

# The Law and the Disciple

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I am delighted to invite you back to the word of God here this morning to the text that we have been studying for a number of weeks now, Matthew 5:17-20. So I invite you to turn to Matthew 5 in your Bibles for the text that we will be expounding here this morning. It is a crucial text. It is a text in which Christ shows his relationship to the law of God as it was expressed in the Old Testament, and now we're going to see how the disciples of Christ relate to that law as well and this is actually a theme that we are going to cover for this Sunday and also the next two Sundays as well. There is so much that needs to be said about this but we're going to introduce it in an overview way here this morning.

The text is Matthew 5:17-20 and let's look at that together and let God have the first word this morning. Our Lord Jesus Christ said,

17 Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Let's notice something just right in that closing phrase there as we begin. There is an issue at stake for all of mankind, for every man, woman, boy and girl throughout all of the ages that would ever live; there is an issue that weighs upon you over the live stream, there is an issue for all of you here within the walls of this room. Jesus Christ makes it plain that there will be those who do not enter the kingdom of heaven and so these are matters of great significance for us, especially in light of the passage that we read for our Scripture reading, Revelation 16 just a few moments ago, recognizing that God has a plan to pour out his wrath and judgment upon sinful unbelieving people at the end of the age and that will be a fearsome, painful, eternal judgment that is ushered in when those judgments begin to unfold on the earth. And the question is what's going to happen to you? Where will you be when that time comes? Will you be safe in the kingdom of heaven and delivered from that wrath of which Jesus said he came to save us from? Or

will you be found with the sinners, will you be found with the rebels, will you be found with those cursing God because you did not get your way and that the judgment of God now comes on? Some will not enter the kingdom of heaven. In fact, Jesus said later in Matthew 7 that there are many who do not find it.

So this is a matter of great consequence. We are not dealing with trifles here. For those of you that are perhaps new to our church visiting for the first or second time, this is why we don't joke a lot. This is why we don't make light of the Scriptures. It's because these things are important and because your soul matters to us and your soul is under the authority of the word of God and it's important for you to treat these things urgently. And we realize that you live and move about in a culture that is used to superficiality, that mocks serious thinking even, let alone biblical thinking, but we realize as we come to the word of God that that's not the picture that God's word paints. So I encourage you to listen today, to take these things to heart, to hear what God's word has to say and open your heart to the work of his Spirit that his Spirit would help you understand where you stand in relationship to these truths of which we speak, where you stand in relationship to this Christ who alone is the Savior of men. So it's with that spirit that we come. It's not a morbid or a morose spirit, it's just an earnest spirit that we approach God's word. We are grateful to God that he has revealed his word. We are grateful that he has made it known. We are grateful for those over the centuries who have explained it and helped us to understand and we just want to stand in the stream of those men today as we open God's word here today.

Now, with that little bit of introduction, let me give you just a sense, a very simple sense of chronology that is actually very important to what we have to say today. As you read this passage, Matthew 5:17-20, understand as we've said many times, that the law and the prophets had already spoken. These things were matters that were settled in writing over the 1,500 years prior to the coming of Christ. And just from a strict manner, a simple manner I should say, of chronology, the law and the prophets came first and then Christ came in the flesh and he said, "I came to fulfill them." So the law preceded Christ. The law pointed to Christ. Your understanding of the Old Testament is starting to become more accurate when you understand that as you read the Old Testament and as the Jews were receiving this revelation over the course of time, it was propelling them forward. It was pointing them forward to a coming Messiah and in time, that Messiah came in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he says right here in this passage that he came in order to fulfill those prior writings, that the law and the prophets had been speaking for the prior 1,500 years.

Last time we saw what Christ meant by that. The law had made predictions about the coming Messiah and Jesus Christ fulfilled those. The law and prophets said, "The Messiah will look like this. He will have these attributes." Christ came and fulfilled those in his life, in his ministry. We saw that Christ fulfilled the law in his teaching by which we said what Christ did was he clarified the meaning, he rescued it and redeemed it from the false captivity that it had been held in by the Pharisees who merely externalized everything, who lived lives of hypocrisy and never made an inner emphasis on the reality of the law. Jesus clarified the law and said, "This is what it truly means. Set aside what

you've heard in the past from these teachers that are your leaders but are false teachers and false guides and blind leading the blind." So he fulfilled the law in fulfilling the messianic predictions. He fulfilled the law in his teaching by clarifying what the law meant. He fulfilled the law in his obedience. He was born under the authority of the law and he kept it perfectly. He obeyed the law in every aspect, never failing once, never sinning or transgressing against the law one single time. He fulfilled the law in that way.

