

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters
Sermon Series - Focus on Your Witness
Sermon Title - Does Grace Nullify the Law?
Sermon Text - Matthew 5:17-20
Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

Introduction:

“I will build my life upon Your love. It is a firm foundation! I will put my trust in you alone and I will not be shaken!” We build our lives upon the love of God through Jesus and we know that’s possible because of God’s grace, His unmerited, undeserved favor! But here’s something many people overlook when it comes to the Laws of God or the Ten Commandments: the intent of those laws are based on God’s love for us and His desire for us to have a meaningful life. As a result, while we are not saved by our adherence to the letter of the law, when we are saved by God’s grace, He gives not only forgiveness for the times we’ve broken His laws, he also gives us His power and strength to follow His laws! Let’s pray and we’ll see what Jesus said about this in His Sermon on the Mount! Pray!

Last week we focused on our witness to others when we talked about our job description which tells us we are to continue Jesus' mission to save the lost! We do that by being the salt of the earth and the light of the world. This week we are going to discover that God has given us additional instructions on how to fulfill that job description. It's a wonderful thing that God not only created us to live but He also created a guide to show us how to live! And when it comes to living for Him, being a servant in His kingdom, and being a witness to others you could call this guide a manual or an employee handbook. If we are going to focus on our witness to others it is critical that we know how to live our lives in a God-glorifying way! In today's portion of His sermon on the mount we find Jesus talking specifically about the Law of God, which is found in the Word of God. Jesus is referring to the ten principles which served as the basis for The Old Testament, The Old Covenant, The Law. What is popularly known as the Ten Commandments, is actually the Decalogue which means "ten words." Not simply ten single words, but ten concepts, ten principles, ten directives, ten laws, thus Ten Commandments. And while humankind was given free will by God and we have the freedom to ignore, go against, and break these ten concepts, they are not ten suggestions. They are the ten foundational principles which guide a covenant relationship with God and our fellow man. You see, a relationship without standards is not going to be a good relationship. All relationships have to have guidelines if the relationship is going to be mutually satisfying! Not that there's not spontaneity and freedom in relationships, but there has to be some structure, some guiding principles, some standard on which the relationship is based upon. Let's listen in as Jesus continues His sermon on the mount. I think you will find this to be very relevant to your life. Jesus said...

Matthew 5:17 “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.

Matthew 5:18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

Matthew 5:19 Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

There are at least four things in these four verses that are critical to know as a follower of Jesus Christ and the details are found in our handbook! The first is...

The Rules are Important!

Jesus said...

Matthew 5:17 “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.

Now this may not make sense to some people and might even seem at first like a contradiction to the gospel of grace, undeserved favor of God, that Paul and others spoke of so passionately in the New Testament. But once you look further into what Jesus was saying, you'll realize that He was by no means talking about working for or trying to earn your salvation! There were people in Jesus' day that were called antinomians. The word antinomian means lawless in the Greek. Antinomians tried to take Jesus' teaching on grace to mean that once a person was under grace they no longer had to follow the moral code of Scripture. There are people today who are trying to do and say the same thing. There are people telling us today that if we disagree with someone, we are not loving them. That's a distortion of the truth. Paul did say in 1 Corinthians...

1 Corinthians 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

So we are supposed to love people and be loving in the way in which we communicate truth to people, but if we abandon the truth of God's principles then we are not loving people, and are in fact hurting them because we are not holding up a Godly standard, which they desperately need and is what is best for humanity! Jesus' response to the distorted thinking that we can just toss out God's moral principles was clear especially when you read the literal Greek translation of this verse. Jesus literally said...

“Don't even begin to think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets!”

By the way, the law and the prophets are the two oldest parts of the Old Testament and Jesus didn't come to destroy them, He came to fulfill them. What does it mean that Jesus fulfilled the

law and the prophets? First of all, the fact that He fulfilled the prophecies concerning the Jewish Messiah is easy to understand. We can read the prophecies and then read in the Gospels how Jesus fulfilled them. But what does it mean that Jesus fulfilled the law? It means that Jesus fulfilled the righteous demands of the law that we were incapable of fulfilling because of our sinful nature. Check out these powerful words in Romans 8:1-6...

Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,
Romans 8:2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh,

Romans 8:4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

Romans 8:6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

Did you see that? God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful man, (He didn't sin), but He was a sin offering for you and me! He was condemned so that He could condemn sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us! Now that's love. Listen to 2 Corinthians 5:21...

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

So that we might become the righteousness of God, not so we could continue living in the filth and sickness of wickedness! In fact, Paul put it this way when he compared Adam with Jesus in Romans 5:19-6:4

Romans 5:19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Romans 5:20 The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,

Romans 5:21 so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 6:1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

Romans 6:2 By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

Romans 6:3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

Romans 6:4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Thank God for His grace and mercy, because without them there would be no hope for you and me, but His grace and mercy do not exempt us from the law, they bring us into compliance with the law so we can live a new life! And this brings us to the next critical thing we must understand about the rules...

