



THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: Lesson 7

TEACHING ON THE LAW OF THE OLD COVENANT AND THE SIX EXAMPLES OF CONDUCT JESUS DEMANDS OF THE CHRISTIAN DISCIPLE

Holy God our Father,
In the old Covenant at Sinai You betrothed Yourself to Your Bride, Israel. You bound Israel, the Old Covenant Church, to Yourself through the Law of the Sinai Covenant. In the Old Covenant Your love for Your Bride Israel was a love conceived in Law and a Law expressed in the obedience of love. But the Law that the Old Covenant Church received as her betrothal band was also a law in anticipation of a future greater law, and in the fullness of time Lord, You bound the New Israel, the universal Catholic Church to her Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, through the fulfillment and transformation of the Old Covenant Law in the ministry and the sacrifice of the Lamb. It is through Jesus that You gave the greater law You promised to the Old Covenant Church through the prophet Jeremiah. It is a Law also conceived in love and lived out in the obedience of faith. It is conceived in the love of Jesus Christ and it is a law that is applied to the hearts of the faithful through the work of our advocate, God the Holy Spirit. Send the Holy Spirit to us now, Lord, to guide us in our continuing study of the application of the New Covenant Law in the lives of Your Christian children. We pray in the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

TEACHING ON THE LAW OF THE OLD COVENANT

“The New Law or the Law of the Gospel is the perfection here on earth of the divine law, natural and revealed. It is the work of Christ and is expressed particularly in the Sermon on the Mount. It is also the work of the Holy Spirit and through him it becomes the interior law of charity...” CCC# 1965

“The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt; for they broke my covenant and I had to show myself their master, says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ” Jeremiah 31:31-33.

“I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees.”

Ezekiel 36:25-27



Please read Matthew 5:17-20.

Jesus begins this part of His discourse with the assurance that He has not come to abandon the earlier revelation of Yahweh. His reference is to the entire body of what we call the Old Testament which includes:

1. The Pentateuch = called in Hebrew the Torah. The Torah, usually translated as “the law”, literally means “revealed instruction.” The Pentateuch, which means “5-part-book” contains the instruction and the revelation of God given to Moses.
2. The Histories and Wisdom literature = called in Hebrew the Kesuvim, meaning the “writings” which includes the history of the children of Israel and the other writings including the poetry books like the Psalms and the wisdom literature.
3. The Books of the Prophets = called in Hebrew the Neviim, the books of the “prophets” which contain God’s judgments and revelations to His people.

Note: the Jewish Old Testament which is called the *Tanach* is still divided into these three parts as is the Christian Old Testament; however, the divisions differ slightly. For example, we include the books of I and II Samuel and I and II Kings in the list of historical writings while the Tanach lists both Samuel and Kings as individual books and places them in the section of the prophetic books while the book of Daniel is included in the “Writings” instead of being placed with the books of the prophets as Daniel is placed in the Christian Bible. The word “Tanach” is an acronym for the three sections of Scripture: **T**orah, **N**eviim, and **K**esuvim. The 1st century Greek translation of the Bible, known as the Septuagint, which is quoted by Jesus in the Gospels and by the other New Testament writers, contained the same 46 books that are in the Catholic translations of Old Testament today. The Jews dropped 7 books and parts of Esther and Daniel from their Sacred Text when they translated the Greek translation of the Old Testament back into Hebrew in the Middle Ages. The Protestants, in copying the Jewish Bible, dropped these same books and passages from their Old Testament texts in the 16th century when they began making their own Bible translations but they kept all 27 of the New Testament books. It is for this reason that Catholic Bibles have a total of 73 books while the Protestant translations only have 66.

By referring to “the Law and the prophets” Jesus’ reference is to the entire content of Sacred Scripture from first of the books of Moses to the last book of the prophets in much the same way when in referring to the entire land of Israel the writers of Bible texts indicate the territory “from Dan to Beersheba”, or “from one end of Israel to the other”. Jesus is affirming that although He has introduced the New Law that He has not come to abolish the Old, but instead He has come to fulfill it. The Greek word St. Matthew uses to translate Jesus’ Aramaic word is the word *plerosia*, literally meaning “to fill”. St. John Chrysostom, teaching on this passage, writes that there may have been murmurings that Jesus was advocating an end to the old Law and therefore Jesus felt it necessary to clarify His support for the sacred texts. St. John Chrysostom writes



that “.. *His sayings were no repeal of the former, but a drawing out and filling up of them.*” [The Gospel of St. Matthew, Homily XVI].