We saw that he fulfill the law in his death, in that the law pronounces a curse on those who disobey. And in Galatians we saw that Christ became a curse for us as he hung on the tree. He fulfilled the curse of the law so that those who would put their faith in Christ could be redeemed from the condemnation of the law and be reconciled to a holy God. We could have said more about the way that Christ fulfilled the types and the shadows, the sacrifices and the feasts of the Old Testament. There is a reason why we don't sacrifice bulls and goats any longer, it's because Christ fulfilled the purpose of those sacrifices. In his own sacrifice, he offered once for all the blood that was necessary to propitiate the wrath of God. So there is no longer any need because the final sacrifice has been made. In all of these ways Christ fulfilled the law.

Now, as we continue on in this text, Christ is going to pivot and he's going to speak to how his disciples respond to the law. And again, there is this chronology that you can say that I think helps put into perspective what's going on. The law was given, Christ came and fulfilled it in the ways of which we spoke, now watch this: as Christ teaches during his earthly ministry and as he sends out apostles and his disciples and they begin to teach others, they are going to follow after Christ. As they follow his teaching, as they receive him for salvation, they are going to become disciples of Christ who learn from him, who take him not only as Lord but as their teacher, and they follow what he says and what he says becomes law for them. It defines truth for them because Christ is truth himself. And the question becomes, then, as Christ has made the fulfillment of the law central to what he's saying here, the question becomes: how will his disciples respond to the Scriptures that Christ has fulfilled? As men come to Christ and follow him, how will they respond to this law that cannot be violated? How will his disciples respond? Look at verse 18, to this law where the smallest letter or stroke shall not pass away until all is accomplished. How will his disciples respond to this law that he fulfilled?

Well, it should be evident and there is something blessedly simple about this. The disciples of Christ will have the same spirit of submission to the law that he himself had. Christ having come and fulfilled the Old Testament, he's not going to suddenly produce disciples who are hostile or indifferent to this law because the disciple becomes like their master. A student becomes like his teacher and if Christ had a spirit of fulfilling the law, then his disciples are going to have a high regard for it as well. This is a very simple point that he is making and yet it is so vital for us to understand. Jesus Christ as he develops disciples is producing men and women who seek to keep and teach the word of God just like their Master did. There is a regard for God's word that becomes imperative and compelling in their heart. And as they do this, as Christ develops disciples who are like that, then they become instruments in his hand, extending the kingdom even further.

That's the direction that we're going here today. We'll break it down into two simple points. First of all we'll say this: true disciples, this is the first point if you're taking notes, true disciples honor the law. True disciples honor the law. There is a word that I like to use and it's the word "symmetry." There is a balance. There is an evenhandedness. There is a balance to what happens and it applies in a lot of areas of life, not just in spiritual matters. But I think that word might help you see what is going on with what Jesus says here. There is a divine symmetry that takes place that marks the law that marks Christ and marks his disciples. The law pointed to Christ, as we saw, and Christ fulfilled the law. He honored the law with his obedience, with his death, with his teaching, and those things that we've already discussed. And now Christ, having fulfilled the law, develops disciples and disciples have the same sense of honor and reverence for the law that Christ did. He reproduces in his disciples the same attitude that he himself had toward the word of God and that's what you see going on then.

Look here at verse 19 now where Christ pivots as shown by the word "then." He says, "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." The word "then" is showing the connection between what he had just said and what he is about to say. Christ said, "I came to fulfill the law because nothing can be violated in the law until everything is accomplished. Everything must be accomplished. That's why I'm here. Whoever then, since I am like this, since the law is like this, whoever then," you see the pivot that's taking place; now he's explaining the nature of the way this works out in the life of his disciples, "Whoever then does this," then he draws conclusions about what is going on. So the premise is this: the law has an abiding authority. Jesus came to fulfill the law, consequently those who follow him are going to have the same spirit of respect and honor toward the law that Christ did. It's not that complicated. It's a long sentence, to be sure, but the basic principle of what he's saying is not that complicated.

