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Lecture 3B – Matthew 5:17-48: The Sermon on the Mount II: Jesus, Moses, and the Disciples

Hello, this is David Turner. Welcome to Lecture 3B. This is a lecture on the Sermon on the Mount, our second one on the sermon, and we're dealing in Matthew chapter 5 with Jesus, the Law, and the Disciples.

We notice, first of all, by way of analysis, that Matthew 5:17-48, involves a general introduction found in verses 17-20, followed by two sets of three specific contrasts between the traditional teachings of the Old Testament and Jesus' understanding of the Old Testament. These two sets are found in 5:21-32 and 5:33-48. You should be looking at your supplemental materials. Page 15 has an outline of the lecture, and page 16 has a chart which lays out the structure of the chapter as we see it.

Both the general principle and the contrasts show us that the fulfillment of the Law, as Jesus teaches it, means that if we have the idea that we need to dominate other people by anger, by lust, by legal technicalities like divorce, by oaths, by retaliation or by hatred, that Jesus will confront us and change us from that mentality. Thinking now about Matthew 5:17-20, the general principles, the point basically is that Jesus has come not to destroy but to fulfill the Law. If this is the case, then the entire Law is eternally valid, 5:18, and the disciples must obey Him as its ultimate interpreter, and they must teach His interpretations of it, 5:19, so that they themselves might have moral uprightness and that those that they teach might have moral uprightness.

This moral uprightness has to exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees. It has to be a unique righteousness fit for the kingdom, 5:20. The relationship of Jesus and the Law is a crucial one in biblical theology, and the terminology to describe that usually has to do with continuity and discontinuity. It's also crucial for the disciples' living, and we'll talk about that next.

What does it mean when Jesus affirms that He has come to fulfill the Law and the prophets? It means that He has come to accomplish their purpose, and it stresses the continuity of the mission of Jesus with the ethical intent of the Hebrew Bible. But accomplishing the purpose of the Law should not be taken to mean that Jesus came only to reaffirm, reestablish, or confirm the Law. Such a viewpoint overstates the continuity of Jesus' teaching and that of the Law and would render the six specific examples of Matthew 5:21-48 as superfluous.

Jesus was not simply saying, Ditto, what Moses said, I say. On the other hand, the discontinuity of Jesus and Moses should not be taken too far because Jesus said He

did not come to abolish the Law and the prophets. His teaching is therefore not contradictory to anything in the Hebrew Bible, although it must in some sense transcend it.

So, two extremes must be ruled out. To say that Jesus came to abolish the Law drastically overstates the discontinuity between Jesus and Moses, and to say that Jesus came only to reaffirm Moses underestimates the discontinuity between Jesus and Moses. So, how may we avoid saying too much or saying too little about the relationship of Jesus to the Law? First, we must allow Matthew himself to define the term fulfilled by paying close attention to how he uses the term throughout his Gospel and by carefully noting the relationship between Jesus' teaching and the Law of Moses in the six specific examples that occur immediately after this passage in 5:21-48. For Matthew, Jesus is the ultimate goal of the Law and the prophets, the one to whom they point.

His mission of kingdom, word, and deed fulfills the ethical standards and eschatological promises of the Law and the prophets. Thus, he becomes the sole authoritative teacher of the Law, and his interpretations take on the character of new Law for his disciples. His teachings are not new in the sense of having no root in the Hebrew Bible, but in the sense of transcending the traditional understanding of the Law promulgated by the Jewish leaders.

It is not Moses, much less the Jewish leaders, who authoritatively teach Jesus' disciples. Jesus alone occupies that role. The six examples of 5:21-48 do not amount to Jesus contradicting Moses but to Jesus' unfolding implications, which were in Moses all along, although undetected by the current religious leaders of Israel.

In this respect, Jesus' fulfillment of the Hebrew Bible is not unlike the interpretations of the Bible found in the later rabbinic literature. Those rabbis maintain that their seemingly innovative rulings were all along contained by implication in the Torah which was revealed to Moses at Sinai. But Jesus claims far more than this, as we shall see in the next section.

Now, what about the disciples in the Law, the matter of Law and Grace? In a passage which is already full of high-impact statements, the statements of Jesus in 5:19-20 about the disciples' obligation to the Law may be nothing less than astonishing to Christians who believe themselves to be under Grace, not Law. Those who are accustomed to reading certain sections of Paul's epistles in which the Law seems to be deprecated may be amazed to read of the perpetual binding authority of the Law on Jesus' disciples. After all, didn't Paul say Jesus was the end of the Law and that his followers were not under Law but under Grace, passages like Romans 6 and 7, and particularly Romans 10:4? But Paul's situations, audiences, and problems were very different from Matthews's.

