect negatively on Paul. And therefore, some have felt that Jesus never said this, but some anti-Paulanist in the early church inserted this. It's an interpolation by somebody reacting to Paul who didn't like him, some Judaizer.

Now, there is no textual basis for this assumption. It merely comes from someone struggling to understand what the passage means and how it interacts with Paul's message. On the other hand, there are those who would say that this was an authentic

statement, and because it is so contrary to Paul, Paul's out the window.

He's no longer valid, because Jesus said anyone who teaches men not to keep the least of these commandments but takes circumcision as not the least, it might not even be the least. Circumcision might even be a more important commandment. But it is within the ceremonial category, and if we would acknowledge the ceremonial laws are less important than the moral, then Paul would be teaching certain people, Gentiles anyway, not to keep the least of these commands, and therefore he'd be the least in the kingdom of heaven.

To tell you the truth, I don't know if Paul would object to being called the least in the kingdom of heaven. He said he's not even worthy to be an apostle. He's the chief of sinners.

I think he'd almost think being called the least in the kingdom of heaven was a flattery, because he felt like he didn't deserve to be in it at all, and he might not have objected to this. But I don't think this means this. We have to really deal with this, because if it does mean that someone who taught what Paul teaches is a lesser Christian for teaching that than somebody who teaches what James, for example, in Jerusalem taught, which kept all the believers in Jerusalem were zealous for the law and kept the law, the ceremonial law, and all that.

Certainly on the surface it sounds like that. Then it would mean that we had better start teaching men to observe all the commandments of the Old Testament, and it would be an artificial thing for us to say, except the ones that we can't keep because the temple's gone. Jesus said the least of these commandments.

He didn't exclude sacrifice from the list. He didn't exclude the pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Those are all in the commandments, too.

There may be lesser ones in our minds, but they are still there, and he's talking about the least of them. If we take Jesus to say that all men through all time must keep all these commandments, then, as I said earlier, we're in big trouble, because there are some that simply are impossible to keep in the mode that they were commanded in the Old Testament. Therefore, if for no other reason than to find some workable use of Jesus' words that we can really live because we want to obey him, we have to look for some other possible meanings.

Now, this is a tangled thing, but let me suggest to you a simple way to untangle it. Jesus has just said that until the law is fulfilled, until the system crashes, until heaven and earth passes, not one jot or one tittle of the law shall fail. Therefore, it would fall that until that time, people would be required to observe every jot and every tittle, even the least of it.

And Jesus' duration statements in verse 18 would seem to have a valid application to what follows, because what's in verse 19 sounds like simply a personal application of the principle in verse 18. The principle is the law is still binding every jot and every tittle. The application is, therefore, do it and teach it.

Otherwise, you'll have a low regard in the kingdom of God. Now, if this is true, then we have to observe that there is a duration to the validity of the statement in verse 18, and we've discussed that. And I've reached the conclusion, I don't require all men or expect all men to follow, but since my comments must come from my convictions, I personally think that verse 18 would indicate that since these are fulfilled, and since the old system has disappeared, that the statement, not one jot or one tittle will pass, was true until the time Jesus said it would be untrue until.

But it's not true anymore. And if that was true, verse 18, it would presumably be true, verse 19, that Jesus is describing the life of righteousness of the disciple who lives prior to the fulfillment of all things. Now, this is not at all artificial to suggest, because later on in chapter 5, Jesus says to his disciples in verse 23, Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way.

First be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. What gift? What altar? What's he talking about here? He's talking about animals offered on altars in the temple. He's talking about temple worship and animal sacrifice here.

He's talking to his disciples. He's giving them instructions about their future behavior. He anticipates that because they live at a time where this activity is part of the required law, they will be doing it still.

He does not tell them to stop offering animal sacrifices. Yet we know a time came where they did stop offering sacrifices and where Jesus himself would have approved of the cessation when the temple was destroyed, and maybe even before that. Maybe when Jesus was offered.

We know that Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice and fulfillment, but as I said earlier, I'm not sure whether the Jewish believers stopped offering animal sacrifices. Some of them didn't stop until 70 A.D., and then, of course, everyone stopped. It all stopped.

