

# What is God's Law & What Parts are Still Binding on New Testament Believers: None, Some or All?

Matthew 5:17-48

Today our goal is to understand one simple question, but that question connects everything we read in this book called the Bible.

Here is the simple question: What is God's Law & What Parts are Still Binding on New Testament Believers: None, Some or All?

## **WHAT IS THE CONTEXT OF THE SABBATH DAY?**

The Sabbath Day comes right out of the Law of God.

We have looked at the Seventh Day and God's desire that all humans remember His as our Creator. This remembrance is built right into the rhythms of life in our seven-day week.

Then we looked at the Sabbath Day as laid down in the Law of Moses, and God's desire that the nation of Israel see Him as the Law Giver, and as they saw their sinfulness confess their need of a Redeemer.

Now we come to this vital two-part question:

## **1. WHAT IS GOD'S LAW & 2. WHAT PARTS ARE STILL BINDING ON NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS: NONE, SOME OR ALL?**

To answer the first question we need to define God's Law.

As we open to Matthew 5:17-48 today we are about to hear the final, and ultimate voice in any discussion of the Law. Our goal is simple. What was Jesus explanation of the Law?

Jesus as God speaking in Matthew 5 is the One who spoke and everything that exists in this Universe began.

Jesus as God the Son is the same one who instituted the 7<sup>th</sup> Day at Creation.

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath that was written down on tablets of stone as the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment.

So the best answer possible on what is the Law and what should it mean to us today comes from Jesus. To set the stage for our reading, Jesus is preaching His first sermon. We call it the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew opens with this sermon and it is all about God's Law.

## WHAT IS GOD'S LAW?

God's Law is His Word. God's Law is not merely the 10 Commandments, the Books of Moses, or even the Prophets. Jesus puts them all into one whole that He calls the Scriptures.

So Jesus launches into a lesson on God's law. God did not give a set of rules to conform to in outward obedience.

God asks for an internal transformation that is humanly impossible. A change that can't be earned by trying hard, or by keeping rules. A heart that loves to do God's will in His Law is only a new heart that God graciously gives to all who believe that they are hopelessly sinful, unable to ever be good enough, and cry out to God for His mercy.

Those that heard Him were shocked. They had been taught a religion of just external rules that could be kept.

They heard Jesus point out the error of their mere outward behavior.

They were focused on externals, and Jesus was focused on internals.

Listen as you follow along and I read for Christ's six times repeated phrase: "you have heard it said". Jesus is contrasting their misunderstanding of God's Law with His perfect explanation.

Matthew 5:17-48 (NKJV) "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> **"You have heard that it was said to those of old,** 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.

<sup>27</sup> **"You have heard that it was said to those of old,** 'You shall not commit adultery.' <sup>28</sup> But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

<sup>31</sup> **"Furthermore it has been said,** 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' <sup>32</sup> But I say to you

<sup>33</sup> **"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old,** 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' <sup>34</sup> But I say to you,

<sup>38</sup> **"You have heard that it was said,** 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' <sup>39</sup> But I tell you not to resist an evil person.

<sup>43</sup> **“You have heard that it was said,** ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’<sup>44</sup> But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, <sup>48</sup> Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Pray

What did Jesus do? Jesus took the law of God back to the way God intended it to be.

## **JESUS CUTS THROUGH THE CONFUSION**

Jesus is teaching this message in Matthew 5-7 because everything had gotten confused in the life of the Jewish people. God’s law had become hidden in a swirling mass of additions, enlargements, and misapplications.

By Christ's time the Sabbath Day had become the central feature of Jewish live. There were 24 chapters devoted to the rules of the Sabbath written down from the traditions of the Scribes, and enforced by the zeal of the Pharisees.

There were so many rules that one scribe wrote that it took two and a half days just to read them all. But everyone lived with the fear of doing anything wrong on the Sabbath. There were rules about everything.

How much food you could eat at a time (the equivalent of two dried figs), any more weight in your hand was work.

How far you could walk (three thousand steps).

What you could hold (nothing associated with any work).

