

Matthew 5:17-21
Law of Love
WRCoB 6.2.24

This past quarter

Our Sunday school spent time discussing
The essence of salvation.

Is it something we have to work towards?
Can we earn our way into God's kingdom?

Or is it God's doing?
Is it a gift through grace?

Is law or grace the core of the Gospel?

Our Sunday school concluded

Ephesians 2:8 NRSV For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—

Today, we look to the second in our summer series
On the Sermon on the Mount
With Jesus saying this.

Matthew 5:20 NRSV For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Now, for goodness sake, which is it?

Law or Gospel?

Well, let's see if we can find out.

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Our passage today moves us into the beginning
Of the central section of his sermon.

In this section, Jesus describes
The ethics of kingdom living.

When I say kingdom living
I don't just mean what heaven is going to look like
But what kingdom living looks like here on earth.

He begins

Matthew 5:17 CEB “Don't even begin to think that I have come to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I haven't come to do away with them but to fulfill them.”

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It was unasked, but the question on the minds
Of the Pharisees and scribes

Was whether or not Jesus aligned himself
With the Law of Moses
The Jewish Torah
The first five books of our OT.

Jesus says he came to fulfill the law.

What does Jesus mean by claiming to fulfill the Law?

According to Richard B. Gardner,
Retired Brethren professor
In the Believers Church Commentary
One can interpret his comment in three ways

One way to look at it is that
Jesus fulfills God's promise of salvation.

Whereas before, it was through the law
That people were saved
Now it is through belief in Jesus.

Another way to interpret his comment is that
Jesus fulfills the law
By living in complete obedience to the Law.

Jesus embodies the Law and the Prophets
Through his perfect and sinless life.

And a third way one can interpret Jesus' words
Is that he fulfills the law
By revealing the perfect will of God.

Jesus' life, his ministry, and his teachings
Serve as an example of how we are to live
Creating a community that follows
The way and will of God.

I suspect the truth is that
It's a combination of each interpretation.

The reason I suspect this is that
In this central section of his sermon

He fleshes out what kingdom living looks like
For a community centered on Jesus.

He wouldn't have had needed
To teach the radical ethics of his lifestyle
If he wasn't interested in having us live them.

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The Law was the foundation of Jewish faith.

It was not merely a set of rules
But a guide for living wholesome, healthy lives.

It provided a framework for living in community.

The Law guided proper social interaction
Positive ethical conduct
And growth in spiritual life.

Jesus recognized its value and relevance
And did not cast it aside as outdated.

Jesus said he came to fulfill the Law.

He wasn't so much concerned
About following the letter of the Law.

As much as he was concerned
About following the spirit of Law.

It goes beyond simple obedience.

Jesus wanted people to understand
That the Law was important
But not with the head, but the heart.

It involved trusting with the heart
And obeying with the head.

To trust and to obey.

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Jesus started the main body of his message, 5:17
By saying he did not come to abolish
But to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.

And then he addresses how he comes to fulfill the Law
By showing, in some cases, the need to exceed
And perhaps even, change the Law.

It will be the most radical teaching of the Law
That the Pharisees and scribes will ever hear.

He then closes his central message with these words.

**Matthew 7:12 NIV “So in everything, do to others
what you would have them do to you, for this sums
up the Law and the Prophets.”**

Between these two bookends
Jesus details or highlights
Some of what kingdom ethics are all about.

He sums up all his teachings with the Golden Rule.

At the beginning and the end

Jesus refers to the Law and the Prophets

Summing it up with the Golden Rule.

Doing for others what you'd like done to you

Is the essence of Jesus' kingdom ethics.

It is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.

Turning outside of ourselves to others

With the same respect, care, and compassion

That we'd like to receive

Fulfills the obligations of the Law.

In that way, Jesus, his life, ministry and death

Fulfills the Law and the Prophets.

He becomes the Law.

For Jesus embodies God's character and will.

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It you follow the Law and the Prophet thread

We see it next, further on in Matthew 22

Jesus answered the question

Which commandment in the Law is the greatest?

Matthew 22:37-39 NRSV

37“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’

38 This is the greatest and first commandment. **39** And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

Matthew 22:40 NRSV

40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

Love God, love others

On these two hang all the Law and Prophets.

All of God’s way

All of God’s will

Points to love as being the fulfillment of law.

And everything, everything, everything about Jesus

Points to the supreme law as love.

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The Apostle Paul agreed with this too.

Romans 13:8-10 NRSV

8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

9 The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

James knows this too.

James 2:8 CEB

⁸ You do well when you really fulfill the royal law found in scripture, *Love your neighbor as yourself.*

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The Law of Love that Jesus teaches
Is something he expects us to follow.

It's difficult isn't it?

Reinhold Niebuhr calls living out the ethics
Found in the Sermon on the Mount

An Impossible Possibility

But Jesus didn't expect us to do it alone.

It is only by and through Jesus
That we strive to attain living a Christ-like life.

Catherine Booth, cofounder of the Salvation Army said

What the law tried to do by a restraining power from without, the gospel does by an inspiring power from within.

Our strength comes from the Holy Spirit.

If the Spirit seems far away
The Law of Love looks more like a rule book
Than a Spirit-filled life.

Over the course of our summer Sundays
We will discover the challenges
Of Jesus' radical and transforming teaching
Here in his Sermon on the Mount.

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But I want to ask you
How is your spiritual life?

Are you living your Christian life
Like it's a set of rules to follow?

Trying to do what pleases God.

Coming to church every Sunday
Because it's the right thing to do

Reading your Bible daily
Saying your prayers
And still feeling rather empty inside.

Trying to control your temptations
Your anger
Your lusts for food or drink.

Trying do all the right things
But somehow despite all that
Your life leaves something to be desired.

You're missing a key ingredient.

Jesus Christ.

Not the idea or concept of Jesus.

But the real Jesus
The Spirit of Jesus
God's Holy Spirit.

You see, the one thing about the Law of Love
Is that it needs God at the heart.

When that happens
When we love Christ
With all of who we are

Christ's Spirit comes and resides in us
And the rule book we had been following changes

And we become filled with love.
Love of God and neighbor.

That is the Law of Love.

An impossible possibility?

On your own? Yes!

But with the help of the Holy Spirit
Much more of a possibility.

Seek Jesus

Tell him you need him above all others

Pray for the indwelling of his Holy Spirit

You might have been a Christian all your life
But never felt his love within you.

That can change in a moment's notice.

Let your ethical conduct be driven
Not by your own self-determination
But through God's Spirit

Then you will fulfill the royal law, the law of love.