So the question becomes: what is your attitude toward the word of God? The question then is: what does salvation do in the heart of a disciple? What does it produce in them? And when you know what the reality is, when you know what salvation produces, then you are in a position to assess yourself and to examine yourself, "Is my heart like that? Do I have the salvation that produces that kind of attitude toward the word of God?"

So let's look at the text. Jesus says, "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven." The word "annuls" means "to set aside responsibility; to set aside your responsibility to obey it." Jesus says, "Because the law has this great authority, because the law has this abiding permanence and it cannot be violated, then it's obvious," notice how I threw that word in, "then it's obvious that someone who diminishes the law, who sins against it without compunction of conscience, to those teachers who diminish the authority and the strategic centrality of God's word, when they set it aside like that," Jesus says, "they are the least in the kingdom." There is a corresponding assessment that God makes of people who claim to follow him that is measured by their response to his word and because God views his word highly, because Christ viewed the word highly, those

who would want to be great in the kingdom need to view the word highly themselves, and if you don't share that attitude that Christ has toward his law, then he's not going to regard you as someone great in the kingdom. You will be among the least.

Beloved, mark it well, mark it well: God measures men and women by the way that they measure his word. The regard that people give to the word of God is the measure by which he esteems them and the way that they are ranked in the kingdom. So, beloved, those who are slack in obedience are least in the kingdom. There are eternal consequences to your response to the word of God. In fact, a man, a woman, a boy, a girl, who lives in utter disregard of God's word, who has no heart love for it, who has no spirit of regard or submission to it, is someone who may not even be in the kingdom at all despite what they say about Christ.

Look over at Matthew 7:21. And this is why, beloved, it is so important for you to get beyond simply speaking words about God or about his word, about Christ or about his kingdom, because the true nature of salvation produces someone who loves God's word and has a heart to obey it. Absent that heart, there is no reason to think that someone is a true Christian. Someone who can live in unbroken sin without any pangs of conscience is not someone that should think that they are Christian, no matter how many times they walked an aisle to pray a prayer at a church service back 30 years ago when they were a kid. That's foolishness to think that true salvation could produce someone who has been reconciled to God, who has been truly born again, and suddenly to have a life that is dead and looks nothing like Christ, that instead looks everything like the way the world lives. There is no reason to think there is any spiritual life in someone like that and Jesus made that emphatically clear in this same sermon.

Look at Matthew 7:21. He said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." You see, there it is again. Jesus said in Matthew 5:20, "There are some who will not enter the kingdom of heaven." He says here in Matthew 7:21, "There is a group of people that are not going to enter the kingdom of heaven." Beloved, what else would it take, those of you that are ambiguous in your spiritual life, what else would it take to awaken you from your slumber except these warnings from Christ that there are masses of people who are not going to enter the kingdom of heaven? How can you live in such indifference to those things? Don't you realize that your eternal well-being is at stake with the things of which we speak?

Jesus says in 7:21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'" "Lord, we were good charismatics. We cast out demons. We healed people, so we said. We prophesied." But Jesus says, "I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" Lawlessness, living without regard to the word of God, the written word of God, living without regard to the revealed word of God. This is a matter of great significance.

Beloved, let's say this, let's put it this way: the law comes from God, the law and the prophets as Jesus was speaking, describing what we know as the 39 books of the Old Testament in English. The law comes from God. God has moral principles by which men are to live. Can I tell you something that's, again, really simple, but something that people go wrong in the most basic ways? You cannot pick and choose what you will obey. God did not delegate to you to decide which aspects of his moral law you found comfortable and agreeable and those which you find inconvenient and a restraint and therefore you are free to set aside.

