

Matthew 5:17-20

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Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0 : 00] Our text today continues our study of the relationship between the law and the gospel, which we launched out on from a study of the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew chapter 5, verses 17 through 20, you've heard this a few times if you've been with us.

Matthew records Jesus saying, do not think that I've come to abolish the law of the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. And beloved, I want us to be found as a church of people who will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Those who are keepers and teachers of the law. Those who have a righteousness found in Christ that exceeds that of the Pharisees.

[1 : 13] And this text has caused us to ask the very important question, what is the relationship between the Old Testament law and the gospel of Jesus Christ?

And we have answered that question in multiple ways and at multiple times over the past weeks with two answers. First, the Old Testament law is meant to bring us to Jesus Christ.

Either in the civil and ceremonial pointing us to our need of this greater sacrifice, a greater king to rule over us.

Or in the moral to show us a great failure of keeping God's standard. The Old Testament law serves as our tutor, fixing for us the holy requirement of God.

Being utterly incapable of keeping such a law without faltering, the law creates for us a problem to drive us to the solution in the personal work of Jesus Christ.

[2 : 26] By believing that Jesus is the Son of God, that He perfectly kept the law. That He died on the cross in your stead. And that He was raised from the dead, defeating sin and death on your behalf.

You can participate in what Martin Luther called the great exchange. Your sin and the just penalty for it, taken from you by Jesus and His perfect law keeping given to you.

The Old Testament law begs the question, have I kept God's standard? This question is rightly answered by each and every one of us with an emphatic no.

If you have yet to recognize your moral failing before a most just God, I pray this morning that you will see your problem in the law and fly to Christ as the remedy.

It is often asked in churches of our day, if you were to die today and stand before God in judgment and be asked, why should I let you into my heaven?

[3 : 41] How would you respond? And they're looking for you to say something like, well, I've placed my faith in Jesus. And I can tell you that we would all fall on our face before a most holy God and cry out that we are unworthy.

The law does this for us, presents us with this most holy God and shows us our failure in pleasing Him.

But praise be to God, beloved, that the gospel tells us that it is Jesus that will come to our defense. We will not need to utter a word.

He will come beside us and He will call us His own. He will say, this one, this one is mine.

I lived and died for his or her benefit. It is because of the defense of Jesus Christ that we are justified before God, our sins forgiven and our righteousness declared.

[4 : 52] Secondly, having been set free from the burden of it, from the problem of the Old Testament law, the Old Testament law, the moral component of it, continues to serve as a guide for how our lives might please God.

So, having been accepted by God in the perfect righteousness of Jesus, we are gratefully obedient to the commands of God for our good and for His glory.

And you do not want to mess that order up. You do not want to think for a moment, especially as we take some time to consider God's commands to us, that in keeping God's commands, you will be accepted.

If you think in this way, you are utterly doomed because you will not keep God's commands at God's standard. The gospel says the very opposite.

It says you are accepted. You are in Christ. Therefore, now obey. I have hoped to show you over the past weeks, which I think we will see in great clarity today, how the Ten Commandments, which are often called the Decalogue, serves as an outline for all of God's moral and therefore perpetual commandments.

[6 : 20] Most of us are very familiar with the Ten Commandments, but I fear we too readily run them as a checklist and come out in our own estimation far better law keepers than we actually are.

So, join me in setting your mind on a careful consideration of the 5th, 6th, and 7th commandments.

If you have yet to place saving faith in Jesus Christ, I pray that you will see your need of Him.

If you have placed saving faith in Jesus Christ, I pray that you will be given cause to praise Him for His abounding grace to you and that your praise will spill over into grateful obedience.

Our text for today is Exodus chapter 20, verses 12 through 14. Beloved, this is God's Word to us. It was written for His glory and our good.

We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

[7 : 38] You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. Now, today I want to take the commandments out of order.

Dealing briefly with the 6th and 7th commandments and then spending the bulk of our time on the 5th commandment. I'm going to do this both for the sake of time and because we'll resume our study of the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus brings up both the 6th and 7th commandments, brings clarity to the people, self-righteous people of His day, what those commandments mean.

