

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 5:17 - 5:20 (Part 3)



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg delves into the weighty matters of the Law and how Jesus went beyond it. While the Pharisees focused on outward displays of righteousness, Jesus taught that love was the most important aspect of the Law. Gregg emphasizes that justice, mercy, and faithfulness are vital components in treating others the way God intended. It is not enough to simply avoid murder or other unjust actions; one must also have a heart of mercy and kindness towards others.

### Transcript

We have been studying the Sermon on the Mount, which is that most famous sermon of Christ's, which is found in Matthew chapters 5 through 7. And we are still working our way through that portion, which is in chapter 5. In the last couple of sessions, I was dealing with verses 17 through 20. And in that place, Jesus tries to clarify to his disciples and to any others who are curious exactly what it is about his relationship to the Law and the Prophets that he wants to clarify. You see, the Law and the Prophets were the Old Testament Scriptures.

They were the Bible of the Jews. And all of Jesus' disciples were Jews who were raised with those Scriptures and with a great reverence for them. And while Christ sometimes was accused by his adversaries of being in violation of the Law and the Prophets, or being an enemy of the Law and the Prophets, Jesus wanted to clarify that in fact he was not in any sense coming to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but rather coming to fulfill them.

Now, he went on to say that for those who lived under the Law and the Prophets until they were fulfilled, it was necessary to keep every last jot and tittle of them, and that anyone who would violate them and teach others to violate them would be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever would keep them and teach others to do so would be considered great in the kingdom of heaven. And then he said in verse 20, 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.

Now, the scribes and the Pharisees were the professional religionists who spent their whole time observing all the minutiae of the Law, not only the Law that Moses gave, but a great number of other commands that Moses never gave and that were never found in Scripture. Because after the Jews had been banished to Babylon in 586 B.C., the rabbis felt it necessary to expand upon the Law. And so they spent a great deal of time discussing among themselves various ways in which the Law could essentially be clarified or improved upon.

And so by the time of Christ, when Christ came along about 500 years or so later, the traditions that these rabbis had come up with, which went far beyond anything the Law of God had ever taught, were now accepted as normal authority in the religious system of the Pharisees. And so the Pharisees not only upheld the Law of Moses, they also upheld these traditions of the rabbis. Now, Jesus was a great admirer of the Law of God, of course, but he had no respect at all for the traditions of the rabbis, which were man-made.

On one occasion, in Matthew 15, Jesus said that the Pharisees worshipped God in vain because they taught for doctrines the traditions of men, namely, these teachings of the rabbis were taught as if they were as authoritative as Scripture. Well, Jesus respected the Scripture. He came to fulfill the Scripture, and he said, in fact, if your righteousness does not exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Well, how could your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees? Well, Jesus goes on to explain that, giving six important illustrations in the remainder of Matthew 5. These illustrations are all cases where Jesus says to his listeners, you have heard that it was said to those of old, and then he quotes something out of the Law. And then he says, but I say to you, and then he explains his position on that particular Law. Now, Jesus, in this case, speaks of six different instances where the Jews had been taught certain things by their teachers, and virtually everything that he gives them is directly from their Law.

There's only one exception, where they had been taught something that went beyond what the Law said, that he addresses here, but essentially he addresses the command, which they had always been told, do not murder. He also addresses what they've been told about adultery, and he addresses what they've been told about divorce, about swearing oaths, and about retaliation, the Law that said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. And also he addresses the issue of you shall love your neighbor as yourself, which is an Old Testament command, but they had been taught that you only have to love people who are your neighbors, you don't have to love your enemies.

In fact, you're entitled and maybe even commanded to hate your enemies. So, Jesus, six times, raises points that the Jewish people, and his disciples were Jewish people, and so

was he, for that matter, that they had been taught by their rabbis certain things from the Law. And Jesus then says, but I say to you, and in each case he gives his own clarification, his own illumination on what that Law meant and what was on God's mind when he gave it.