Not long ago, we had a conversation with someone who said, "I am a Christian but there is this aspect in which I am going to sin and I am going to do what I want to do." Well, a person like that has to be confronted with the fact, "You don't get to pick and choose like that." You come under the authority of all of the word of God, you honor it and seek to respect it and with a spirit of willingness regard it with a spirit of obedience, not from a sense that says, "I'll be the final judge of what applies to my life." Either God's word is over you or it's not. You don't get to pick and choose like that.

So what else can we say? Well, to kind of illustrate this, you can see it in the lives of the Pharisees and what they did. Look over at Matthew 23 as we illustrate this point of not being able to pick and choose and to find obedience on your own terms. You cannot annul the law of God that way. You cannot set it aside and say, "This does not apply to me," when it does. You can't do that and think that you're going to heaven. That's the bottom line.

Matthew 23, beginning in verse 23, Jesus speaking to these scribes and Pharisees that he was also rebuking with the Sermon on the Mount said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also."

What's Jesus saying here? Well, what the Pharisees would do is that they would carefully count out an exact 10% of even garden herbs in order to give their tithe to the Lord. And in this scrupulous external matter of detail, professed to be obeying all of the law of God. "You see, look at what we're doing." They assumed that by focusing on the lesser things, that they were also fulfilling the greater things that the law of God required. Not true. Not true. They neglected the greater commandments. They had no love for God. They had no fidelity. They had no mercy in their souls. They were hypocrites who secretly loved attention, secretly loved the places of honor, secretly loved for people to see them going through the motions of their external ritual and ceremony, but inside had no real love for God, had no real love for his word as shown by the fact that the spiritual qualities that the word of God produces, were foreign to their lives. The justice and the mercy and the faithfulness were alien to their beings and nothing about throwing out a few seeds in

temple offering compensated for the greater lack of the inner response of their inner man to the word of God. And Jesus condemns them for that and calls them for the hypocrites that they were.

Beloved, do you see that? Do you see that he is speaking to those who had no inner love for God's word? They had no heart for obedience. They had no heart of respect or reverence to the word of God. They simply went through the motions. They checked off the boxes of their so-called external obedience but yet their heart was far from God and certainly far from the Christ who was teaching them in their midst. They were hypocrites.

Now, with that in mind, go back to chapter 5:19. Jesus makes the pivot point of spiritual growth, he makes the pivot point of true spirituality, he illustrates the reality of true salvation as shown by those who respond to the word of God from the heart. In verse 19 he says, there at the end he says, "but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." He keeps them. From a heart of love and from a heart of reverence, he has regard for obedience to the word of God. From a heart of love and reverence, he respects the authority of the word of God so much that he doesn't simply make it a matter of private religion to himself, but he teaches others and he shares it with others as God gives him opportunity and makes the word of God known in his circle of influence. "Whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

So what you need to see, beloved, is this, what you need to see is this: is that God measures believers in accordance with their reverence for his word. A true Christian, one who has truly been born again, will have a settled submission to God's word. A settled regard for its authority. When they see a Bible, they say instinctively, "Ah, there is God's word." And it's not just an external attestation to the authority of God's word, there is this heart response that says, "I love this word. This word is my law. This is the word that defines who I am. This is where I meet my God. This is where I find out about Christ. This is where I shape my life and my affections." There is a centrality to the word of God and it has a controlling authority in the inner man of the one who is a true Christian. "Whoever keeps and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

So I'm going to help qualify that in just a moment but, you see beloved, if you want to know if you're on the way to heaven, if you want to know if you are presently in the kingdom of God as defined in Colossians 1, that we have been transferred out of the domain of Satan and into the kingdom of his beloved Son, if you belong to Christ, here is the defining issue of it: don't simply trust in what you've said in the past because people lie all the time and your heart is deceitful and you can deceive yourself. You are your biggest enemy when it comes to deception. You can deceive yourself about these matters. The question to look for, the thing to look for in your heart is: is it your pattern of life to love God's word? Is it your pattern of life to affirm its truth rather than to minimize it? Is it your pattern of life to affirm the place of obedience, even if your obedience is still imperfect? To say that, "Yes, obedience is important and obedience is the aspiration of my heart even though I am mindful of the fact that I still sin and fall short of the glory of God. I speak with Paul when Paul said, 'I joyfully concur with the law of God in my inner

man but I fall short and I find that there is still this wretched sin that still clings to me.' But, oh, in my heart of hearts, there is a love for God's word. In my heart of hearts, I recognize its purity, I recognize its authority and I embrace it. I don't resist it." That's the mark of a true Christian. These are the things that matter.