So we're going to get to consider them much more fully at that time. But in brief, let's look first at the 6th commandment. You shall not murder.

Now, it is very tempting to believe that none of us have transgressed this commandment. At least I think. I don't know each and every one of you. But that we very quickly are apt to go, Oh, I've never murdered anybody.

[8 : 41] This is not a crime that I am guilty of. But, oh, have we murdered. The Westminster Larger Catechism, which you're going to see some of this today.

And if you don't like it, I apologize. I want you to see, though, as they're pulling together the moral law systematically, these are some of the most exhaustive and succinct statements that are out there on what these commands mean.

So if you want to look on the back of your bulletin and follow along with me, I would encourage you simply typing into Google, Westminster Larger Catechism, and you'll find all the scripture proofs for this and wrestle with it and work it out yourself.

I affirm these statements without reservation. Question 135 says, What are the duties required in the 6th commandment?

And they write, The duties required in the 6th commandment are all careful studies and lawful endeavors to preserve the life of ourselves and others, resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions and avoiding all occasions, temptations and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any.

[10 : 04] By just defense thereof against violence, patient bearing of the hand of God, quietness of mind, cheerfulness of spirit, a sober use of meat, drink, physic, which means medicine, sleep, labor, and recreation, by charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness, peaceable, mild, and courteous speeches and behavior, forbearing readiness to be reconciled,

patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil, comforting and suckering the distressed, and protecting and defending the innocent.

Now the Westminster Divines have pulled together a multitude at each of these commas, essentially scripture, to say these very things to us.

And I'll admit that I'm still wrapping my mind around the sober use of meat and the direct application to this command. But, if we really take a look at what the Bible requires of us from the sixth commandment, it's not so easy to check the box, is it?

Let's look further at what sins are forbidden in the sixth commandment. The Westminster Divines wrote, the sins forbidden in the sixth commandment are, all taking away the life of ourselves or others, except in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defense, the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life, so withholding things that keep people alive, sinful anger, here it comes, hatred, envy, desire of revenge, all excessive passions, distracting cares, here's the meat thing again, a moderate use of meat, drink, labor, and recreations, provoking words, oppression, quarreling, striking, wounding, and whatsoever else tends to destruction of the life of any.

We are transgressors of this law. Jesus drives this point in Matthew chapter 5, and I think does so on the particular matter that we are most often guilty of.

[12:45] Beginning in verse 21, He says, You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment. But I say to you, that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council, and whoever says, You fool, will be liable to the hell of fire. You see what Jesus is doing here is He's making this direct connection.

If you harbor anger in your heart, you are in your heart a murderer. We are each and every one of us guilty of this. Many of us have transgressed this law this morning.

Many of you this morning killed your roommate, or your children, or your spouse in your heart.

Some of you may have killed someone who pulled out in front of you on the way here in your heart.

And we are guilty in this way before our most holy God. The seventh commandment. You shall not commit adultery.

[13:55] Pray for Caleb Waters, who volunteered to preach the text for Matthew 5 on this matter.

Once again, a commandment that one can be likely to say they've kept.

Either you may not be married, or you're married, and you, by your estimation, have been faithful to your wife or to your husband. But this commandment means so much more than might be understood on the surface.

We must be students of our Bible, the totality of it, to rightly see and understand what's both required and forbidden in this commandment. So again, let me read to you.

I hope you don't mind these big summaries. Question 138. What are the duties required in the seventh commandment? The duties required in the seventh commandment are chastity in body, mind, affections, words, and behavior, and the presence of it in ourselves and others.

Watchfulness over the eyes and all the senses. Temperance, keeping of chaste company, modesty in apparel, marriage by those that have not the gift of continency, which is celibacy.

[15:08] Conjugal love and cohabitation, diligent labor in our callings, shunning all occasions of unclumeliness, and resisting temptations thereunto, which is a fantastic word.

Let's look at what's forbidden. The sins forbidden in the seventh commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required. So, all those things just mentioned, the neglect of them are adultery, fornication, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts.