Paul labored to extend the Gospel from Christian Jewish communities like Matthews to Gentiles. In so doing, Paul taught that the Gentiles who believed in Jesus were not obligated to follow the Law. This, of course, resulted in no little tension with Christian Jews, as we see in Acts 15, Acts 21, verses 20 and 21, not to mention non-Christian Jews, as we see in Acts 21:28.

According to the narrative in Acts, Paul himself continued in synagogue worship and other Jewish practices throughout the span of his ministry. Notice such passages as Acts 18:18, 20:17-26, 22:3-17, 23:1-6, 24:11-21, 25:8, 26:20-23, and 28:20. As an evangelist to Gentiles, however, Paul's strategy involved flexibility in areas he deemed expedient.

Check out 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Much of Paul's seemingly negative teaching on the Law was not directed against the Law per se, but against teachers who erroneously wished to bring his Gentile converts under the Law. So, Paul, while insisting that such converts were not obligated to the Law as a rule of life, also stated that their obedience to Jesus through the Spirit would fulfill the Law's righteous requirements.

Look at Romans 8:1-4. Paul's identification of the weightier matters of the Law with love in such passages as Romans 13:8-10 and Galatians 3-14 seems to follow the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 22:34-40. By way of conclusion to Matthew 5:17-20, Matthew's Christian Jewish community must not think that Jesus has come to abolish Moses.

Rather, Jesus fulfills the Law of Moses by upholding its perpetual authority and by interpreting it in an ultimately definitive manner, which leads his disciples to a righteousness that surpasses that of the Jewish leaders. This general notion of a surpassing righteousness will now be explained in six concrete examples in which Jesus' teaching brings out the true meaning of the Law of Moses and transcends the way it has been traditionally understood. As his disciples live by this teaching, their righteousness will surpass that of the Jewish leaders, and their good deeds will be like a shining light which causes people to glorify their Heavenly Father.

Matthew 5:16. Now we come to Matthew 5, verses 21-48, and look at the specific examples. On your chart on page 16 of the Supplemental Materials, notice that the structure of these specific examples first lists the traditional teaching of the Pharisees based on the Old Testament, then Jesus' contrasting teaching, and in all of them but the third, a further application or explanation.

These contrasts amount to Jesus unpacking what he meant when he said that he had come not to destroy but to fulfill the Law of Moses. Now we need, first of all, to think about what it means when Jesus said, You have heard it was said, but I say unto you. It has commonly been understood to call these six examples antitheses.

Now, an antithesis is a contradiction essentially, and the idea would be that if you call it an antithesis, Jesus is contradicting the Law. Is that really what it was about, or is he simply contrasting what he says to its traditional understanding? Although it's common for interpreters to speak of the six examples contained in Matthew 5:21-48 as antitheses, this is certainly a mistake. An antithesis is not merely a contrasting statement, but it's a contradictory statement.

If Jesus had intended to teach antithetically to the Law and the Prophets, he would have needed to say what amounts to an antithesis to Matthew 5:17 because he would have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. If Jesus had been speaking antithetically, he would have said, You have heard that it has been said you shall not murder, but I say to you, you shall murder. This is, of course, unthinkable.

No doubt the transcendent teaching of Jesus here is in contrast to that of the traditional teachers of the Law, but it does not formally contradict the Law. In all six of the contrasts, there are two crucial matters to keep in mind. First, there's the contrasting parallel in the people to whom Jesus is speaking.

The ancestors, that is to say, the National Israel, the Old Testament community, versus you, that is to say, Jesus' disciples, which implies that the disciples, not the Jews as a nation, are the locus of Jesus' revelatory ministry. Second and even more noteworthy is the contrast between the agency of what was said and what is now being said. The Greek text emphasizes that Jesus himself is speaking with an authority that transcends that of the previous divine revelation through Moses.

Jesus does not deny that God had spoken through Moses. Check out also 15:4. But he affirms his own transcending revelatory agency in strong language. This authoritative way of speaking was not lost on those who heard him.

Notice 7:29, 8:8, 9, 9:6, 10:1, 15:4, and 28:18. Now, the nature of the contrast that's being laid out here by Jesus. Is he speaking against Moses or is he speaking against the Pharisees? It has to be asked whether Matthew 5:21-48 intends to set Jesus against Moses or against the ostensible contemporary experts on Moses, the Pharisees. In other words, is Jesus presented here as contesting Moses or the official spokesman for Moses? Check out 23:2. The question is perhaps impossible to answer because it's too complex to be put in so reductionistic a manner.