And beloved, we just have to be specific because these things are too important. Your soul lives on for far too long for us to treat these things superficially. Someone who can be comfortable in sin, comfortable in known disobedience and disregard to the word of God and is comfortable there and likes living there and has no pangs of conscience about that, has no reason to believe that they are truly a Christian because the response to the word of God should mirror the way that Christ himself responded to the word of God. Christ responded and fulfilled it. He regarded its authority and honored it. Those who belong to him are going to grow in like manner of responding to it and affirming its authority. Absent that, there is serious grave reason to believe whether you are a Christian or not.

Now, time out. A pause here to clarify what we're saying because clarity is everything when it comes to teaching Scripture. Clarity is everything. Christ is not describing an obedience that earns your salvation. That is very very clear. He started this sermon by saying that his disciples are recognized by the fact that they deny any claim to self-righteousness. Look at Matthew 5:3. This is the entry gate into everything else that Jesus has said. This is the cornerstone and everything else flows from it. And in Matthew 5:3, let me remind you, Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The poor in spirit are those who openly acknowledge that they have no merit of their own. "I am not a righteous man. I am a sinner who falls short of the glory of God. The best of my righteousness is but filthy rags in the presence of a holy God," is what the true disciple says. And Jesus from that cornerstone builds the rest of his teaching that follows in the Sermon on the Mount. The presupposition, in other words, of everything that he says in Matthew 5:19 and 20 is an acknowledgment that we do not meet the standard of God when it comes to righteousness. We have no merit of our own that entitles us to salvation. That's essential to understand.

So when we talk about the priority of honoring God's word and of obedience to God's word, it is not so that we can earn our own salvation. Scripture is clear in many places that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ, not by works. Galatians 2:16 says that, "by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified." So with what we're saying here, we're not telling anyone that they have the ability in their own person to obey God's word and earn salvation on their own. That's not what we're saying. That's not what Christ is saying. What we're saying is something completely different. We're saying that the person whom Christ saves, the person whom grace redeems, undergoes a transformation of heart so that their attitude toward God's word is changed. By a prior work of the grace of God, part of what he does is he works a change in the heart whereas before you were stony and indifferent to God's word, he replaces that by an act of grace so that you are receptive and loving in response to the word of God. We'll see more about that in a moment.



Understand this, again going back to the Beatitudes, to those opening verses where Jesus defined the nature of the character of his disciples. Look at Matthew 5:6, let me remind you of this. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," we said in verse 3, "I have no righteousness of my own." And yet in verse 6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they," meaning they and they alone, "will be satisfied." The true disciple of Christ has a hunger for righteousness, has a thirst for righteousness. It is the defining overarching desire and motivation of his heart, "I want the righteousness that is expressed in God's word." It's a longing in his heart that is never fully extinguished in the life of a true Christian. God saves you in part so that you will hunger after the righteousness which he alone has in perfection, and you move your life in that direction and you love the word that reveals that righteousness to you and that equips you to transform and pursue it. This is fundamental to true salvation. So these heart desires matter and a true disciple honors the law as a result.

Now, that brings us to our second point this morning as we go into verse 20. Kind of an echo of the first point. The first point we've said that the disciples honor the law. There is a settled sense of respect and reverence for the law of God. Secondly, true disciples obey from the heart. They obey from the heart. Jesus here calls his disciples to an inner love for God's word and for obedience that was foreign to the Pharisees.

Look at verse 20. He says, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." For his disciples, for his immediate audience, I should say, to hear those words would have been shocking because as we've said in the past, the first century audience to whom Jesus was speaking was conditioned to see the Pharisees as the highest example of spirituality of their day and Jesus says, "Unless you're better than them, you're not going to heaven." Well, to his audience that's the same as saying, "No one is going to heaven then because no one can be better, no one pays more attention to the details, no one is more consumed with this external obedience than the Pharisees are and I can't do better than them. And you're telling me that unless my righteousness exceeds theirs I'm not going to heaven?" This is crushing. This is sobering.

