

Matthew 5:17-20 (NKJV)

¹⁷ "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

¹⁸ For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

¹⁹ 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.

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.

Matthew 5:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ 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.

We might think that reading the sermon on the mount should give us all that we need to live. We might think, I will just stick to the sermon on the mount. After all, these are **Christ's teachings** aren't they?

So we could read this verse today and get into serious trouble. We might go back to Exodus and Leviticus and sincerely believe that we are to **keep the whole law**. And we would find great difficulty there. To start with, there is no temple to offer sacrifices at. And from there we would get into more problems.

When we read **anything** in scripture we must learn **what it means** and sometimes we learn a great deal from what it **cannot mean** based on what other scriptures say.

Jesus is making a very strong statement. It is a statement that cannot be ignored. We would ignore it to our peril, as some do. We spoke of **antinomianism** a few weeks ago. (that is the word that I had to try to pronounce several times) That is an understanding of scripture that throws out the law. It says that, because of grace it does not matter what we do. And that can be a deadly disease.

No, we reject that outright because Christ rejects it outright.

At the same time, we cannot know **how to apply what Christ says** here without reading the rest of the sermon on the mount and without reading the rest of the New Testament.

I am hoping to start by making two points.

1. How the NT applies the law- example of circumcision

2. What parts of the law Jesus focused on in the rest of His sermon.

So we are starting with what Jesus **did not mean** about the law. And I hope to walk through this step by step. We are going to primarily use circumcision as an example. It serves as the best example I can think of of something the law **deeply emphasized** but **no longer applies** to believers.

Circumcision was required by the law. It was a very significant obedience. It was related to God's covenant with the Jewish people.

Genesis 17:13-14 (NKJV)

¹³ **He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.**

¹⁴ **And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."**

Leviticus 12:2-3 (NKJV)

² **"Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean.**

³ **And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.**

It is very interesting and important to understand that a foreigner male could not keep the Passover with Jews that **he had joined to** if he did not get circumcised.

Exodus 12:48 (NKJV)

⁴⁸ **And when a stranger dwells with you *and wants* to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it.**

So not only is it that the **Jewish males** must be circumcised, but so do **the gentile males**. Do you see how **significant** this ritual would be to the Jewish people?

There is even this precedent, this command by God, that Gentiles should get circumcised if they want to freely worship God. This would have created an **expectation** in the Jewish follower of God. And it would seem to be a perfectly legitimate expectation. It would be an unshakeable assumption. If a Gentile wants to follow God, he must be circumcised. That is clearly what the law says.

So what do **we think** about circumcision when Jesus says this in our text this morning:

Matthew 5:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ **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.**

If this is **all we knew** of scripture, we would probably apply this very differently than we do knowing **the rest** of the New Testament. I would apply it by saying and preaching that if Jesus said the law is good and we must keep it, we better obey the law with great zeal and precision. Gentiles must be circumcised.

But I think we all assume that **Paul** is not going to be called the **least** in heaven. Paul will be one of the greats in heaven. So we can assume that what Paul does with this point of law, what Paul says about circumcision, is what God says about it.

So what does Paul say about circumcision? What does this Jew brought up in the law say.

Romans 4:9-12 (NKJV)

⁹ **Does this blessedness then *come* upon the circumcised *only*, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.**

¹⁰ **How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.**

¹¹ **And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still* uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also,**

¹² **and the father of circumcision to those who not only *are* of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham *had while still* uncircumcised.**

Paul is using the law and the prophets to show a greater truth that was not easily evident. The law was certainly good. But it was not given to save us. There were greater principles at work. And those principles that are involved in our salvation precede and supersede the law. Paul's argument would have been hard to hear for any self respecting Jew. It would have blown their minds.

And we need to think about this. People listening to Paul might think that what he was saying was **not blatantly obvious** in the law. And shouldn't something this important be blatantly obvious? Should it not clearly say **in the Old Testament** that one day the Gentiles will no longer need to be circumcised to fellowship with God and with Jewish God followers? The point I am trying to make here is that

just because something is **not blatantly obvious** doesn't make it **unimportant**. Paul is making a point that most people would have completely missed about Circumcision and God's fellowship. God's imputed righteousness was granted prior to circumcision. So it is logical that a person can be saved and not be circumcised.

Paul goes on in Galatians. Here he is talking to a bunch of Christians who have a dilemma. Some Jewish false teachers have crept in and started telling these Christians that they needed to keep the law. They needed to be circumcised, among other things. They would probably have been quoting our text this morning. They would be saying, "Jesus wants you to be circumcised. After all, you don't want to be the least in the kingdom of heaven do you?"

Paul doesn't fluctuate with his message at all. He doesn't give in an inch. He goes right to the heart of the matter.

Galatians 2:15-19 (NKJV)

¹⁵ We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

¹⁶ knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

¹⁷ But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, *is* Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!

¹⁸ For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

¹⁹ For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.