It would seem that in some instances, Jesus deals with contemporary paraphrases of the implications of the law, and in others, he deals more directly with the law itself. In the former category would be the 1st, 3rd, 4th, and 6th contrasts. That is 5:21, 31, 33, and 43, where the Old Testament text is cited with additional material appended to it or cited in a modified way, 5.31 or a summary of several texts is given as in 5.33. In the latter category, the 2nd and 5th contrasts, the Old Testament is cited word for word, and no additions are made to it, 5.27 and 5.38. Thus, in most of the contrasts,

there is evidence that contemporary construals of Moses are involved in the contrast, and this is inevitable since the ancient text of Moses has been subject to hundreds of years of interpretation and developing oral tradition.

Matthew presents Jesus as coming to accomplish the purpose of the law and the prophets, not to abolish them. Thus, one would expect the contrasting teaching of Jesus to transcend the Old Testament in a manner that does not formally violate its ethical authority. At the same time, Jesus warns his disciples that their righteousness must exceed that of the Jewish teachers in 5:20. So, one would expect that his teaching would expose the errors of those teachers as it expounded on Moses in an ultimate way.

In other passages such as 9:10-13, 15:1-9,, and 19:1-9,, Jesus explicitly rebukes the Jewish leaders for their mistaken views of the law and the prophets, so one should not be surprised to find a similar confrontation occurring implicitly here. It appears that this model of exposition plus exposure is most clear in examples 3 and 6, 5:31 and 43, but it's present to some extent in each example. For example, in 5:33-37, Jesus first alludes to the Old Testament text on vows as revealed to the ancestors, and then he proceeds to refute contemporary casuistry, that is to say, a manipulative use of vows in the use of the vows.

To illumine the ultimate goal of Moses and the prophets, Jesus must show the darkness that benights the teaching of the Jewish leaders. Now, what about the hermeneutic of Jesus and his greater righteousness? The relationship of Jesus to the Old Testament is a theological watershed. Jesus' general statements about accomplishing the Old Testament's purpose, not abolishing it, as well as his six specific contrasting situations have been variously understood.

Some have held that this means Jesus' life and teaching established or confirmed the law, but this understates the legitimate discontinuity between Jesus and the Old Testament. Others have stressed that Jesus' own personal obedience to the law completed its role in redemptive history. This idea is valid in its understanding of Jesus' obedience to the law, but dubious in its estimation of the implications of that obedience.

In light of 5:19 and 20, it's very doubtful that Jesus believed that the law had completed its role. Others have argued that Jesus, as a new Moses, brought a new law which superseded the Old Testament law, but this errs on the side of excessive discontinuity. Certain systematic theologians have thought that Jesus stressed the moral law, not the law's civil or ceremonial aspects, but whatever the relationship of Jesus to the law, it is a relationship to the whole law.

One can't partition the law into an anachronistic category that suits only its modern readers. Others conclude that Jesus reveals or intensifies the true inner meaning of the law. This has some merit, but at best it's only a partial answer.

What should we think then? It's most likely that we should believe that Jesus is the end or goal of the law, and thus he is its ultimate definitive interpreter. He alone is the authoritative eschatological teacher of the law and the prophets. The life and teaching of Jesus fulfill the law just as New Testament events fulfill Old Testament predictions and patterns.

On the one hand, Jesus does not contradict the law, but on the other, he does not preserve it unchanged either. He reveals the ultimate meaning of the law for those whose righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees. 520, check out also 22:34 to 40, 23:23, and 24.

He brings the law to its intended goal. How does he do this? In 5:21-26 Jesus teaches that the prohibition of murder implicitly prohibits the anger and abusive speech that lead to murder. While the Old Testament does not condone anger, Jesus' transcendent teaching links anger to a capital crime.

Anger and angry words are tantamount to murder. The second contrast in 5:27-30, Jesus teaches that the prohibition of adultery implicitly prohibits the lust which leads to adultery. While the Old Testament certainly does not condone lust, Jesus' direct linkage of lust to adultery is a more stringent standard of sexual ethics which interprets the 7th commandment, Thou shalt not commit adultery, by the 10th commandment, Thou shalt not covet anything, especially thy neighbor's wife.

Therefore, Jesus' teaching is that lust is tantamount to adultery. In the third contrast in 5:31-32,, the only one where there is no further application or expansion of what is said,, Jesus teaches that marriage is a sacred union inviolable except when infidelity occurs. While the Old Testament does not condone divorce see especially Malachi 2:14-16 there is reason to believe that it was condoned by many of Jesus' contemporaries.

See Hillel on the Mishnah on Gittin tractate about divorce decrees. But Jesus teaches that divorce and remarriage, except in the case of infidelity, are tantamount to adultery. Divorce is merely a temporal concession to human sinfulness, but permanent marriage is the original model for humans.