Question: To stress this assurance what statement does Jesus make and what example does Jesus use concerning His solidarity with “the Law” as expressed in the Sacred writings?

Answer: In verse 18 Jesus says [literally] *‘until heaven and earth pass away not an iota, not a keraia will pass from the law until all is accomplished.’* The “iota” [ee-o-tah] is the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew *yod*, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet which is about the size of a comma, and the *keraia* [ker-ah’-yah], or “something horn-like”, refers to one of the tiny hooks or projections which distinguish some Hebrew letters from other letters. Luke records the same use this word in Luke 16:17 *It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away then for the [keraia] smallest part of a letter of the law to become invalid.* Although in this statement Jesus does not mention “the prophets” as He does in the previous verse, Jesus is probably using the “the law” as a comprehensive term for the entire body of divine revelation in the Old Testament.

But what exactly would Jesus fulfill? To answer that question it is necessary to examine what is contained in the sacred books of what we call the Old Testament. The Old Testament contains:

1. **Doctrinal teaching:** The Old Testament instructs us about God, the revelation of His relationship with man, and the promise of man’s salvation. It is, however, an incomplete revelation.
2. **Ethical precepts:** The moral law is revealed throughout the Old Testament, instructing God’s people in holiness.
3. **History and Predictive prophecy:** Predictive prophecies are warnings of God’s judgment and the promise of the coming of the Messiah from King David’s line. Predictive prophecy anticipates the coming of Jesus either in direct prophecy or foreshadows Him in biblical “types” [i.e. the story of God’s command to sacrifice Abraham’s son Isaac in Genesis 22:1-18]. Predictive prophecy anticipates a future fulfillment.

There are modern scholars who would take exception to including “predictive prophecy” in this list, but to deny the validity of predictive prophecy in Sacred Scripture is to deny that God had a comprehensive plan for the salvation of humanity. Please note that a biblical “type” is *“a biblical person, thing, action or event that foreshadows new truths, new actions, or new events. In the Old Testament, Melchizedech and Jonah are types of Jesus Christ. A likeness must exist between the type and the archetype but the latter is always greater. Both are independent of each other. God’s call for the return of the Israelites from Pharaoh’s bondage typifies the return of Jesus Christ from his flight into Egypt. In the New Testament the destruction of Jerusalem, foretold by Christ, was the*



antitype of the end of the world." [The Catholic Dictionary, abridged edition of Modern Catholic Dictionary, sub category: "Types, Scriptural", page 441.

Question: What key statement does Jesus make and repeat in Matthew 5:17-20, and what is its significance?

Answer: Verse 18: "*Amen, I say to you...*" and verse 20 "*I tell you...*" Jesus is issuing commands in His own name and under His own authority. No other prophet or scribe had ever spoken with such authority.

Note: In Jesus' time "amen" had come to be understood to as an affirmation meaning something like "it is true", "I believe" or "so be it", but the etymology of this word has even more bearing on Jesus' statements. "Amen" is, in fact, an acrostic formed from the first letter of three Hebrew words: *El Melech Ne'eman* which is translated "**God = El, King = melech, trustworthy = ne'eman**" which can mean "God [the] Trustworthy King" or "God [is a] Trustworthy King." [see the Jewish Talmud: Shabbat 119b; and *The Jewish Book of Why*, by Alfred Kolatch page 152]. Understanding the literal meaning of the acrostic "amen" makes the passage in Revelation 3:14b so much more meaningful where "Amen" is used as a title of Jesus the Messiah: "*The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the source of God's creation, says this:...*" Using the full meaning of "amen" re-read Revelation 3:14b and Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:18:

- "*God the trustworthy King, the faithful and true witness, the source of God's creation, says this...*" Revelation 3:14
- "*God the trustworthy King, I say to you...*" Matthew 5:18

The Law of the Sinai Covenant given by Yahweh through His prophet Moses and reinforced by the prophets of God throughout the Old Testament was a gift of God to His holy Covenant people. It was the Law that bound the Old Covenant Church to Yahweh and it was the Law that bound Yahweh to Israel the Old Covenant Church as His people. But, it was also a gift in anticipation of the more perfect Law that the promised Messiah would usher in, beginning with His reign over the Church: "*The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah...*" [Jeremiah 31:31]. The Magisterium of the universal Church interprets the Old Covenant Law in this anticipatory light as looking forward to Jesus as the new lawgiver, an interpretation which is expressed in the documents of the Council of Trent: "*If anyone saith that Jesus Christ was given of God to men, as a Redeemer in whom to trust, and not also as a legislator whom to obey; let him be anathema.*" [Dogmatic Canons and Decrees: The Council of Trent, "On Justification", Canon XXI pg.54].