So Paul is saying we do not want to go back to the old system that can only condemn. We want to fully buy into the new system of faith in Christ. The law killed me. I was living under its death sentence. And in Christ's death I died to that condemnation force and am now living in Christ. So I don't want to go back to the old system of living, the old system of righteousness which could only fail. Paul goes on with his reasoning in

Galatians 4:8-10 (NKJV)

⁸ But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.

⁹ But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how *is it that* you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?

¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years.

Paul is still talking about the danger of going back to the law to live under it in an effort to earn anything, or to avoid its condemnation for not living as the law required a Jewish person to live.

To go back is unthinkable. Those elements are **weak and beggarly**. They cannot provide salvation or justification. To live **under that system** and **trust it in the least for any merit in salvation** is the worst possible alternative.

Again we are talking about **how not to apply** what Jesus said about the law. Here Paul expands his discussion from the application of the **law about circumcision** to his application of the law **to other restrictions of the law**.

We do not know the specifics of what Paul is talking about here. But we know for sure that he was talking about how the law applied to days and months and seasons and years.

This is a quote from the Expositors Bible Commentary

In view of the context of the struggle in Galatia, there can be little doubt that the observances the Galatians were succumbing to v. were Jewish observances. "Days" would refer to sabbath days, including also those feasts that fell on specified dates in the calendar. "Months" refers to celebrations tied to the recurring monthly cycle, such as those connected with the appearances of the new moon and which Isaiah ridiculed ([Isa 1:14](#)). "Seasons" refers to seasonal events of more than one day's duration—the feasts of Tabernacles, Passover, etc. "Years" most naturally refers to the recurring years of Jubilee.

Expositor's Bible Commentary, The - The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Volume 10: Romans through Galatians.

I want to note that there is **room for argument** on whether this refers to the **weekly Sabbaths** or not. Scholars argue about that.

Then Paul gives us a little more input about proper application of the law in Colossians.

Colossians 2:16-17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,

¹⁷ which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

Again a quote from the Expositors Bible Commentary-

"Religious festival," "New Moon celebration," and "Sabbath day" probably refer to various holy days of the Jewish calendar—annual, monthly, and weekly. The reference to "Sabbath day" points clearly to the Jewish calendar, for only Jews kept the Sabbath. That being the case, "religious festival" and "New Moon celebration" must point primarily to the ritual calendar of the Jews. Paul's thought is that the Christian is freed from obligations of this kind. No one, therefore, should be permitted to make such things a test of piety or fellowship.

Christianity, as Eadie explains, "is too free and exuberant to be trained down to `times and seasons'.... Its feast is daily, for every day is holy; its moon never wanes, and its serene tranquility is an unbroken Sabbath".

Expositor's Bible Commentary, The - The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Volume 11: Ephesians through Philemon.

And let's look at one more passage from Paul.

The point he will make in Romans is not so much a warning of the danger of falling back into the Old Testament servitude to the law, but of being free to worship according to one's conscience.

Romans 14:4-13 (NKJV)

⁴ Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

⁵ One person esteems *one* day above another; another esteems every day *alike*. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

⁶ He who observes the day, observes *it* to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe *it*. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.

⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

⁹ For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰ But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

¹¹ For it is written: "*As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.*"

¹² So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

¹³ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in *our* brother's way.

Here Paul addresses people living together who have different views of how the Old Testament law applies to their lives. His fear here, **IS NOT** that these people are going back to conformity of the Old Testament form of worship. They are just trying to decide **what most pleases God**. I believe these refer to points that are not made **super clear** in the New Testament. In this instance it has to do with foods and days. And notice, Paul does not say **you need to all see this alike**. He says just the opposite. You need to **freely accept those who see it differently** than you. He does not say that either side is required to change their minds in

order to fellowship with each other. And if either side requires conformity on arbitrary matters, they are wrong to do so.

If we were just to read our Matthew text, we would not have considered such a thing to be possible. Jesus words are-

¹⁹ 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.

We learn from this very clearly that breaking one of the least of the commandments has to be defined by the rest of **Jesus' teaching** and the rest of **the teaching in the New Testament**.

And it all makes sense. If Christ is the **fulfillment of the law**, the **application** of the law and the **definition** of the law that applies to a **Christ follower** must go through the sieve of Christ's teaching. We must determine **what Christ means** when he says "one of the least of these commandments" by the rest of the New Testament.

We are not free to view the Old Testament, any longer, from the lens of those who lived in the Old Testament. We must see it through the eyes of Christ.

Now that we looked at what Jesus **did not mean**, we will take a glance of what Jesus **does mean**.

Look at what Jesus is going to say going forward in Matt 5-7.

We can know for sure that what **laws Jesus speaks to** are at least **some of those** that are **the commandments we must keep**. And what are they?

Vs 17 Thou shall not murder.