See Matthew 19:8, which has to be looked at in conjunction with Matthew 5:31-32. In the fourth contrast, Jesus teaches that the use of vows would be unnecessary if disciples consistently took to heart the biblical admonitions to tell the truth. Notice 5:33-37 While the Old Testament certainly does not condone the misuse of vows,

Jesus criticized their use. He forbids what the letter of the law permits, but he does so to uphold the spirit of the law against the bearing of false witness.

For Jesus, casuistry or manipulative use of vows is tantamount to bearing false witness. 5:33-37 compare 23:16-22 Fifth The fifth contrast in 5:38-42 teaches that the law on retaliation was designed primarily to limit conflict and only secondarily to endorse it. The Old Testament does not condone unjust punishment for crimes and damages.

That's why an eye for an eye was enjoined. The tendency would be to take more than an eye, so this Old Testament concept of proportionate justice, sometimes called *lex talionis*, is not primarily to be vengeful but to limit the extent of retaliation. Jesus teaches that, instead of any retaliatory response to wrongdoing, his disciples should respond with grace.

Instead of taking one's own vengeance on someone, one should let God take care of that. Indeed, Jesus teaches in 5:38-42 that insistence on taking one's own vengeance is tantamount to denying that God will avenge his people. Sixth and finally, in 5:43-48, Jesus teaches that all humans, not only one's friends, are to be loved.

The passage that he cites in 5:43, of course, from Leviticus, does not state that one should hate one's enemies. That is evidently a traditional addition. The text cited in Leviticus simply says love your neighbor, and neighbor is probably anyone with whom one comes into contact, as Jesus taught the lawyer in Luke in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Now, the Old Testament certainly does not condone hatred of one's enemies, but Jesus makes love of enemies the preeminent evidence of one's filial relationship to the Heavenly Father. If we want to be like our Father, we can't hate our enemies. Hating one's enemies is tantamount to paganism.

And now to conclude our lecture on Jesus, the Law, and the Disciples, it has been argued here that Matthew 5:21-48 is in continuity with the Law and the Prophets to a greater extent than is commonly held. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that there is much in Matthew 5:21-48 which is antithetical to the macho individualism of American culture. Jesus' ethic contradicts the anger and the aggression that seek to dominate other people.

His words against the misuse of women by adultery and divorce sound a note which resonates with contemporary sensibilities often heard from feminists. His stress on integrity in speech is much needed in our Christian community, where it's not uncommon for prominent believers to be caught in lies. His words against retaliation are important, but they're difficult to apply in a society like the United States, where

Christians have religious liberty and usually are not put into situations where they're persecuted outwardly for their faith.

Finally, there's no doubt that evangelicals have a lot to learn about loving their enemies. These six examples, which contrast Jesus' ultimate transcendent teaching of the Old Testament to the traditional understandings of it, amount to pointers in the direction of the righteousness which is greater than that of the Jewish leaders in 5:20. Now Jesus will turn from relationships with people to religious activities in 6:1-18 and attitudes toward material things in 6:19-34. The message of the kingdom dynamically transforms the disciples' conduct in these areas, too, as we'll see in our next lecture. As we conclude, we have to stress, I think, particularly 5:48. Be like your Heavenly Father is perfect.

You are perfect. What an awesome command. This is something that, technically speaking, in one sense of the word, is impossible because God is infinite and we can't be perfect in infiniteness like Him because we're finite creatures.

But God wants us to be like Him and be perfect like Him in His moral attributes. Sometimes the theologians call them the communicable attributes of God, such as love, holiness, mercy, etc., to distinguish them from the incommunicable attributes of God, God's omnipotence, etc.

We can't be omnipotent, but we can live our lives by love, grace, holiness, and mercy. If we're like our Heavenly Father is perfect, we'll not only quit hating our enemies, the final, sixth and final contrast, but go right back down on them in line. If we're like our Heavenly Father is perfect, we will not insist on retaliation when someone does us wrong.

We will certainly not make bragging comments about what we're going to do and then not do them. We will have integrity in our speech. We won't divorce our spouses.

We'll be faithful to the vows which we made to them before God if we're perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect. We won't commit adultery and be unfaithful to our spouses to begin with, which often leads to the need for divorce. And finally, we certainly won't murder or exercise the anger, which will lead all too often to murder.

So, when we're told to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect, we're given perhaps the tallest order that one could imagine. But God has created us in His image, and He has recreated us in Christ as a new humanity. So by the truth of the Word which we've thought about here today and the power of the Holy Spirit whom God gives us and the encouragement of our brothers and sisters in the Christian community, we can begin to make progress and be more like God and more like Jesus as we seek to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect.