

BUILD YOUR HOUSE ON THAT!

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Matthew 5.17-20
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I. Connecting With One Another

What do you think of when you hear the word “law”? Why do you think what you do?

Before continuing in this study, spend some time in prayer:

- a. For Good Shepherd’s Executive Pastor Jim Wilson and his wife Connie who are on vacation – thank God for Jim’s leadership and pray that the Holy Spirit would give him and Connie a good time of rest, relaxation and refreshment,
- b. For the many children’s and student ministry activities this summer – camps, retreats, Vacation Bible School, Rendezvous at the Park and Urban Plunge – that God would use these opportunities to inspire these members of our family to Connect in Him, Grow in Faith and Serve in Love,
- c. For this weekend’s gatherings and children’s classroom times – that God would guide our leaders’ planning, preparation and leadership, and draw us into a deeper communion with Him.

II. Introduction to this Study

What we have addressed in the previous two weeks, Matthew 5.1-16, functions as a sort of introduction to – or better yet, foundation for – the body of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5.17-20, then, Jesus rounds the corner from the introduction into the body of His teaching. Notice that Jesus began his sermon in the third person: “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” continued in the second person: “You are the salt of the earth,” and now shifts, authoritatively, to the first person: “I say to you.”

In the first century, the law was a hot topic. In fact, it was *the* topic. Rabbis endlessly debated the commandments, especially which was the most important of the 613 commandments found in the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, called the Torah. We see this play out in Mark 12.28-34, where one of the teachers of the law asks Jesus which is the “greatest commandment.” His well-known response is, in one sense, very similar to his teaching in Matthew 5.17-20, as we will see.

III. Study the Text

- a. Read verse 17 aloud. What can we infer that those following Jesus thought of his attitude to the law before this statement? Why do you think they thought that?

Recall that in chapter 4 of Matthew’s text, Jesus is tested by the devil in the wilderness (see 4.1-11). In each instance, he responds by quoting from the law. What does this episode by itself tell us about Jesus’ feeling toward the law?

Later in chapter 4, Jesus declares that the Kingdom of Heaven “has come near” and he immediately begins to embody that Kingdom by teaching in synagogues, calling disciples, as well as healing the sick (see 4.18-25), each of which was the responsibility of the

religious authorities. How would that have prompted Jesus' contemporaries to think about His relationship to the law? Why did he do these things anyway?

- b. Look at verse 17 again in as many biblical translations you have available. How do the different translations render the word "abolish"? How about "fulfill"?* See the bottom of this page for a list of these words if you don't have multiple translations available.

How do these different terms help you understand Jesus' statement? Are there any that make it more confusing?

- c. The Hebrew Scriptures contain doctrinal teaching (that is, what God's people should believe), predictive prophecy (which pointed forward to the Messiah), and ethical precepts (how God's people should live).

Can you think of ways the ministry of Jesus fulfills each of these three aspects of God's Word? Are there any other aspects of the Scriptures that Jesus fulfills?

- d. In verse 18, Jesus declares that "until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." What kinds of things do you think of when reading of all things being "accomplished"?

If you'd like to read more about the accomplishment of "all things" check out Colossians 1.15-20. Notice especially the One through whom "all things" are accomplished!

- e. Jesus states, "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." The Pharisees and teachers of the law were scrupulous adherents to the 613 commandments, following each one literally. Do you think that's what Jesus meant? Why or why not?

Scholars note that Jesus' statement should not to be understood quantitatively (that is, following each and every commandment and thus beating the Pharisees at their own game), but instead, qualitatively, by allowing each of God's commandments to penetrate the depth of our hearts, transforming us from the inside out, that we might follow Jesus' example to fully love God and others.

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. What is your normal response when you're tempted to do something dishonoring to God – or to not do something that would honor Him? Have you tried internalizing the Scriptures?

- b. This weekend we celebrate(d) the Lord's Supper, recalling that Jesus' sacrificial death, on our behalf, has fulfilled the law. We remember that we no longer need to offer sacrifices, since Jesus' has taken our place.

How does knowing that grace free you from the temptation to try to "earn" salvation? Are there specific ways you've tried to do so? Are there ways you need to repent from trying to "earn" God's love?

- c. Are there ways your understanding of Jesus "fulfillment" has been too narrow? How could you be reminded of and live out the far-reaching implications of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and promise to come again?

- d. How have you been most encouraged to follow God's commandments? Are there other ways you could open yourself up to learning and living God's law?

abolish: destroy, demolish, annul, repeal

fulfill: fill to the full, accomplish, uphold, complete, bring to its end, finish