

Matthew 5:17-48, Fulfillment of the Law

The reading for today includes the passage where Christ describes how He came to fulfill the law, not to destroy the law. In this section, we have two sets of three contrasting statements between what was said “of old,” or to the ancients (ancestors) and what Jesus now says – “**but I say to you.**”

Outline:

1. General introduction regarding the relationship of Christ to the law (5:17-20)
2. Specific ethical applications: six examples (5:21-48)
 - a. Anger and abusive speech (5:21-26)
 - b. Adultery and lust (5:27-30)
 - c. Divorce and adultery (5:31-32)
 - d. Vows (5:33-37)
 - e. Retaliation (5:38-42)
 - f. Loving one's enemies (5:43-48)

Matthew 5:17-48 (CSB)

Christ Fulfills the Law

17 “Don’t think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished. 19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.

Murder Begins in the Heart

21 “You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment. 22 But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults his brother or sister will be subject to the court. Whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be subject to hellfire. 23 So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Reach a settlement quickly with your adversary while you’re on the way with him to the court, or your adversary will hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I tell you, you will never get out of there until you have paid the last penny.

Adultery Begins in the Heart

27 “You have heard that it was said, Do not commit adultery. 28 But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Divorce Practices Censured

31 "It was also said, Whoever divorces his wife must give her a written notice of divorce. 32 But I tell you, everyone who divorces his wife, except in a case of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Tell the Truth

33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to our ancestors, You must not break your oath, but you must keep your oaths to the Lord. 34 But I tell you, don't take an oath at all: either by heaven, because it is God's throne; 35 or by the earth, because it is His footstool; or by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. 36 Do not swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair white or black. 37 But let your 'yes' mean 'yes,' and your 'no' mean 'no.' Anything more than this is from the evil one.

Go the Second Mile

38 "You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. 39 But I tell you, don't resist an evildoer. On the contrary, if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 As for the one who wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and don't turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Love Your Enemies

43 "You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don't even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Synoptic Parallels:

Luke 16:17, 21; 21:33; 12:57-59; 16:18; 6:27-36

Mark 13:31; 9:43-48; 10:11-12

Contrasts between the parallels:

Matthew	Luke	Mark
One stroke or letter (5:18)	Stroke or letter (16:17)	My words (13:31)
Penny (5:26)		Cent (12:59)
Right eye/hand (5:27-30)		Hand/foot (9:43-48)
Sin (5:29)		Stumble or fall away (9:45)
Except in the case of adultery (5:32)	No exception (16:18)	No exception (10:10-11)
Give (5:42)	Give and don't ask for it back again (6:30)	

Love and Pray for your enemies (5:44)	Love and Pray for your enemies – adds “do good” and “bless them.” (6:27-28)	
Tax collectors (5:46)	Sinners (6:33)	
Be perfect as God is Perfect (5:48)	Be merciful as God is merciful (6:33)	

Clarification of Christ’s fulfillment of the law instead of abolition, as the example of what one looks like versus the other. If He had come to abolish the law, Christ would have said “You have heard it has been said ‘You shall not murder;’ but I say unto you, ‘you shall murder.’” Instead, it His perfection of the law, He added to the law, rather than abolishing it.

Contrasts in this section: 1) the people of old (Israel), and 2) you (the disciples). And 1) what has been said, and 2) what is now being said. * Remember, Matthew’s primary audience was Christian Jews.

Comments for each section:

1. Anger and angry words are tantamount to murder. The distinction between Matthew’s penny, and Mark’s cent is in the specific words each used. Mark’s cent is from the Greek **λεπτόν**, lepton, a small piece of money, probably the smallest piece of money (Strong’s 3016). Matthew’s penny is from the Greek **κοδράντης**, kodrantés, a quadrans, the smallest Roman copper coin, a quarter of an *as*, the sixteenth part of a *sesterius* (Strong’s 2835). This amount was equal to the two mites from Luke’s reference to the poor widow giving to the treasury.
2. This contrasts fulfillment of the law and the 7th and 10th commandments, specifically not lusting after another’s wife, but Matthew 5:28 speaks of women in general, not just married women.
3. Matthew includes the exception of adultery for divorce being impermissible. This is missing from Luke 16: 18, and mark 10: 11. These differences should be considered in light of the primary audiences of each Gospel author. Mark and Luke wrote for a mainly Gentile audience. Matthew wrote to primarily Christian Jews.
4. The vows that are prohibited convert the inclination to take oaths by the authority of scripture. This would preclude the breach of Exodus 20: 16, bearing false witness. Examples of problematic vows: Herod made a frivolous vow, motivated by lust, which causes the beheading of John the Baptist and Matthew 14:7, 9. Peter takes an oath while declaring his third denial of Christ in Matthew 26:74. Jesus does not take a vow when charged to do so by the high priest in Matthew 26:63.
5. Here we have six specific examples regarding retaliation. The first three purpose to instruct regarding not following the typical cycle of evil action and escalation. The 4th and 5th examples deal with promoting benevolence to the less powerful.
6. This removes the restrictive concept of neighbor from being simply other Jews, to being considered as a universal application to mankind. This is also seen in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37).

The last verse of this section, (v.48) may be viewed as a generalizing summary of Jesus’ fundamental teaching on the fulfillment of the law to circles or to emulate the character of God, (Leviticus 11:44-45; 1 Peter 1:16).