This is frightening to think about and yet it's important to realize what Jesus is saying here. Jesus was calling them to a completely different kind of righteousness. The Pharisees had mastered external obedience in a way that had nothing to do and left their inner man untouched. They could be full complete hypocrites and still think they were right with God. What Jesus is pointing to, what he is laying out to them, what shows even more in verses 21 through 48 which we will get to eventually, what Jesus is saying is that the righteousness of the kingdom is an inner righteousness of heart that far transcends anything about these external observances that you see going on around you. You see, Jesus wasn't calling them to try harder in the details, to be even more precise in counting out garden herbs for their tithe, he was overturning everything they thought and saying that, "This righteousness of which I speak is a matter of heart motivation, of heart love, of heart attitudes, that is consistent with what God's message had always been."

Go back to Ezekiel 36 in the Old Testament. In setting forth such an amazingly high standard, "your righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees," Jesus was pointing them in a way that took them out of the realm of their customs and back into the realm of the word of God. God had told Israel through the prophet Ezekiel what true salvation would look like, and in Ezekiel 36:25, he says as he describes symbolically salvation, he says, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols." Verse 26, look at what he describes here, he says, "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." You see, Christ is pointing them in Matthew 5, pointing them to that kind of heart transformation of which the prophet spoke. Jeremiah also spoke of these things. And in pointing them to that heart transformation, he shows them what the righteousness is that God requires: a heart that is tender to his word; a heart that loves obedience; a heart that does not bristle against the word of God, the commands of God, but rather embraces them and says, "These things are lovely to me. These are the sweetest things on earth to me. Those words that reveal my God to me, those words that make his will known to me, I delight to know those things." That's the nature of true salvation.

Go back in your New Testament to Hebrews 8, if you would, speaking after redemption had been accomplished in the death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now the writer of Hebrews, writing some 30 years after, 35 years after the resurrection of Christ, comes back to the same point and he says in verse 10, quoting from the Old Testament, he says, "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their minds and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people." You see, when God saves a man, when God saves a woman, he changes their disposition. He changes their fundamental operating assumptions and presuppositions so that it can be described as writing his law, writing his word on their hearts, so that in the deepest part of the inner man, in the inner sanctum of the human soul, there is this respect, this longing, this desire for obedience to the word of God that is foreign to what you knew as an unsaved person. You see, the righteousness of the kingdom, the righteousness that salvation produces in the life of someone who is following Christ is a heart righteousness. It's not about obeying more details and finding out more rules and checking off the boxes. It's not simply about showing up and being in a room on a Sunday morning. It's about a whole life perspective geared toward God's word.

Kingdom righteousness, the righteousness that God produces in his disciples is a heart righteousness. Romans 7:22, the Apostle Paul said, "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man." I joyfully agree with what God's word says. Psalm 119:97. You could quote all of Psalm 119 at this point. Psalm 119:97 says, "O how I love Your law!" I love it. It conforms with what I desire. My desires are conformed to it. I hunger after it. The Lord Jesus himself in John 14:15 said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Then in 1 John, "The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

So over and over again here in Matthew 5 radiating through the Old Testament and through the New Testament, you find the spirit that God produces in true disciples that says, "I love God's word." In true salvation, beloved, God gives everyone whom he truly saves, he gives every one of them a new heart that loves his word. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If any man be in Christ, he is in new creation; behold the old things have passed away, new things have come."

So we step back and we ask for the tenth time this morning, the 10,000 time on the fifth anniversary of the start of Truth Community: does your heart know something of that kind of disposition toward God's word? That is the mark of a true Christian. Absent it, you have great reason to fear for the security of your soul no matter what you've said about Christ in the past. Do you enjoy hearing God's word taught? Do you like to somehow read it on your own? Do you have some mechanism by which you intake it? Some, I'm asking? I'm not asking whether you've memorized it or setting forth time requirements for day by day or saying you've got to structure your schedule. No, that's not it. That's not what we're talking about all. It's not those superficial things. The question is: what's in your heart toward God's word?