With Jesus' announcement "*I SAY*", and not "God says" He is declaring his superiority over Moses and the other Old Testament prophets. Jesus is declaring that **He is the**



new lawgiver, the promised One who is “greater than Moses” prophesied by Yahweh in Deuteronomy 18:18-19; the prophet to whom God commanded the Covenant people they must listen and obey. Speaking to Moses Yahweh had revealed: *“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kinsmen, and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him. If any man will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it.”*

Question: According to Jesus in Matthew 5: 17-18, when will the Law be changed in any part?

Answer: *“until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law...”*

His promise is that none of divine revelation, in the smallest part, will pass away or be discarded until it has all been fulfilled in Him. His statement that none will pass away *“until heaven and earth pass away”* affirms that when they do “pass away” a mighty rebirth will take place and time as we know it will change. **The final fulfillment of the “passing away” of the one and the birth of the other will coincide.**

Question: When does Jesus say this event will take place?

Answer: Not until *“all things have taken place.”* [Matthew 5:18]

Question: What “things?” What is Jesus referring to?

Answer: Many would say this reference is to the end of time and the cosmos as we know it, but this question requires further examination. Jesus’ reference may not concern the end of the world in the sense of the dissolution of the existing universe.

Please read in the Book of the Prophet Joel, Joel 3:1-5.

Question: What event is the prophet Joel prophesizing?

Question: Now read Acts 2:14-24. What Old Testament prophet does Peter quote in Acts 2:17-21 and what connection is there to what was prophesized in the Old Testament and the events that have recently taken place in the time in which Peter is living?

Answers: Peter quotes Joel 3:1-5. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter declares that Joel’s prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth and in the Second Great Pentecost as God came down upon the New Covenant people praying with the Virgin Mary in the Upper Room, filling and indwelling the believers of the New Covenant with the Holy Spirit—that these events are, *“... what was spoken through the prophet Joel.”* Peter is declaring that Jesus’ death and resurrection has ushered in a New Age and a New Creation. His resurrection and this supernatural event in the Second Great Pentecost is, in fact, the promised “Day of the Lord” that has signaled the beginning of the Final Age of man—the age in which we all now live.



St. Paul affirms this teaching when he writes in 1 Corinthians 10:6-13 that the events in the Old Testament *“happened as examples for us”* [verse 6] and that the events that unfolded in the lives of the Old Testament men and women were written for our benefit: *“These things happened to them as an example, and they have been written down as a warning to us, **upon whom the end of the ages has come**”* [verse 11].

On the subject of the Old Law anticipating the New Law the catechism teaches:

- CCC # 1962 *“The Old Law is the first stage of revealed Law.”*
- CCC # 1963: *“...the [Old] Law is holy, spiritual and good, yet still imperfect. Like a tutor it shows what must be done, but does not of itself give the strength, the grace of the Spirit, to fulfill it. Because of sin, which it cannot remove, it remains a law of bondage.”*
- CCC # 1964: *“The Old Law is a preparation for the Gospel...”*
- CCC # 1965 *“The New Law or the Law of the Gospel is the perfection here on earth of the divine law, natural and revealed. It is the work of Christ and is expressed particularly in the Sermon on the Mount. It is also the work of the Holy Spirit and through him it becomes the interior law of charity: ‘I will establish a New Covenant with the house of Israel...I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’”* [quoting Jeremiah 31:31-34 and also Hebrews 8:8, 10]

Question: What is the key phrase found in the teaching in Matthew 5:17-20?

Answer: The key phrase is verse 17 in which Jesus promises that He has not come to abolish but to **fulfill**: *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”*

Question: What in the Old Law will Jesus fulfill through His sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection that will bring New Covenant believers through their baptism by water and the spirit into the family of God and usher in the eternal Kingdom on earth, the universal Church, as prophesized by the prophet Daniel in Daniel 2:44 and 7:27?

