

**What They Really Say
Matthew 5:17-20**

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ²¹ “You have heard that it was said... ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry....” ²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’” ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent...” ³¹ “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’” ³² But I say to you...” ³³ ...“You have heard that it was said... ‘You shall not swear falsely...’” ³⁴ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all...” ³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’” ³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil...” ⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’” ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies...”

What God's Commandments Really Say

1. What They Say About YOU = *Worse Than Your Greatest Nightmares* (Vss.19-48)

2. What They Say About HIM = *Greater Than Your Wildest Dreams* (Vss.17&18)

¹⁰ For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them” ¹¹ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law... ²¹ Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be!... ²² But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. ²³ But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. ²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” – Galatians 3:10-27

Study Guide: What They Really Say Matthew 5:17–20

Additional passages: Matthew 5:21–48; Galatians 3:10–27; Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36:26–27

Big idea: God's commands reveal a deeper righteousness than outward obedience. They show us our need for Jesus, who fulfills the law and changes our hearts.

Getting Started

What is a phrase you use regularly but would have trouble explaining? Why is it possible to think we understand familiar words without grasping what they really mean?

Read **Matthew 5:17–20** together. Then discuss the two questions at the center of the message.

1. What does Jesus say about the lasting importance of the Law and the Prophets in verses 18–19? How does verse 20 challenge someone who thinks being a decent person is enough?
2. The sermon pictured God's commands as a dartboard: the outer edge represents outward behavior, the inside represents attitudes and desires, and the bullseye represents the positive love God calls us to show. How does Jesus move inward from "*do not murder*" in Matthew 5:21–26? How does he do the same with "*do not commit adultery*" in Matthew 5:27–30?
3. Which is easier for you to recognize: a wrong action or the attitude behind it? Why?
4. In the story of Sprinkles and Blossom, one dog stayed near the fence looking for a way out; the other wanted to be close to her family. Where do you notice yourself asking, "How close can I get to the boundary?" What might that reveal about your heart?
5. Why would the scribes and Pharisees have seemed like examples of righteousness to Jesus' audience? What do you think Jesus means when he says our righteousness must *exceed* theirs?
6. According to Matthew 5:17, what did Jesus come to do? Why does it matter that he says *fulfill* rather than *abolish*?

7. Read **Galatians 3:21–27**. What does Paul say the law shows us, and where does it lead us? What does faith in Christ do to us that our own obedience cannot?
8. The sermon described Jesus as both obeying God's commands and bearing the consequences of our disobedience. How does that change the way you hear Matthew 5:17-20?
9. Read **Ezekiel 36:26–27**. What does God promise to change? How is a new heart different from simply having stricter rules?
10. If Jesus is changing our hearts, what might obedience look like in a current relationship, temptation, or conflict? Name one specific step you could take this week.

Close in Prayer

Thank Jesus for fulfilling what we could not. Confess one place where you have settled for outward obedience while resisting God in your heart. Ask him to grow genuine love for God and others in you.