

Without God's Law There Is Only Destruction

Matthew 5:17-20; Romans 7:12

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Many who claim to be Christians would rightly condemn the lawlessness and chaos we have seen in our cities over the past year. They would correctly state that a nation that does not have just laws and just laws that are enforced will destroy itself. They would also rightly declare that a nation cannot have those upholding just laws and those who believe they are a law unto themselves (anarchists) and expect there to be anything but destruction. Jesus agrees when He said that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand (Matthew 12:25). A kingdom with different standards of laws cannot stand. It will destroy itself.

Is this not also a significant reason why there is much division among Christian churches today? There are different standards of law (in doctrine, worship, church government, and moral standards) within churches today or even no law at all. As the kingdoms of this world will destroy themselves with different standards of law, so will the kingdom of Christ destroy itself for the same reason. If we can only see the problem (namely, that Christ's kingdom is divided), but not the cause (opposing laws or absence of law), the problem will not be resolved.

Jesus makes clear that there is a divine law that binds all mankind until the end of the world and unifies all that are in Christ's kingdom—not conflicting laws, not the absence of law, but one divine law. The main points are: (1) The Perpetual Obligation of God's Moral Law (Matthew 5:17-19); (2) The Spiritual Nature of God's Moral Law (Matthew 5:20).

I. The Perpetual Obligation of God's Moral Law (Matthew 5:17-19).

A. Jesus has now given two descriptions of those who believe in Him: (1) Who you are in Christ? (Matthew 5:3-12—the Beatitudes); (2) What you do in Christ? (Matthew 5:13-16—as salt you preserve this world from corruption and as light you reveal Christ's good works). But what are good works that glorify God? What is the standard for good works in Christ? It is God's Law. Good works reflect God's Law. The true meaning of good works, justice, righteousness, and purity are revealed not by the mere laws of men, not by popular opinion polls, and not by a consensus of people within a particular culture, but are revealed by God's Law. That is the focus of Jesus in Matthew 5:17-48: God's Law governs and unites His kingdom—otherwise it is chaos as we now see.

B. God's Law is not temporary (just for the Old Testament), but is of perpetual obligation until the end of this world. Note what Jesus says.

1. **“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy” (Matthew 5:17).**

a. Jesus makes clear that His mission in coming into the world was not to destroy (not to cancel nor terminate) the law or the prophets (this refers to the whole Old Testament, Matthew 7:12). He wants to make sure that no one misunderstands this point: “Think not” (and for emphasis He says it twice). Whatever Jesus means by “fulfill” in the same verse (and we will look at that shortly), it cannot mean that the New Testament brings God's Law to an end for the Christian. Therefore, any teaching today that would undermine God's Moral Law from the Old Testament is contrary to what Jesus teaches.

b. There are three categories of God's Law in the Old Testament: The Moral Law, Ceremonial Law, and Judicial Law.

(1) **The Moral Law** binds all men in all ages in all lands until the end of the world. It is summarized in the Ten Commandments which were written with the finger of God upon stone

tablets and placed in the Ark of the Covenant to show their perpetual obligation (Romans 7:12; Romans 3:31). Jesus further summarized God's Moral Law in two commandments which also come from the Old Testament (Matthew 22:37-40; Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18).

(a) God's Moral Law must continue until the end of the world because sin continues until the end of the world. Without God's Moral Law there is no sin accounted to anyone, for sin is the transgression of God's Moral Law (1 John 3:4; Romans 4:15).

(b) The Moral Law reflects the righteousness of God. Do you want to know the holiness of Christ? Look at His Moral Law. Do you want to see what conformity to Christ looks like? Look at His Moral Law.

(c) **Objection:** We are not under the law, but under grace (Romans 6:14). We are not under the law to justify us or to deliver us from bondage to sin; only God's grace can do that. The Law has no power to save; only the grace of God can do that. The Law condemns us, God's grace justifies us. That is why Jesus came to perfectly keep all of God's Law which He imputes and credits to our account. Yet, God's Moral Law reveals the will of God for our lives (1 Thessalonians 4:3). God's Law is not the power of your sanctification, but it is the standard.

(d) **Objection:** Christ is the end of the law (Romans 10:4). "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth." The Jews at Paul's time and many in churches today keep the Law to make themselves righteous before God, but Paul says the Law cannot do that because you cannot keep it perfectly. Only Jesus kept the Law of God perfectly. Only He is righteous. And we are only righteous in Him. Therefore, we do not keep God's Law to become acceptable before God, but as an acknowledgment that He is Lord and deserves my obedience and as an expression of my love and gratitude to Him for His free grace I want to do His will and glorify Him by my works.

(2) The **Ceremonial Law** bound Israel and taught God's people in the Old Testament concerning Christ and the payment He would make for the redemption of His people. That is what the sacrifices, the ceremonies, the priesthood, the tabernacle/temple, the feasts, and the dietary laws all pointed to. They were temporary shadows, and Jesus was the body (Colossians 2:17). Once the body is present, the shadows are no longer necessary. These ceremonies were a schoolmaster or teacher to lead them to Jesus (Galatians 3:24), but after Christ has come we no longer need a schoolmaster or teacher (Galatians 3:25).