The Rules have a Purpose!

Matthew 5:18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

The law was designed to lead us back to a relationship with God, and to help us know how to live in peace with one another. Again, the Ten Commandments are not bad, it's just that we're not good enough to keep them and that's where the grace, mercy, and love of God comes in! He takes care of our penalty, and on top of that gives us the power to do better. There's nothing wrong with God, our Boss, our Lord, asking us to not worship idols or to let anything else take His position as God in our life! There's nothing wrong with Him asking us not to kill, steal, or to covet, or to use His name in vain, or commit adultery, or be dishonest! And is it asking too much to ask us to honor our parents and take one day a week to rest and worship? When Jesus says not even the smallest letter or stroke of a pen will disappear from the law until it accomplishes what it's supposed to, Jesus is not imposing a letter of the law legalism. Jesus was more concerned with the intent of the law! Ultimately the law was designed to help us live in such a way that we could be restored to right fellowship with God. Living in sin and opposition to the law had separated us from God, and our relationships with one another had turned tragic! God was brokenhearted. So brokenhearted that He was willing to give His only begotten Son to be the sacrifice for all who would believe in Him. In fact, we see in the book of Galatians that the purpose of the law was to lead us to Christ.

Galatians 3:22 But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

Galatians 3:23 Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed.

Galatians 3:24 So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith.

How does the law lead us to Christ? The law holds up to us God's ideal for each of us, but at the same time makes it painfully apparent that we, in our fallen nature, can't reach God's ideal! We have broken the law and on our own, are simply unable to keep the law. This puts us in a predicament and if we are humble and smart enough to admit we can't save ourselves, we will be led to Jesus Christ! And guess what? Once we have been led to Christ and accept the fact that He chose to love us, forgive us, and save us, we are justified by faith in what Jesus did on the Cross and that can never, ever be taken away from us! And yes He did choose to love us. I believe that's what Scripture is talking about when it says God predestined or pre-chose, or

predetermined to love us. Question is, will we choose to accept His gracious offer. Check this out in Ephesians 1:7-14...

Ephesians 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Ephesians 1:8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding,

Ephesians 1:9 he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,

Ephesians 1:10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

Ephesians 1:11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,

Ephesians 1:12 in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

Ephesians 1:14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

God chose to love you according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Christ! You were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the Promised Holy Spirit! God is so awesome to love us like that and to lavishly offer His grace to us! In the next part of Jesus' sermon on the mount, He gets really practical. Jesus tells us that just because we've been saved by grace doesn't mean we ignore what's right and what's wrong in life. Because we've found forgiveness doesn't mean we can ignore the rules. Here's what Jesus said...

Don't Ignore the Rules!

Matthew 5:19 Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Did you notice He didn't say if you break a rule you will be kicked out of the Kingdom of heaven, but you will be called least! And those who practice and teach the commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Why is this? Because those who ignore God's principles and teach others to ignore His principles hurt the cause of Christ in this world and those who live by and teach His live-giving principles advance the cause of Christ! Let me give you a very relevant illustration. Let's just say you work at a factory around very dangerous equipment and there are some very specific instructions about safety and the use of safety equipment. Let's just say you ignore those instructions and get seriously injured. You are taken by ambulance to the hospital where you are stitched up and released. Your company pays the bill and sets up rehab for you.

Now, just because the company didn't fire you, paid your hospital bill, your therapy bill, and welcomed you back to work after you got better, doesn't mean you should continue ignoring the safety protocols. That just wouldn't make sense, would it? But sometimes people do that on a spiritual level. Jesus pays the price for their sin, forgives them of their sin, and offers to help them do better, but they fall back into the same patterns of destructive and dangerous living. Now, if you do that in your job, you might get fired, but the beautiful thing about Jesus is He won't fire you or kick you out of the family, but He might transfer you to a lesser job in the kingdom. And don't forget the consequences of living in sin! If you ignore the warning labels on heavy equipment you have a high chance of being seriously injured or even killed. Consequences of sin are extremely painful, even when you're forgiven! Folks, God not only wants to save your soul, He also wants to save your life here in this old world. Paul put it uniquely in the book of Romans 13:8-14...

Romans 13:8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.

Romans 13:9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Romans 13:10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Romans 13:11 And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

Romans 13:12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Romans 13:13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

Romans 13:14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Now, this leads us to one final thing Jesus said in our text for today, and it may surprise you...

Look Beyond the Rules!

Matthew 5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Why did Jesus say this? First of all we must remember that the Kingdom of heaven is where God rules! And if we aren't living according to God's rules, then we are not allowing Him to rule our lives and guide our lives into His perfect will for us! The Pharisees and the teachers of the law knew the letter of the law, but they either didn't know or had forgotten the intent of the law. And we must remember, the rules of the law were intended not just so we could obey a set of do's and don'ts, but were intended to point us to a relationship with God Himself and lead us into His divine will for our lives! But we must not forget that because of God's holiness, we must be perfect in order to ever hope to be in His presence! However, none of us are perfect! This is precisely why Jesus came and lived a perfect life and then exchanged that perfect life for our

imperfect life on the old rugged cross! He then covers us in His perfection so we can be reunited with God! Peter said this in 1 Peter 2:24-25

1 Peter 2:24 "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."

1 Peter 2:25 For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

So we don't find forgiveness and salvation based on the good we do or the bad we don't do! We find salvation in who Jesus is and what Jesus did for us! And when it is all said and done Jesus did what He did for us because He wanted to give us forgiveness for the penalty of sin and wanted to give us victory over the power of sin so we could live the principles of God's Holy Law! Here's something we must not miss, something we must remember: the law was not bad or evil, it's just that we were unable to follow the letter of the law or the spirit of the law because of our weakened and fallen nature. Paul talks about this in depth in Romans 7:4-12...

Rom 7:4 So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.

Rom 7:5 For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.

Rom 7:6 But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

Rom 7:7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."

Rom 7:8 But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead.

Rom 7:9 Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.

Rom 7:10 I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.

Rom 7:11 For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.

Rom 7:12 So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

So, once again, the law is not bad, it is holy, righteous and good, but our sinful nature caused us to be too weak to keep the letter of the law or even the spirit of the law. We are not saved by the law, but by grace, and the same grace that saves us from sin and from the punishment we deserved because we have broken God's Holy Law, that same grace also gives us access to the power of God to be able to keep the law, especially the spirit of the law! Because of His Grace and through His Holy Spirit, we have the ability to say no to sin and yes to the life giving principles God so desperately wants us to know and live by. Once again, the law was given as a guide, and a standard for our relationship with God and our fellow man. I don't know if you've

ever thought about it, but the first four commandments, as we traditionally number them, deal with our relationship with God and the last six deal with our relationship with one another. I say "as we traditionally number them because Jewish people number them differently than Christians. Catholics and Lutherans have a slightly different way as well. We traditionally understand the first commandment in the Ten Commandments to be "You shall have no other Gods before me." However, within Judaism, the religion that brought us the Ten Commandments, the first commandment was not something to do or not to do, but something to know. Something to acknowledge! It is found in Exodus 20:2.

Exo 20:2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

And the apex of the law as well as the highest intent of the law is seen in the following interaction Jesus had with a Pharisee, who happened to be an expert in the law. Jesus responded by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4...

Mark 12:28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

Mark 12:29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Mark 12:30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

Mark 12:31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Mark 12:32 "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him.

Mark 12:33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Mark 12:34 When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Not far from the kingdom of God! My friends, where are you today spiritually? This guy was not far from the kingdom of God, the place where God rules. But evidently he had yet to put his trust and faith in Jesus! He was close, but not there! That's a sad place to be! What is holding you back from allowing Jesus to first of all be your Savior! If you are willing to Admit you've sinned and need a Savior, Believe Jesus died on the cross to be that Savior, and if you will Call upon His name for salvation you can experience the Amazing Grace of Jesus today! You can know that the penalty for your sins was taken by Jesus on the Cross and you will never face condemnation! And then if you want to walk in the kingdom of God, where God gives His guidance, His wisdom, His power, and His presence, then allow Him to daily be your life coach, your Lord, your guide, your boss! Paul said...

Rom 3:21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Rom 3:22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,

Rom 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Rom 3:24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Rom 3:25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished--

Rom 3:26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

So Jesus died to save us from the penalty of our breaking God's Holy Law. But He also died to set us free from the power of sin in our lives so we could live according to the principles of God's law. And listen to what I'm about to tell you as we end our message! This is life changing! Paul said this in Galatians 2:20...

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Paul said this in Romans 7:6...

Rom 7:6 But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

But this says we are released from the law! Yes, we are released from the letter of the law, but not the spirit of the law. We are released from the burden of trying to follow the letter of the law in order to earn our way to heaven. We've been given the grace, the forgiveness, and the mercy of Jesus in regards to our failure to follow the law! But we've also been given the power of Jesus Christ, through His Precious Holy Spirit, to no longer live a life controlled by sin and self, so that we can "serve in the new way of the Spirit!"

Now that we've been released from the burden of trying to keep the letter of the law in order to gain our way to God and to heaven, and now that we've been given the power of The Holy Spirit to understand and follow the spirit of the law, we can begin living a life that glorifies God! We can avoid the horrible consequences in this life that comes with lawless living. And we can begin having a powerful witness to those around us! Paul sums it up this way...

Phil 1:9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,

Phil 1:10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,

Phil 1:11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God.

Let's Pray!!