And here's another way to approach it: does disobedience to God's word pain you? Does it hurt you to know that you're in disobedience to God's word so that you flee to Christ for forgiveness and seek reconciliation afresh? Or do you say, "Eh, do you know what? This is the way I am. I am who I am," in your Popeye spirituality as if God's word doesn't penetrate that, as if your disobedience is okay because you say it's okay. It doesn't work that way. You do not have that prerogative. You do not have that authority. God's word has the authority, the question is how do you respond to that? True disciples respond to it with a spirit of keeping it and teaching it. Period. There is no in between because in true salvation, God gives his people a heart for his word.

Go back to Matthew 5. Matthew 5 again. And in light of everything that we've said, let's consider the totality of Jesus' words in verses 19 and 20 again. "Whoever then annuls," sets aside, "one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Do you know why Truth Community Church will never denigrate God's word? Do you know why you'll never hear us say don't talk about the Bible when you're talking to unbelievers? Do you know why we'll never encourage you in that direction? It's because we want the reward that God says he gives to those who honor his word. That should be the mark of every one of you, not just the leadership of the church. We have no time, we have no regard for more prominent teachers who teach their congregations, "Don't talk about the Bible to people if you want to win them to Christ." That's foolishness. By what authority do you annul and set aside the authority of God's word and tell people, you actively tell people to disregard it? That's criminal. It's treasonous. There will be an accounting for men who teach like that. And we say these things not from a spirit of self-righteousness, we speak as those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and by the blood of Christ alone, but we honor what God says in his word and what he says about his word. "Whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." We elevate the word of God as

a church, as a congregation. This is what our membership is committed to. We elevate the word of God because we realize that there is a coming day of accountability that men will face before God and we desire that day to go well for everyone that would hear. And God says, "The measure on that day is going to be found by the way you responded to My word." So of course, of course if we believe what God says, of course we're going to elevate the word of God. Of course we're going to call you to believe it. Of course we're going to call you to respond to it. Not because we're trying to control or manipulate people, it's because we desire what is good for you for all of eternity. We want you to receive from God, "I regard you as great in My kingdom because I saw how you loved My word." That's what this is about and if that's not entertaining enough for some people, well, God bless you as you go. That's what we're about without apology and with an expectation that God will bless his word as it goes forth.

Charles Spurgeon says this and I quote, he says, "The kingdom is not for rebels but for the exactly obedient. It not only requires of us holiness, reverence, integrity and purity, but it works all these out in our hearts and lives. The Gospel does not give us outward liberty to sin because of the superior excellence of a supposed inner sanctity, rather it produces outward sanctity through working in our inmost soul a glorious freedom in the law of the Lord."

Friends, do you know God like that, with a heart that finds freedom and your greatest delight in his word? Do you love his word like that? Those who know Christ reflect submission to his word. They love it. It affects the way that they think. They gladly welcome its influence. It shapes the whole course of life for them. It shapes who they choose as mates. It shapes how they raise children. It shapes how they respond to worldly entertainment. It shapes the relationships that they welcome. It shapes everything, driven by a fundamental, singular, undivided unity of heart that says, "I embrace this word and I embrace it, why? Because of its inherent loveliness and because the lovely Lord of my soul embraced it as well, and the best thing that I could do with my life is to be like Christ. And what did Christ do toward the law? He fulfilled it. He honored it. Well, then I'm on base with it too."

We'll give Spurgeon the final word this morning. "What a King we have in Jesus. What manner of persons ought we to be who say we are in his holy kingdom? How careful ought we to be of our Father's revealed will? How determined to allow no trifling with the law or the prophets?"

Let's pray together. My friend, if these things do not resonate with your heart, it's because you're not a Christian and in light of that, I invite you to the Lord Jesus Christ, to come to him who freely receives sinners just like you. He made a blood atonement for sinners just like you to reconcile you to God, that you might be born again and have a new heart of the nature of which we have been speaking here today. Come to Christ and be saved if this has convicted you and shown you your separation from God. Christ would not have you stand on the outside of his kingdom. He says, "Come." Trust his promise and come, won't you?

*Father, for the rest of us, make us into faithful disciples who are ever growing in our love and obedience to Christ and to your holy word. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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