Now, as I say, there are six examples, and the number six here, it's not just that Jesus ran out of examples after he had given the sixth one, and so he just stopped there. The number of examples that are given is, I think, well calculated to cover the whole spectrum of what Jesus wanted to say. You see, there was another occasion when Jesus was reproving the Pharisees for the shallowness of their religion, and he said to them, in Matthew 23 and verse 23, he said to them, Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites, because you pay your tithes of mint and anise and cumin, but you neglect the weightier matters of the Law, justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

These you ought to have done without leaving the other undone. Now, what Jesus said that the scribes and Pharisees had done wrong was that they had only kept some of the Law, the easiest part to keep, actually, and they had neglected the most important part, what he called the weightier matters of the Law. Now, when Jesus talks about weightier matters of the Law, he's obviously talking about those that are weighty in the sight of God, the most important Law.

Now, what laws had the Pharisees kept? Well, they'd kept ceremonial laws, tithing, keeping ceremonially clean. They probably never missed an opportunity to offer a sacrifice and so forth, and they were very careful about the laws that were ceremonial in nature. But the laws that were moral in nature were more important to God, and they neglected those, and Jesus categorized those in three subheadings, justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Now, on yet another occasion, in Matthew 7, 12, Jesus said that as you would that men should do to you, do likewise to them. He said, for this is the Law and the prophets. Now, what he's saying is this.

The Law and the prophets really boils down to this one thing, that whatever you want people to do to you, do the same to them. That's just another way of saying love your neighbor as you love yourself. But, therefore, we need to say, well, why then, if Jesus said there's only one command, and that is love your neighbor as you love yourself, or do to others what you'd want them to do to you, why then does he say there are weightier matters of the Law and list them as justice and mercy and faithfulness? Well, he is not contradicting himself in one place, saying that the whole Law is one thing, and then saying there's three things that are weightier matters.

The one thing that Jesus taught is the weighty matter of the Law is love, and these three things, justice, mercy, and faithfulness, are simply components of what love is. You see, we sometimes think of love as an affectionate feeling that we have for certain people.

When we are told to love our enemies, some people think, well, how in the world could I possibly do that? Every time I see that person, they repulse me, or they irritate me, they injure me.

How can I feel warm fuzzies about them? Well, the Bible doesn't say that you have to feel any warm fuzzies about them. If we think of love as a fuzzy, warm feeling that we have, or affection, or attraction to somebody, we are not interpreting love the way the Bible does. Remember, Jesus said love your neighbor as you love yourself.

What does that mean? What do you want your neighbor to do to you? Do that to him. You see, loving is doing. Loving is seen in the way you treat people, not the way you feel about them.

Now, of course, love is not behavior absent of feeling, and I don't want to suggest that as Christians there should be no feeling in our loving, but I think we do need to address the mistaken notion in our culture that love is a feeling. No, love is not a feeling. Love is a commitment.

Love is a determination to act for the good of the other person that you love. You may feel good about them at the moment, you may not feel good about them at the moment, but whether you feel good about them or not, you will do the thing which you know to be best for them. And how do you know what that is? Well, you know pretty much what you want done for you.

You know how you want people to treat you, therefore you treat them that way, and that's what loving them as you love yourself is. Now, really, how do you want people to treat you when it really gets down to it? You want them to treat you justly, right? You don't want people to violate your rights. You don't want people to be unjust and unfair to you, so you should treat others justly.

You want people to be compassionate towards you, that is when you're in need, when you're desperate, when you've done something wrong and need to be forgiven, you want people to be merciful to you. Well, then you should be merciful toward others, that's part of loving them. You also want people to be faithful to you, that means you want them to keep their promises.

You don't want people to mislead you with promises and commitments that they don't keep. You want people to deal in integrity, you want them to, when they give their word, keep their word. That's what faithfulness is.

Now, if somebody acts toward you in an unjust way, or an unmerciful way, or an unfaithful way, that is, they break their promises to you, you would know instantly that that is not loving. They are not loving you. You don't want people to treat you that way.