But more than what you could do, it was immensely clear what couldn’t be done.

## **THE UN-KEEPABLE RULES OF THE SABBATH DAY**

Here is the short list that Dr. Alfred Edersheim notes for us in his *Life & Times of Jesus the Messiah*:

You couldn't take a bath for fear water would spill onto the floor and wash the floor as it fell off you.

If there was a lit candle, you couldn't blow it out; chairs couldn't be moved because they tended to drag ruts across the ground, and that was a violation.

A woman couldn't look in a glass, because she might see a gray hair and pluck it out.

Jewelry couldn't be worn, because it weighed more than a dried fig.

You couldn't carry more grain in your hand than would fit into a lamb's mouth.

You couldn't leave a radish in salt because it would become a pickle.

There were laws about writing, and about getting the dirt off your clothes; it was very intricate to get the dirt off your clothes without violating the Sabbath.

You could only carry ink enough for two letters - not letters to people, but alphabetical letters<sup>1</sup>.

## **RELIGION IS ALWAYS ABOUT EXTERNALS**

So, the bottom line is that the religious people of Christ's day felt that as long as they fastidiously guarded their lives so that they didn't do certain actions named in the law as wrong (such as killing, stealing, committing adultery) they were great.

Jesus however said that they were dead wrong, because God doesn't look merely at outward appearances, God looks at the heart.

It is not merely avoiding wrongs actions that God is concerned about: it is the thoughts, the desires, and the attitudes that led to those wrong actions that God wants changed.

Anyone can conform their own outward behavior, for certain periods of time. Often this conformity is for no other reason than pride, that some people obey rules. And spiritual pride in external observance was overflowing in the religious people of Christ's day. In fact:

## **THE DEADLIEST SIN IS PRIDE**

These<sup>2</sup> religious leaders and all the people that followed them, which was the majority of the population of Israel, had on the outside said no to a lot of fleshly behaviors.

They said no to outward violations of the Ten Commandments. They said no to adultery, sins of the flesh, lying, murder, lusts that manifested themselves in wicked behaviors, these are the forbidden sins. These are the open sins. They gladly restrained themselves from those on the outside. They could say with the rich, young ruler, "All of these laws have I kept from my youth up."

You say, "Well how can sinners do that?" Because pride, spiritual pride, is such a self-satisfying sin that it makes up for all that you have to forfeit. Listen, spiritual pride is like an aphrodisiac, it's like a drug.

Spiritual pride is a high, walking around in overtly spiritual pretense in the way you dress and the way you conduct yourself and making outward pretenses and outward prayers and outward acts of manifest fasting, making an issue out of your giving for all to see.

That's what they did. They found so much personal satisfaction in spiritual pride that they were willing to let other behaviors go. Spiritual pride is a very, very powerful, powerful sin. It's also a damning sin.

## **BEWARE OF EXTERNALISM TODAY**

The trap of external conformity and superficial obedience is still a deadly trap today. There are Christians who are only known for what they don't do. The big, public sins of murder, adultery, lying are carefully avoided. But there is not an internal transformation.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/2290/the-lord-of-the-sabbath>

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from John MacArthur, 090614 Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath, Part 2 Mark 3:1-6 Code: 41-12 (218 words)

As Jesus said the outside is white washed but inside there is corruption. How about it. Are you changed on the inside or just keeping up a good appearance on the outside?

Matthew 5:17-48 (NKJV) “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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.

**Murder starts in our hearts with unrepentant anger.** <sup>21</sup> **“You have heard that it was said to those of old,** ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire. <sup>23</sup> Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup> Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.<sup>26</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

**Adultery is First an Attitude of gratifying lust visually and mentally.** <sup>27</sup> **“You have heard that it was said to those of old,** ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ <sup>28</sup> But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

**Divorce is first an Attitude of fault-finding with your marriage partner.** <sup>31</sup> **“Furthermore it has been said,** ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ <sup>32</sup> But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

**Real Truthfulness starts internally.** <sup>33</sup> **“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old,** ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ <sup>34</sup> But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; <sup>35</sup> nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup> Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