All unclean, imaginations, gentlemen, thoughts, purposes, and affections. All corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto.

Wanton looks, impudent or light behavior, immodest apparel, prohibiting of lawful, and dispensing with unlawful marriages. Allowing, tolerating, keeping of stews, which I'm pretty sure was a Puritan word for a prostitute.

I'm really still working that out, but I think it's short for steward, which would have been used as a slang term, but if you can figure that out, let me know.

[16:22] They're not talking about soup, in this case. That I'm confident of. I think this is what they mean, because, it goes on to say, keeping of stews, and resorting to them. Entangling vows of single life, making a vow and not keeping it.

Undue delay of marriage. Having more wives or husbands than one at the same time. Unjust divorce or desertion. Idleness, gluttony, drunkenness, unchaste company, lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays.

They're not saying they're against dancing, but this particular type of dancing and stage plays, and we certainly could add in our day, movies and television, and all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others.

Once again, here is not just a command for the men in the room, but for men and women alike. We have shown ourselves, in our hearts at least, to be adulterers.

Matthew chapter 5, verse 27 and 28, Jesus says, You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery, but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

[17:48] Praise the Lord for the gospel of Jesus Christ, for our failing in keeping such a law. The fifth commandment, and we'll spend a bit more time here.

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. Let's consider first, who this command is for.

We are very quick to think that it is merely for children, but it means much more than just the command, which it does include, but for children to obey their parents.

Again, I'm going to pick up a little bit of language from the Westminster Confession, and I want you to hear two words, and then rightly understand them. And those two words are, superiors and inferiors.

And typically when we think of those words, the way we use them is in terms of quality. Like, I am better than you because I'm your superior, and it can mean that.

[18:53] But the words mean a bit more, and even their primary meaning is a bit different. So, the idea of a superior is one who is higher in rank, status, or quality, the way we typically think of it.

And the inferior is one who is lower in rank, status, or quality. So, I am the superior to my sons who are the inferiors, as the Westminster Divines think about this kind of thing.

Okay, so don't get confused by those words and what they mean. So, question 124, you don't have this one. I'm going to touch these very briefly. So, they ask, who are meant?

Who are meant by father and mother in the fifth commandment? We want to go father and mother, right? Yes, but.

Their answer is, by father and mother in the fifth commandment, are meant not only natural parents, but all superiors in age and gifts, especially such as, by God's ordinance, are over us in place of authority, whether in family, church, or commonwealth, in the governing of the place in which we live.

[20:11] It has a broader meaning. Let me just show you a few places where this father-to-son type of language is used.

I think the family is a given. I think we can all be on board with that one and not hesitate on it. But, let's look at an example for the church. 1 Corinthians chapter 4, in verse 14 and following, Paul writes, I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children.

So, here he is establishing himself as the superior to the Corinthian church's inferiority. Verse 15, For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers.

For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you then be imitators of me. He's saying, honor me by imitating me.

That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord. What Paul is communicating is he's going to model for you what it looks like to honor your father in this particular setting.

[21:22] To remind you, it goes on to say in verse 17, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. And Paul does this repeatedly in other places as well.

He calls Timothy, his son, in many spots, as well as Titus. Titus chapter 1 verse 4, the first part of it, to Titus, my true child in a common faith.

And he says this of Onesimus and Philemon 10, I appeal to you for my child, O Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. And so you see how the fifth commandment can apply in the setting of the church, in the family of God.

Now it also applies in the commonwealth, in our very governing. There's been a controversy this week about Romans chapter 13, you may be aware of.

Romans chapter 13, verse 1 and 2. Further on into the chapter, but let me read verse 1 and 2 for you. Paul writes, let every person be subject to the governing authorities.

[22 : 29] For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities, resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

Do you hear the obey, honor your father and your mother, that it may go well with you? We don't want to incur the judgment of the authorities.

Now if you're not aware of the controversy that I mentioned, Jeff Sessions, our Attorney General, used this text to defend dividing up immigrant parents from their children, and said, you should just obey, because we're the government.