Therefore, Jesus says, essentially the weightier matters of the law, which boils down to

love, can be broken into its individual components. These components are a way of relating to someone, a way of treating someone. It's what you do to someone.

You act justly and mercifully and faithfully toward someone. Now, that is what love is. Love is, according to Jesus, these three things, these weightier matters.

Justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Now, Jesus in Matthew chapter 5 is teaching about the law, and his particular clarifications about the law. Jesus is not coming to change the law here.

He doesn't change any of the law. When he says, you have heard that it was said, you shall not commit murder, he doesn't turn around and say, but I say, commit murder. When he says, you have heard that it was said, to those of old, you shall not commit adultery, he doesn't say, but I say unto you, you shall commit adultery.

He does not change the law. He amplifies it. He clarifies it.

He illuminates it. And he shows what the law was really getting at. That's what he does here.

Now, what's interesting about this is that he gives six illustrations. And I would like to suggest to you that two of these illustrations illustrate justice. Two of them illustrate mercy.

And two of them illustrate faithfulness. That these are the things that really love amounts to. It amounts to justice, and mercy, and faithfulness.

And so he illustrates, with two illustrations each, what God really cares about. When God says, don't murder, he doesn't only care about you killing or not killing people. Of course, that matters to him.

But there's more to it than that. In fact, the very command not to murder stems from God's greater concern that you do justly. And murder is a tremendous act of injustice.

Likewise, when he says, don't commit adultery, he also is concerned about justice. Because you are violating the rights of a man to his wife. When you lust after his wife or when you sleep with her.

So this is an act of injustice. This is a violation of someone's rights. Likewise, when he talks about divorce and he talks about swearing falsely, he's talking about the issue of faithfulness.

That you make a promise, you keep it. And when he talks about turning the other cheek, and when he talks about loving your enemy, he's talking about mercy. When somebody is deserving of retaliation from you, that you don't retaliate.

Instead, you show kindness to them. That is mercy. This is what Jesus is getting at in these six illustrations.

What I'm suggesting is that Jesus is telling us that the real meaning of the law is that we should love. And that means, the real meaning of the law is that God wants us to be just, he wants us to be merciful, and he wants us to be faithful. Because any treatment of another person that is less than just, less than merciful, and less than faithful is not loving.

Now, the way he does this is he takes, in each case, two examples of how the law in the Old Testament showed a concern about this very issue. I believe that the first two are given to show a concern about that, from a couple of commandments of the Old Testament, that God was concerned about justice. And the next two are commands from the Old Testament that show that God was concerned about faithfulness.

And the last two are commands that show that, or where Jesus illustrates that God wants us to be merciful. Now, Jesus doesn't change anything. He just shows that these concerns are the concerns that underlie the laws that God gave in the Old Testament.

And yet the Pharisees, who saw themselves as great keepers of the law, neglected these issues of justice and mercy and faithfulness, the weightier matters. So here's how I believe Jesus clarifies his own relationship with the law. He is not here to destroy the law.

He is here to fulfill it. And to fulfill it, among other things, means to fill it full. You see, the Pharisees kept the law as an outward show, an outward shell of behavior, merely.

They could be outwardly not murdering anybody, but in their heart murdering. But they didn't care. As long as they were outwardly doing what the commandments said, they felt like they were righteous.

And that's why Jesus said to his disciples, Your righteousness has to exceed theirs, because theirs is outward merely. Yours has to be inward as well. You need to not only not murder people, but you need to not do other things that are equally unjust or similarly unjust.

The idea here is that God said don't murder. But it isn't only murdering that he's concerned about. Murdering is forbidden because it is an act of injustice.

And God is concerned about all acts of injustice. When he talks about divorce, he says, you know, I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife without the grounds of fornication, what he's teaching is this, that God, in giving his views of divorce, is simply showing a concern about faithfulness in general. Divorce is a good example of unfaithfulness.

But God doesn't want any kind of unfaithfulness, whether it's divorce or any other kind.