But we could say then that at least the instructions in the Sermon on the Mount to these Jewish believers who are the Jewish remnant, who are following the Jewish Messiah under a Jewish code of conduct, he spoke to them as if they were obligated to keep the law, but not necessarily that they always would be. But certainly for most of their lifetime, they would because the total fulfillment of everything didn't occur until 70 A.D., at which time some of them were dead and the rest were old men. And so for the majority of their life, they would be living under a system of law, just like the Old Testament characters did.

And he assumed, therefore, that they would offer animal sacrifices, but that they should make sure their priorities are right, make sure their relationships are right when they bring their gift to the altar. It seems clear from that illustration in Matthew 5, 23 and 24 that Jesus is not talking about, at least in some respects, he's not talking about how all Christians of all time would live, although the principle is still the same. We bring our sacrifice to the altar another way now.

We offer spiritual sacrifices, and what Jesus said in Matthew 5, 23 and 24 would still apply to us, but we just don't have a physical altar or a physical gift that we bring there. But the spiritual thing is true. I would say that the Sermon on the Mount is, of course, applicable to us, absolutely, but there are some forms of behavior that Jesus spoke of that have been transformed into a new thing.

They're spiritual sacrifices now. Likewise, it seems to me that verse 19 applies to the Jewish believers, his disciples, until the fulfillment. And whether that fulfillment was seen to take place at the cross, which was only three years after this, or maybe two years after this, or whether it was 40 years later, at 70 AD, there was still behavior that they would be engaged in from the time they heard this sermon on for some years to come.

That was applicable, and he did not want them to think... You see, Jesus was gaining a reputation among the Pharisees as being a lawbreaker. They felt he was pretty slack on this business of Sabbath-keeping, for one thing. And his disciples didn't wash, and apparently he didn't wash either properly, as their tradition said he should.

And he just didn't uphold the law that they held to. Of course, you've got to remember the Pharisees had lost track of where the dividing line was between the actual law that God had given and the traditions that the elders had passed down. And they thought it was all the law.

But the fact is, Jesus was gaining a reputation as being a lawbreaker. And there were many times when they tried to get him to commit himself to being against the law. That's why they brought him to a woman and took him to adultery and said, Moses said we should serve her.

What do you say? As if he would say something different than Moses would. Actually, Jesus didn't say anything different than Moses would say. Jesus approved of stoning her.

He said, let him that is without sin cast her stone, though. And of course, he knew that would prevent her from being stoned. But in principle, he was not denying that Moses was right.

She should be stoned, but the executioner had better be a more worthy person than anyone here. And since he's not, Jesus was the only one who was worthy, and he said, well, I decide not to condemn you. He could have mercy rather than sacrifice.

He didn't, but the point is that they tried to find ways that they could specifically accuse him of violating Moses. And what he's going against here is the idea that he is here now teaching things against Moses. I'm not teaching anything against Moses.

I'm not invalidating anything Moses wrote or the prophets wrote. Everything I'm saying agrees with them. In fact, until their words are completely fulfilled, I'm in favor of observing every dot, every jot and tittle, every least commandment right down to the bottom.

And anyone in my movement who violates these laws and teaches others to do it, I'm going to call them the least in the movement. And whoever upholds the righteous requirements of the law during this time that the law is indeed the standard of righteousness until it's fulfilled and gives way to something better, I'm going to call that the best in my movement. I mean, before Jesus came, there were kingdom people.

There just wasn't the king yet. But there were people who were subjects of God's kingdom. John the Baptist's parents, Jesus' parents, Anna who was in the temple night and day fasting and so forth, Simeon whom God was speaking to and giving him prophetic insights.

These were kingdom people. Jesus just came and he was the king. But these kingdom people were living under the law of Moses.

And when Jesus came, that did not immediately change. He lived under the law of Moses according to Galatians 4.4. He came born of a woman, born under the law. And so Jesus lived under the law.

His disciples lived under the law at least until it was fulfilled. And during that time, which was his entire life and the larger part of the disciples' lives probably, it was necessary for them not to debunk, not to nullify the law, at least among the Jews to whom the law had been given. See, I think Paul's position, and Peter's too at the Jerusalem Council, was not that the law was not a good law, not that the Jews shouldn't keep it, but that the Gentiles never had been put under it in the Old Testament and should not be now.

The law was not for the Gentiles. Peter made that point at the Jerusalem Council. Paul made that point in arguing with Peter, or rebuking Peter, in Galatians chapter 2. He says, we're Jews.

Now here's an interesting thing. Maybe I just found fault with my own suggestion. Because I said, I don't know of anywhere that Paul said that Jews don't have to keep the law.

But maybe he implied it here. I'm not sure. In Galatians chapter 2, because Paul was rebuking Peter, and he says in Galatians 2, we who are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, oh, actually I

should have gone earlier, verse 14.

He says, when I saw they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, if you being a Jew live in the manner of Gentiles, and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? Now that statement, if you a Jew live as a Gentile, that may suggest that not only Paul, but Peter also, had given up on the ceremonial law, even though they were Jews, and although the temple still stood. So it may be that the 12, at least, and Paul, understood that Jesus' death and resurrection fully satisfied and fulfilled the law. But people like James and some of the others were not so sure about that, and it wasn't until the temple was destroyed that all the prophets' predictions had been fulfilled.

The law, perhaps, was fulfilled at the cross, and the prophets at the destruction of Jerusalem, because there were many prophetic predictions of that destruction. I don't know. Part of this is going to have to be above my reach, things too high for me.

But I guess the matter that concerns me most is that I, a Christian, living in the 20th century, reading the words of Jesus, saying, how does this apply? Do I live before, or do I live after, the time of fulfillment that Jesus spoke of? That's really the question. If it is until heaven and earth literally pass away, then I'm living before that time, and I must be under the law still. But if the time Jesus spoke of has passed, then I'm living after that time, and that changes all the rules, in a sense.

I mean, that changes the whole approach to what he's saying here. And there's every reason to observe that some of the things he said to them were cast in the mode of their present circumstances, as Jews living under the old covenant but following the king. And they were supposed to observe the laws that the king's predecessors had given, Moses and the prophets.

So that's personally how I understand verse 19. And then he says, For I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. So the kingdom of heaven is the whole issue here.

Being the least, being the greatest, or maybe not even entering at all in the kingdom of heaven, what is at stake here? And in a day when God's law was still definitive of what God required people to do, at least Jews and probably whoever else wanted to come to God, a Gentile had to become a Jew in those days, pretty much, to be right. The law, Jesus said, Listen, do you think I'm here to destroy the law? Not at all. I'm affirming the law.

Everything in the law is great, man. It's just great. It's not all there is.

There's going to be more. But for the time being, that's the best we've got. And I think

my disciples should follow it.

I think that my disciples should teach others to follow it. And any of my disciples who don't do that, I'm going to think I'm going to have a low opinion of them. They'll be called the least in my kingdom.

But, of course, all of that changes if the time comes where the jots and the tittles do pass away, the time of the fulfillment of all. And there are sufficient references to that fulfillment having taken place in the New Testament to convince me that that has happened. Now, as I said at the end of our last class, fulfillment of the law, principally to the believer, is the moral issue.

See, the fulfillment of the ceremonial issue, Jesus did that. Jesus was the sacrifice. Jesus made the unclean clean and all that.

Jesus took care of all the stuff that's in the ceremonial law and fulfilled that in his death and resurrection, I believe. The moral aspects of the law, though, that's where the requirement falls on us. That's... The ceremonial law, remember I said, is descriptive of what Jesus would do and be.

The moral law is prescriptive of what we are to do and be. And I want to talk a few moments about that because that is what I understand the rest of his teaching in this chapter to be about. Because what matters to God is that I fulfill the law.

And fulfillment of the law, as I mentioned earlier, Jesus said in Matthew 7, 12, Whatever you want men to do to you, do that to them also. That's the whole law and the prophets right there. Or he said elsewhere, If you love God and love your neighbor, all the law and the prophets hang on those two things.

Or as Paul said, both in Romans 13 and in Galatians 5, He that loves his brother has fulfilled the law. Love for your neighbor is the fulfillment of the law. In Galatians 5, the way he says it is that all the law is summarized in this one word.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Get that verse number. Verse 14, Galatians 5, 14.

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Fulfilled, that's the word, the law is fulfilled. The law is fulfilled, the law is fulfilled, the law is fulfilled, the law is fulfilled.

In this, love your neighbor as yourself. Now, in that sense, in that sense of fulfillment of the law, the moral law, the fulfillment is ongoing forever. From the time of Jesus on through our time, and forever.

Because morality cannot change since God doesn't change. And so what we need to

understand is how we are to fulfill the law and live a righteous life that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. And Jesus' six illustrations in the remainder of Matthew 5 are there to answer that question.

But I think that many people misunderstand the nature of the answer. Jesus said in Matthew 23, 23, that the weightier matters of the law are justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Now, in all fairness, faithfulness, *pistis* in the Greek, might more properly be translated faith.

And a lot of, almost all the translations translate that way. Some of them translate faithfulness. The word faithfulness is actually another word in the Greek, but sometimes the word faith actually means faithfulness.

Even in Old English this is true, and it's also true in the Greek, that in Old English sometimes talking about doing something in good faith means in good fidelity, in good faithfulness. So, in fact, in Shakespeare, even in the Old English, they'll say faith, sir, or faith, my lord, or whatever, when they're affirming that they're telling the truth. I mean, faithfully.

I'm saying this faithfully. Jesus said in Matthew 23, 23, the weightier matters of the law are justice, mercy, and faith, or faithfulness. I understand him to mean faithfulness.

And yet Jesus, now those are the weightier matters of the law, and yet Jesus said all the law is fulfilled in one thing, love. Now, I'd like to make a proposition here that you could check and see if I'm right. I have a feeling you won't necessarily see it as true immediately, but as we go along I'll try to demonstrate why I believe this is true.

I believe that love is the fulfillment of the law, and that justice and mercy and faithfulness, which Jesus said are the weightier matters of the law, are what love is. Love isn't the way you feel about somebody. And, I mean, we do use a word, we do use the English word love, and so in ancient languages the word love was used that way, too, to speak of a feeling, a romantic attraction to somebody.

It is said of Amnon that he loved his half-sister Tamar, so he raped her. That's not really what the epitome of love is, you know, that's a kind of love. Literature talks about love that way.

Lust, romantic feeling, attraction, fondness, all of these things are ways that we use the word love, but that's not what the fulfillment of the law is not that kind of love. When the Bible says he that loves his neighbor, he that loves his brother has fulfilled the law, it's not talking about those feelings, it's talking about a more earthy aspect of what is love, down-to-earth behaviors. It means treating, as Jesus put it, treating your neighbor the way you want to be treating yourself.

That's really, I mean, that couldn't be put more succinctly. What you want done to you,

do that to someone else. That has very little to do with feelings or fondness or anything else.

It has to do with what you do. It's a commitment. It's a moral commitment.

That you know what you want done to yourself, and out of empathy and devotion to the well-being of another person, you will do to them what you want done to you. And if that is true, that's what love is, biblically. If that is true, then you will readily see that justice and mercy and faithfulness are the three things.

There may be others, but I can't think of all of them. Justice, mercy, and faithfulness seem to be the three things that is what love is. Because justice means that you will not cheat somebody.

You will not violate their rights. And we all would like that done to us. We don't want anyone violating our rights.

If we earn something, we'd like to have it. We don't really want someone cheating us out of it. And so to do justly is really what everyone wants done to them.

Most of us just would be happy if people would treat us justly. Now a criminal, of course, would like mercy. But we all want to be... we're all criminals at times.

We're not necessarily against the laws of the land, but we all fall short. There's times, for example, when I've told people, okay, I'll meet you at such and such time, but then unforeseen circumstances, getting a flat tire or something like that, caused me to be late. Now I realize that being late is an inconvenience to that person.

And they don't know what's happened to me, and they're maybe saying, well, he said he'd be here at this time and so forth. But I'm hoping they'll have mercy. If they tell me they'll be somewhere at a certain time, then I feel like I have a right to expect them to do it, and I'm going to inconvenience myself to be at that rendezvous.

If they don't show up, it's an inconvenience to me, and I will hope that they'll treat me justly. But I also hope that where I inconvenience them, that they'll treat me mercifully. We all want to be treated justly, and we all want to be treated mercifully.

And we all want to be treated faithfully, which means that someone keeps their word to us. There are many liars, but there are no people who like to be lied to. In fact, the Bible says, let God be true in every man a liar.

Probably every man is dishonest at some time or another, and many are dishonest as a habit. But there's not one man who likes people to lie to him. No one likes to have their expectations set up and disappointed by somebody making a promise they don't keep or giving facts that are untrue.

No one wants to act on misinformation and suffer the inconvenience of it. Everyone wants to be told the truth, and everyone wants everyone else to keep their word. That's faithfulness.

Now, justice and mercy and faithfulness are just what we want people to treat us with. We want everyone who deals with us to deal with us justly, mercifully, and faithfully. And if anyone ever does something unkind, unmerciful, or unfaithful to us, we consider that to be not very loving.

And we're right, it isn't very loving. Therefore, if we're to do it to others as we want them to do to us, if we're to love our neighbors as we love ourselves, then it would mean that we need to show justice in all relationships, we need to show mercy whenever that is needed, and we need to be faithful under all circumstances. These things are not something else but the same thing as love.

They're just parts of it. They're what Jesus called the weightier matters of the law, but the whole law is simply to love. Now, I've suggested that Jesus, when he said he came to fulfill the law, at least one part of the meaning of that, at least the ethical, moral aspect of that law, is fulfilled by love.

When he teaches these six illustrations, he teaches what it is the law was trying to get across to us, and what the law was trying to get across is to love. People cannot murder but not love, people cannot commit physical adultery and still not love, people can divorce their wives lawfully and not be loving, people can make oaths and not be loving. You see, love is something that goes deeper than just the outward keeping of forms of the law, and Jesus came to fill the inside part.

The inside part of the law was love. Now, when you read the six examples that Jesus gives here, I believe that there are two that are about justice, there are two that are about mercy, and there are two that are about faithfulness of his examples, and that in each case he's trying to show that what the law really was after was justice and mercy and faithfulness, or we might say love. The only two illustrations he gave from the Ten Commandments are about murder and adultery.

The reason primarily I believe that murder and adultery are evil is because they are unjust. To kill a human being is not always wrong. There are times it's even commanded in Scripture, but it's always wrong to kill somebody unjustly, that's murder.

What makes it one thing just and the other unjust is rights. A person has a right to live or a person has done things that he has the right to die, he's worthy of death. To give somebody what they rightly deserve is justice.

And murder is forbidden for the simple reason that it is an injustice. It is not because of some ideal of the sanctity of human life, because if that were the ideal that was to be

followed at all times, then capital punishment and every other form of killing that God actually commanded would be a violation. It is because murder is an act of injustice that it is offensive to God.

I mean, all people die and God even kills some directly and orders others to be killed. It's not the death of a human being that's offensive to God. It is the injustice of murder that is offensive to God.

Likewise, adultery. God is not offended by sex. He invented it.

He designed it. He made it all up and he ordained it. But what he's against is the injustice of making a promise and living in a society where there's a mutual expectation that every man has the right to the exclusive access to his wife and the wife has the right to exclusive access to her husband and then someone violates that right.

I mean, there are other sexual acts besides that are sin, but there are sexual acts that are not sin. Sex is not the issue. It is an issue, but it's not the issue in this illustration.

What's offensive to God is the injustice. If you would look at what they call the second table of the Ten Commandments, which is all those things that have to do with human interpersonal relationships, honoring your father, your mother, you should not murder, you should not commit adultery, you should not steal, you should not bear false witness, you should not covet, what is your neighbor's? All of those things have one thing at their core and that's the issue of justice. Why should you honor your parents? It's only right.

It's only just. Paul put it this way, you repay your parents because you owe them a debt. He put it that way in 1 Timothy chapter 5. There's a debt owed.

It is unjust not to pay your debts. Honoring your parents is just and right and fair. They've got it coming.

Murder deprives somebody of their right to life. Adultery deprives a person of their right to have the exclusive access to his wife. Theft deprives a person of their right to their property.

False witness deprives a person of their right to their reputation. Earned good reputation but destroyed by false witnesses. And of course coveting, that's a slightly different kind of thing but all that really points out it's wrong to do so in your heart too.

But the point I'm making is that the second table of the Ten Commandments is essentially about justice. You don't do unjust things. Now if I buy your car from you, I can take possession of your car and it's not an injustice.

If I take your car without your permission, that's an injustice. I've deprived you of your right to your car. That's stealing.

And so these issues, justice is a big issue with God. Why? Because justice is part of love and anyone who's unjust is unloving. And I believe that Jesus, when he talks about murder and adultery, what he goes on to point out is that it's not just murder that God objects to but other forms of injustice too.

That a person who murders or a person who commits adultery shows themselves to be unjust but you can show yourself to be unjust by lesser ways than that, less scandalous ways. And I'm saying you need to watch out for those too because love is just. And because love is just, you need to be just in more ways than just avoiding killing and adultery.

You need to be just in the ways that many people don't think of as immoral or moral issues. And Jesus gives some examples of it. So what he's showing is that the law had a deeper issue at its root and that is love in particular in some of these cases justice.

When you come to the issue of marriage and taking of oaths that Jesus talks about next, these both have to do with faithfulness, another aspect of love. Breaking a covenant is what divorce is. Breaking an oath, both of those things are unfaithfulness.

They are a person finding a way not to keep his promise. That's unfaithful. And so Jesus points out that unfaithfulness is a concern to God too.

Because why? Unfaithfulness is unloving and love is the fulfillment of the law. And the last two illustrations he gives, but an eye for an eye and tooth for tooth, but he says well why don't you just turn the other cheek. And about love your enemy as well as your neighbor, as well as your friend or whatever.

You need to love your enemy too and do good to those who hate you and pray for those who spitefully use you. What is that? Mercy. Showing mercy.

When someone strikes you on one cheek you deserve to hit him back, but you can show mercy and not do so. You can turn the other cheek. If someone compels you to go a mile, they have the right to do that, but it's merciful for you to go too.

If someone hates you and hurts you and persecutes you, you as it were by justice have a right to be hostile toward them, but by mercy you extend grace and forgiveness and love and blessing to them. So that what we have here is a basic teaching I think that the law has a deeper part than has been expounded very widely in Israel before Jesus came. All its elements are found in the Old Testament.

They're not new with Jesus, but they've not been expounded in his day. And he has come to fill the law with its fullness in more ways than one it seems like. To fulfill the ceremonial law and also to fulfill the moral law.

And the fulfillment of the moral law is in love. His disciples are to love and he wants to

explain how the law can be interpreted without love and commonly was. You have heard that it was said this, okay well you haven't murdered anyone, but you haven't loved either.

Because you are unjust in other ways besides murder. You may take your oaths as the law says you can, but you have secrets about oaths that you claim are not binding. And you therefore use what you consider non-binding oaths so you can break your word.

You're being unfaithful while you're keeping the law. You're keeping the law of oaths, but you're still not keeping faithfulness, which is love. And what's true when someone strikes you on one cheek, if you hit him back, the law technically allows this.

An eye for an eye, tooth for tooth, but you should show mercy. That's more loving. You should turn the other cheek.

So the examples he gives are simply there to unpack the question of what is the fulfillment of the law? What is love? Love is more than just observing the outward commands of the law. Love is love. Love is justice.

Love is faithfulness. Love is mercy. And certain examples are given to make that more clear.

And I'm gonna I'm gonna stop there, although we have to stop in a few minutes early, but I really can't go much further without either being overly repetitious or getting into some of the material in a deeper way than I probably should, since we want to give full sessions to each of these categories. So I think rather than get into it further than I want to right now, I'll just stop here. But that is the best I can do with this material about fulfilling the law and these difficult passages.

But I think it's a responsible treatment. It may not be the only treatment that one can imagine making sense, but I believe that it has, I think it has much in its favor, biblically. And that's what I think Jesus was saying.

We'll come back next time and talk about murder and adultery. Probably murder will occupy our whole discussion. We'll probably give a whole discussion to each of these categories.

Fortunately, we have a lot of sessions available. We'll need them. Okay, stop right there.

Any questions?