(3) **The Judicial Law** bound Israel as a civil state to particular laws intended for Israel and not intended for Gentile nations other than the general equity requires (i.e. that which is moral—the fence around the roof, Deuteronomy 22:8).

2. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets, **but to fulfil**" (**Matthew 5:17**). This is the second statement of the Lord that demonstrates the perpetual obligation of God's Moral Law.

a. Jesus did not come to terminate God's Moral Law. So why did He come? He came "to fulfil" it. He came to make God's Moral Law full and complete by expounding faithfully God's Law in His teaching and keeping God's Law perfectly (Matthew 5:21-48—"You have heard it said, but I say").

b. That is what Jesus did in expounding what faithful Sabbath keeping is—not idleness, but works of worship and preparation thereunto, works of necessity (what is needed to sustain life—food), and works of mercy (helping others who are in desperate need—healing). Jesus was accused of breaking the Sabbath by the religious leaders because His disciples ate grain from a stalk and healed on the Sabbath, but He fulfilled the Moral Law not by ending it, but by giving the Law its right understanding (Galatians 6:2—fulfill does not mean to end Christ's law, but to teach it and practice it faithfully).

3. **"For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled"** (**Matthew 5:18**). This is the third statement of the Lord that demonstrates the perpetual obligation of God's Moral Law.

a. “For”—what follows gives an explanation as to how long the Moral Law will continue. Jesus here asserts His authority and faithfulness to the truth. The Moral Law, down to its smallest letter (“jot”) in the Hebrew alphabet (yod) and even to the smallest point of a Hebrew letter (“tittle”) will not pass away (or come to an end) before the passing away of this present heaven and earth.

b. As long as there is sin in the world, the Moral Law will be needed to reveal that sin. As long as we need to know God’s will in living justly, godly, as we grow in holiness unto the Lord, we will need God’s Moral Law to direct our paths (Psalm 119:197; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). As long as Christians are called to love the Lord in this earthly life, you are called to keep His commandments (John 14:15). His Moral Law abides to the end of time. The Moral Law (unlike the Ceremonial Law and the Judicial Law) is not temporary, but of perpetual obligation.

4. **“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19).** This is the fourth statement of the Lord that demonstrates the perpetual obligation of God’s Moral Law.

a. This is Christ’s conclusion to what He had said in the previous three verses (“therefore”). Because of the perpetual obligation of God’s Moral Law which Jesus did not come to terminate, but to make full (Matthew 5:17) and which will continue to the end of the age (Matthew 5:18); therefore, whoever shows such disregard for the Moral Law by willfully breaking the least commandment and then further aggravates that sin by teaching others to willfully break what is considered to be least of the commandments shall be accounted least in the kingdom on earth by God (the least—helping an enemy get his ox out of the ditch, or his car).

b. Men may hold those who teach only “grace” to the exclusion of God’s Moral Law (watching movies and programs that promote blasphemy, immorality, and worldliness, rather than godliness) to be great, but Jesus tells you right here His own evaluation of who is least and who is great in the kingdom and church of Christ. If Jesus so accounts those who are least and great in His kingdom by how they treat His moral commandments, then His Moral Law is of perpetual obligation.

II. **The Spiritual Nature of God’s Moral Law (Matthew 5:20).**

A. This statement no doubt came as a shock to His disciples, for the scribes and the Pharisees were viewed by the Jews as living the most exemplary life of law keeping (even following the tradition of the elders in so many man-instituted laws—which Jesus condemns). The problem was that their righteousness was merely external for others to see. It was a mere formal outward religion by which they believed they were made acceptable in God’s sight (like Paul in Philippians 3:7-9).

B. Jesus corrects this deathly error by His divine authority (“For I say unto you”). This is not a mere mistake that has earthly consequences, but is a deathly error that has eternal consequences between heaven and hell. What is it to have a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees?

1. It is to be righteous in Christ by faith alone—justification.

2. It is to be growing in righteousness and holiness—sanctification (both outwardly and inwardly—murder and adultery begin in the heart).

3. The Moral Law of God was always about having a heart for God and loving Him so much that you want to honor Him, trust Him, love Him, and obey Him. The Moral Law of God was/is always about loving God supremely and loving your neighbor as yourself. The Moral Law was not only written upon stone, and now written upon paper, but was/is also written upon the hearts of all that are born again (Jeremiah 31:33).

4. Is that what keeping God’s commandments is really about to you? If so, your righteousness in which you are growing exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees. If not, search your

heart, for Jesus says, “ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Are His commandments your delight or are they your burden? Do you love them because they reveal God’s will or do you compromise them because you don’t care?

5. Jesus is indeed concerned about your outward obedience and glorifying God by your good deeds, but that is not enough. God is even more concerned about your inward obedience and your love for Him and for His commandments. When obedience to Christ begins with love for Christ, the outward obedience will certainly follow. When repentance for sin begins with love for Christ, it will be sincere. Just as a nation without just laws will be in chaos and destroy itself, so the church and the professing Christian without just laws will be in chaos and will destroy themselves.

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