That's the summation of what he had to say, which I wholeheartedly reject. Russell Moore, who I'm just, one of the reasons I'm so proud to be a Southern Baptist, is Russell Moore, who's the president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, was interviewed on CNN, and he said this to that response.

He said, we all have moments where we can spend a little more time in Sunday school, and this is one of those moments for the Department of Justice. He went on to talk about what is it that Paul is really trying to say.

[23 : 44] Paul is not just unilaterally saying if the government says it, it is right and it is good, but rather, God places governments for the reason to commend that which is good and to punish that which is evil.

We have to get in a very tough spot to say if the government says it, then it should go, right?

Because now suddenly, North Korea is the most righteous country because they listen to whatever the dear leader says.

May it never be. God does not grant a waiver to governing officials simply because they are government officials. This is not the way of things, right?

We place God's authority and God's Word over and above. They are subject to it. And therefore, there will be times, right, when God's church will reject the governing of our nation in order to stay obedient to our Lord.

And this is good. The command says that honoring your superiors when they are rightly living, when they are rightly ordering over the top of you is a good thing and is not just for the inferior to the superior because there's a promise of good, there also is this implication of expectations for superiors, right?

[25 : 18] They must then lead well, right? They must command well. An example of this is the command given to parents in Deuteronomy 6, verse 5 and following.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

This is this great summation of the first four commandments. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise. There's a great charge given to superiors to care very carefully for those put under their care.

So, the Westminster Larger Catechism asks the question, question 125, why are superiors styled father and mother? And this is their answer.

Superiors are styled father and mother both to teach them in all duties towards their inferiors like natural parents to express love and tenderness to them.

[26 : 28] To have those who are in positions of superiority to think in terms of the love and the tenderness that we offer to our very own children.

According to their several relations and to work inferiors to a greater willingness and cheerfulness and performing their duties to their superiors as to their parents.

To see that those who are placed over us when rightly exercising their authority love us, care for us, intend good for us, so that we would see them as we would see our parents.

Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 4. Paul gives both a positive and a negative exhortation to fathers here.

He says, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. So there's a positive exhortation, instruction and discipline of the Lord, which does not just mean consistent with His commands, although it means that, but also consistent with His character.

[27 : 47] We are to lovingly train and teach our children and all others place under our authority. We are meant to guide them with great care in the same way that God does with us.

Isn't He so unceasingly patient in bringing about correction in our lives? Fathers were meant to parent our children. Our employees, don't tell them that you're their father. We're meant to be instructing and guiding and leading in this very way in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. But there's a negative exhortation at the beginning of the verse as well. Do not provoke your children to anger. And it suggests a repeated ongoing pattern of treatment because certainly fathers, don't our children sometimes get angry with us when they are disciplined or instructed.

They would not be human if they did not. But here, this ongoing thing that causes a deep-seated resentment for the discipline and the instruction of the father.

[29 : 00] That causes our children to not want to hear anything we have to say because of the way that we say it. So we must be careful in this matter.

And I want to give you just a few guidelines because it is Father's Day after all. Some ways in which we provoke our children to anger.

And really briefly, there's eight of them but I'm going to run them fast. First, overprotection.

Overprotection. Boy, do we live in a day where parents overprotect their children.

We want to put guidelines. We want to be instructive. No one wants their child being run over by a car but our children also need a chance to make some mistakes and to stretch their wings just a little bit.

My eight-year-old climbs the tree in our front yard much higher than I am comfortable with. But I don't want to keep him on the ground. Secondly, favoritism.

[30 : 08] Some of you may have experienced this as children. I'm thankful that I did not. My parents never did any of these things. But showing greater joy, celebrating more one child over another.

Our children need to know that in their uniqueness they are extremely special to us. Similarly, number three, comparing. Comparing one child to another child. Why can't you be more like your brother or like your sister?

Or comparing them to other children. Our children are uniquely made. They are wonderfully created and they are vastly different from one another.

Praise God. And there are some children that are just cooler than other children but we don't want them to know that. They need to be entirely unaware of this in their upbringing and we need to foster a great deal of expectation for them but also a great deal of care as we deal with their unique personalities and challenges.