Vs 27 You shall not commit adultery

Vs 31 The divorce laws

Vs 33 Making oaths

Vs 38 Justice and revenge

Vs 43 Treatment of enemies

Can any of us read through what Christ says about these topics and avoid conviction? Doesn't it strike at the core of **who we are?** He takes the law and **expands it** to what real righteousness looks like. He applies it to the Beatitudes person. He shows us what it looks like when a person sees the law the way the **Lawmaker** sees it. It used to be good enough that you could not be **externally** convicted of **doing** these crimes, even though your heart could be as dark as night.

That is not true for the Christian. We have the Holy Spirit in our hearts revealing to us the essence of real righteousness. The external righteousness of the

Pharisee will no longer hold up as a standard. The standard has expanded to **everything we are**. And Jesus is pointing out just what kind of a **changed person** a **Christian** really is. The Christian is living his life from the inside out. The change **on the inside** is changing what he does **on the outside**. This is way better than the change that authority might have on us by enforcing the laws. In an environment of enforced laws, we may provide **external conformity** but the heart can go **unchanged**.

We will look at greater depth to what Christ says about **murder**. He moves it from the conviction for **act of murder** to the conviction of **hatred** to the conviction of a **refusal to reconcile** to the conviction of the **failure to love**.

For me, to obey the commandment that “you shall not murder” now means I will refuse to live in an unreconciled state with a brother or sister if it is in my power to do so. I think I was **more likely** to keep the command not to **remove someone’s life** than I am to keep the command requiring me to leave my **comfort zone and pride** to make sure my brother and I are reconciled.

Jesus means what He says about the commandments. He means it when He says it is a big deal when we **cast them aside** and fail to **teach them** or **live them**.

Because He has given His life to allow us to receive **new hearts** from Him. He has empowered the **Christ powered** life. He has made our hearts congruent to righteousness. So now He **demand**s a higher standard because He has **enabled** a higher standard. He is free to command the **intent of the law** instead of just the **letter of the law**.

Now we will close by looking at what it means to be least in the Kingdom.

¹⁹ **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.**

First we need to note that the **possibility must exist** for people who break the commandments to still be part of the Kingdom of Heaven. What hope that provides for us. Because I think it is safe to say that **all of us have broken the New Testament applicable commandments**. All we need to look at is what Christ said the most important commandments are. Love God. Love people. Case closed. We have all failed. Praise God that we are no longer under the law but under grace. We can still have entrance into the kingdom of heaven. But what we do matters. We see here a **scale of importance** in the kingdom.

We know that Christ's sacrifice provides all believers **entrance** into His eternal reward. It is like in the parable that all the workers get the same pay at the end of the day. Eternal life is that pay.

While that is true, Christ's work of saving us does not provide the same status to all who enter His kingdom. We are told to live in such a way that **we store treasures in heaven**. Faith says I will forgo the **pleasure I could have now** for **pleasure I am sure to have forever**. Instead of using my time and money and influence selfishly, I will use them for the kingdom. I will obey at the **core of who I am** what Christ has instructed me about godly living. And by keeping those commands, we store up treasure. We increase whatever it means to have greatness in the Kingdom. And as we are frivolous and selfish and self indulgent, our treasure decreases. As we live for **our pleasure** instead of **Christ's** we prove a weakness of faith in our Lord. And it is only fair that our reward will be less. This is really no huge surprise. We are always choosing when and where we want our reward.

Now I am not trying to say that we should **avoid enjoying** the things that God has allowed us graciously to do. But we need to keep in mind, what would I really do if I live now in preparation for eternity? What am I willing to forego for a better reward there?

But look at what the rest of the verse says.

but whoever does and teaches them

Doing them is not enough. We must also teach them. Or maybe it is backwards. Our greatness in the Kingdom does not increase by teaching commandments that we are not willing to keep. We can teach the proper way to live with great clarity, but that, **in itself** earns nothing in the kingdom. We can give excellent biblical advice, but if we, ourselves, will not apply that advice, it stores up no treasures. How **we live** is the true test of **our faith**. But if we live faithfully, if we live storing up treasure, then it is important that we are **verbal with that truth as well**. It is then that Christ is most glorified.

We are all told to be disciplers. We are all told to teach those people we disciple **how to obey**. But we are seeing here, with what Jesus says, that anyone we disciple should be able to **watch what we do at home**, watch how we respond to various incidents in life, and they should be able to say, so **THAT** is what the teaching means. **That** is how to live the Christian life. Even in our failures, the quickness with which we **admit our failure** and **confess our sins**, and make provisions to never do it again. The speed and sincerity **with which we repent** and **try to make it right**, these are all things a **disciplex must teach and live**. They

are the **keeping** of the commandments and the **preaching** of the commandments that go a long way in the kingdom of heaven.

I hope this morning was helpful in us getting a very good understanding of what it means to **keep the least of these commandments**. I hope we know a little better this morning how to **discern** what we should keep of the Old Testament law and how to regard that which no longer applies to us. I hope we will see how we will not all see it the same way, but in those disputable matters there is no need for divisiveness. Love is to cover those differences.

Let's focus this week on answering the question- am I keeping the commandments that please Christ? Am I living my life optimally for a great treasure in heaven?