And so these laws simply provide individual cases where God showed a concern in these areas and where Jesus clarifies what God's concern is. And he does so in order to counter the prevailing religious mood of the time, which religious mood was, as long as I can stay within the perimeters of the outward behaviors God commands or forbids, then I will be righteous.

And it doesn't matter what's in my heart. That's how the Pharisees felt. The Pharisees could sit around lusting at women all day.

But as long as they never slept with a neighbor's wife, they felt they had not violated God's commands and they were righteous. They could sit around being angry and hateful toward people all day long. But as long as they never killed anyone, they believed that they were righteous and that they were pleasing to God.

They believed that they could do all kinds of things that the law outwardly seemed to permit, but in their hearts be violating it. But they were forgetting what God told Samuel the prophet when he went to the house of Jesse. He said, God looks on the heart.

Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. And that is what Jesus was teaching. Jesus essentially was teaching that the law, which is God's Old Testament definition of righteousness, that is to say, you do it and you'll be righteous, it had implications that go deeper than any of the Pharisees seemed to have recognized.

And those implications need to be spelled out sometimes because mankind is afflicted with a disease of externality or externalism. Because we deal every day with human beings that we can see. God, whom we cannot see, is not so readily in our thoughts, at least in a natural man who has never come to know God.

He may believe that God is out there, but he's never seen Him and therefore he thinks very little about Him. But there's people around all the time and he can see them. And the opinions of people matter a great deal because if people don't respect Him, they may not do business with Him.

They may not invite Him to things. They may reject Him. A man wants the approval of other men for the simple reason that other men are visible.

Other men are in his felt reality and in his sensed reality. God is outside that realm. He doesn't sense God and therefore pleasing God is not so high on his list of priorities.

He can feel the consequences if his fellow man reject Him, but he cannot feel instantly the consequences if God rejects Him. Those consequences are not felt until the day of judgment. So, man is afflicted with this externality which seeks to impress people and not so much concerned about impressing God.

Now, God can be pleased by what he sees in a man, but it will only be if what he sees in

a man comes from a pure heart. If it comes from a heart that loves God and is trusting of God. In the absence of that, no amount of religious activity on the outside will ever please God at all.

It will only impress people. But, of course, many religious people don't care to please anyone else except people. There's many people who go to our churches every day and they don't give a thought to God at all.

They just want to make sure that all the people in the church recognize them as good Christians, as persons who tow the line, as people who follow the protocol, people who are in good standing in the organization. And when it comes down to having a conscience toward God every moment of every day and keeping the heart pure and so forth, that's the furthest thing from their mind. In that respect, religious people today can be very much like the Pharisees.

Later on in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus, in chapter 6, gives examples of religious things which the Pharisees did in an ostentatious manner in order to be seen by men. And he told the disciples, when you do these same things, and they were good things to do. They were things like giving alms to the poor, praying, fasting.

There's nothing wrong with any of those activities, but Jesus pointed out that when the Pharisees did those activities, they did so in a way to be seen by men because they cared about impressing men. That was why they did them. Jesus said, when you do these things, don't do them to be seen by men.

Do them in a way that's invisible to men so that you will be seen by your Father and receive a reward from Him. So throughout Jesus' teaching, he's emphasizing a part of religiosity that is not natural for man, the internal part, the spiritual part. You see, most people of every religion, whether it's Judaism or what we call Christianity today, or whether it's Islam or you name it, the religion is largely external.

It usually is jumping through the hoops that are necessary to retain the respect of others in the religious community that we're hoping to be found within. Jesus is teaching, it doesn't matter what people think. It matters what God thinks.

And therefore, we need to do our religious works when we do them in such a way that God's pleasure is what we're seeking, and we couldn't care less about man's. And likewise, when we keep the laws of God, we need to keep them in such a way as He is pleased to have them kept, not just in such a way as people will be impressed with. And that's what Jesus gets into in these following verses.

We'll have to wait until next time, though, to take them individually. So next time we'll talk about what Jesus said about the murder commandment and how He amplified that. I hope you'll be able to join us at that time because we've run out of time for today.