**Forgiveness is first an Attitude.** <sup>38</sup> **“You have heard that it was said,** ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ <sup>39</sup> But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. <sup>40</sup> If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also. <sup>41</sup> And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. <sup>42</sup> Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

**Real Love is impossible humanly speaking.** <sup>43</sup> **“You have heard that it was said,** ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup> But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. <sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others?* Do not even the tax collectors do so? <sup>48</sup> Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

## **JESUS SAID SALVATION CHANGES THE INSIDE FIRST**

You see<sup>3</sup>, if you're not regenerate, if you haven't been transformed, if you haven't been changed and converted by belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is nothing that can deal with the wretchedness of your heart.

You can mask it by controlling your behavior but you can't do a thing about it on the inside. That's why Jesus said about them, they're like whited sepulchers, they're painted white on the outside but inside they're full of stinking dead-men's bones.

They were okay with living a wretched life of sin in their own minds, and as far as the outside was concerned, restraining their visible behavior for the sake of spiritual pride because spiritual pride is such a high.

Pride is the most satisfying of all sins.

The zenith of this system of manifest spiritual pride was Sabbath. On Sabbath they all came out into public view at the synagogue. On that great day, all the focus of their self-righteous proud system reached its clarity. This was their time to shine.

So as we read Matthew 5 and all of Christ's teaching on the Law, what law was He referring to? To understand His teaching we need to understand what was God's Law in the Old Testament.

## **GOD'S LAW IS PERFECT**

For just a moment turn back to Psalm 19. Here we find God Himself explaining what he thinks of His Law. In Psalm 19:7-9 God explains the character and power of His law.

Psalm 19:7-9 (NKJV) The law of the Lord *is* perfect, converting the soul;

The testimony of the Lord *is* sure, making wise the simple;

<sup>8</sup> The statutes of the Lord *are* right, rejoicing the heart;

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted from John MacArthur, 090614 Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath, Part 2 Mark 3:1-6 Code: 41-12 (172 words)

The commandment of the Lord *is* pure, enlightening the eyes;

<sup>9</sup> The fear of the Lord *is* clean, enduring forever;

The judgments of the Lord *are* true *and* righteous altogether.

God's law is perfect because God gave His Law.

God is perfect, so His Law is perfect.

God is unchanging, so His law is unchanging.

So we have this perfect law, given by God, that will never go away, wear out, get repealed, or ever forgotten. One more thing, our relationship to God's Law will forever impact us in Heaven!

Now back to something unsettling that Jesus said in Matthew 5:19:

“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”.

That is pretty serious. So back to what is God's perfect, changeless, vital forever law?

## **JESUS CALLED ALL OF GOD'S WORD THE LAW**

What is amazing is that Jesus saw all of the Old Testament as the teachings from God, the Scriptures, or the Law of God. He saw the Old Testament as a unit that came from God, speaks for God, and is connected to all the God is doing in the world. Nine times the New Testament calls the Old Testament by the term “the law and the prophets”<sup>4</sup>.

Notice in Luke 24 as Jesus was summarizing truth after His resurrection how He blended together Moses (the Law) with the Prophets, and calls all of them Scriptures.

God speaks with one voice through Moses, the Law, the Prophets, the Scripture. It is His Law or the Diving teachings of the Divine Teacher.

Luke 24:27, 44 (NKJV) And beginning at **Moses and all the Prophets**, He expounded to them in all the **Scriptures** the things concerning Himself. <sup>44</sup> Then He said to them, “These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the **Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.**”

Next time we will consider what Jesus said about the second half of that question: What Parts are Still Binding on New Testament Believers: None, Some or All? The answer we will see comes from God through Paul:

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NKJV) All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 5:17;7:12; 22:40; Luke 24:27,44; Acts 13:15; 24:14; 28:23; Rom. 3:21.

Every word of God's Word is from God.

Some of God's Word was given just to Israel.

But most was given to everyone of all ages as the expression of the character of the God of the Universe whom we with new hearts WANT to serve, obey, please, and become in His image!