Fourth, and similarly, pushing achievement beyond reason. We have done very little organized sports with our boys by design.

[31 : 23] It is astounding to me how much some five-year-olds get yelled at on a field. It is just tragic to see already young boys trying to seek the favor of their father by performing on a field.

It is such a shame. Fifthly, discouragement. Again, speaking in a way that's condescending to our children, telling them that they don't measure up.

We're not talking about God's standard here but our own sinful desire for them that we might look good because our children make us look good. Six, failure to sacrifice.

Failure to give our lives for the sake of theirs that they would know that they are loved in a sacrificial way. We give of our time, we give our attention to our children.

Seventh, conditioned love. I think a lot of us have feelings of unconditional love toward our children but sometimes we express it in a way that's conditioned.

[32 : 29] I think we are all, each of us, guilty of saying to one another and to those of us who have children, to our kids, I love you but here's the behavior I need you to correct.

And what we are expressing is I love you as long as you correct this behavior. We don't want to say these kinds of things to our children. Sam and I labor, and we don't always do this perfectly, but labor to say to our kids, I love you and that's why.

I love you and therefore you need to be obedient. I love you so stop sticking that thing in a light socket. I love you so you need to eat the green beans.

Not I love you but you need to eat your green beans. And eighth and finally, and I think this goes without saying, but we do want to be careful as parents that we avoid all forms of physical or verbal abuse.

These are things, dads, that are going to prompt our children to anger. We want to pick up the qualities of Christ in disciplining our children and they need to be, they need to be corrected but we do so with a great deal of grace and understanding as those who get that we're the greatest of sinners and trying to help our children see their need for Christ.

[33 : 50] This is on the front of your bulletin, John Flavel, 17th century English pastor wrote, if you neglect to instruct your children in the way of holiness, will the devil neglect to instruct them in the way of wickedness?

No. If you will not teach them to pray, he will to curse, swear, and lie. If ground be uncultivated, weeds will spring.

So, superiors are styled father and mother because superiors are commanded to seek the good of their inferiors and inferiors are commanded to obey their superiors for their good.

For their good. At the end of the fifth commandment, God etched in stone that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

And in the restating of the law in Deuteronomy chapter 5 before the next generation goes into the promised land, there is added and that it may go well with you.

[35 : 02] That your days will be long and that it may go well with you. And Paul draws our attention to this in Ephesians chapter 6 verses 1 through 3 where he says, Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right.

Honor your father and mother. And then in parentheses, this parenthetical, Paul adds, this is the first commandment with a promise that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.

And so you see, children in the room and those of us, I think all of us have some degree of superior over and above us. This is a commandment with a promise that God will work good as we honor, as we seek to replicate and obey those things that are admirable in our superiors.

One more question and answer from the Westminster Larger Catechism and then I'll close us with one more text. Question 127, what is the honor that inferiors owe to their superiors?

The honor which inferiors owe to their superiors is all due reverence in heart, word, and behavior. prayer and thanksgiving for them, imitation of their virtues and graces, not those things that are vices, but those things that are virtues, willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels, due submission to their corrections, fidelity to defense and maintenance of their persons and authority according to their several ranks and the nature of their places, bearing with their infirmities and covering them in love so they may be an honor to them and to their government.

[37 : 07] Let me close in reading from Psalm 119. This was, and this was so very good for me that it timed out that our scripture reading as a church has been working through Psalm 119 across the past couple of weeks as I've thought much about the law and the gospel and its place in our life.

So much repetition of God's goodness to us in His command. And so I want to read to you from Psalm 119 beginning in verse 153 and to the end of the stanza.

The psalmist writes, Look on my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget your law. Plead my cause and redeem me.

Give me life according to your promise. Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek your statutes. Great is your mercy, O Lord.

Give me life according to your rules. Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, but I do not swerve from your testimonies.

[38 : 17] I look at the faithless with disgust because they do not keep your commands. Consider how I love your precepts. Give me life according to your steadfast love.

The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever. Let's pray together.