Answer:

- Jesus will fulfill the purification rites of the Old Covenant. For Old Covenant believers to touch someone who was ritually impure left them ritually impure, but when Jesus’ touches the sick or sinners or the dead He does not become impure, instead He purifies the impure.
- Jesus will fulfill the old sacrificial system. Jesus purifies us and purges us of our sins through His perfect sacrifice on the Cross. His perfect sacrifice eliminates the necessity of imperfect animal sacrifice necessary under the Old Covenant Law.



Concerning the imperfection of the old sacrificial system the inspired writer of Hebrews instructs us in Hebrews 9:9-12 [before the destruction of the Temple in 70AD]: *“This is a symbol of the present time, in which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the worshiper in conscience but only in matters of food and drink and various ritual washings: regulations concerning the flesh, imposed until the time of the **new order**. But when Christ came as high priest of the **good things** that have come to be, passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, **not belonging to this creation**, he entered once and for all into the sanctuary not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption”* [Hebrews 9:9-12]. Are the “good things” referred to in this passage [meaning Jesus’ perfect sacrifice on the Cross] the same “things” Jesus spoke of in Matthew 5:17 that had to be fulfilled until the Law changed? The inspired writer of Hebrews says that these “good things” have led to the “new order” and to a “new creation” in Christ which replaces the past creation. This is the very event that the prophet Joel prophesied in the 6th century BC!

Question: What does St. John record in his Gospel as Jesus’ last words from the Cross and what do they mean? Turn in your Bible to John 19:30.

Answer: Jesus said “*Teltelestai*” = “**It is finished**” also translated as “**It is fulfilled**”. It is the Old Covenant Law that prepared us for His coming that is fulfilled. It cannot be His work of salvation because that will not be fulfilled until His glorious resurrection. It is the Old Covenant sacrificial and purification system that has been fulfilled in the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. He became the ultimate, the perfect sacrifice for sin. Scholars tell us that in the Greek *teltelestai* can also mean “paid in full”. Jesus came to “finish” or “fulfill” God’s work of salvation, as he told His disciples in John 4:34 *“My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work”* [also see John 17:4], and to “pay in full” the penalty for our sins. With His perfect sacrifice on the cross, the Old Covenant animal sacrifices, which were an imperfect, temporary measure, ended.

Turn in your Bible back to Matthew chapter 5.

Question: In Matthew 5:19 what warning does Jesus give concerning the Law and what promise? How does Jesus say greatness is measured in the Kingdom of Heaven?

Answer: He warns in verse 19 that *“Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.”* Jesus teaches that greatness in the kingdom will be measured by obedience and correct teaching of the Law. Using the conjunction *oun*, which can be translated as “certainly”, “accordingly”, “then”, or “therefore”, Jesus makes the vital connection between faithful obedience to the Law and entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus also makes it clear that personal obedience is not good enough. **The faithful Christian disciple must also teach others the permanently binding nature of God’s commands.** Greatness in God’s Kingdom will be measured by **living** and **teaching** in



obedience to the laws of God—teaching our children, our extended families, our neighbors, and the world.

In Matthew 5:20 Jesus declares: *“I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”*

Question: What standard does Jesus set for His disciples in verse 20?

Answer: Not only is the Christian’s “greatness” in God’s Kingdom measured by a righteousness which conforms completely in obedience to God’s law but entry into the Kingdom is not possible without an obedience that surpasses that of the scribes, the 1st century AD theologians, and the Pharisees. God’s kingdom is a kingdom of the wholly righteous!

Question: Who were the Pharisees and why does Jesus use them as the minimum standard? Were they 1st century AD religious liberals who “winked” at the Law?

Answer: Quite the contrary; they considered themselves to be what we would call the religious conservatives! The religious/political sect of the Pharisees prided themselves on their righteous and rigid adherence to the “Law”. Their very name came from the Hebrew word for “separate”. Their goal was to completely separate themselves from the sinner and to use the Law to “build a wall” of holiness around the Covenant people. Pharisee teachers of the Law had calculated that the Law of Moses contained 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions, totaling 613 articles of the Law [actually in the 1st century AD the count only totaled 611; it was the great Rabi M. Maimonides [1135-1204 AD] who added the two additional commands to total 613 articles of the Law]. Jesus would have amazed those listening to this statement that they must exceed the holiness of the religious experts and the rigorously observant Pharisees who were so formally correct in their external observation of the minutest detail of the Law!

But what Jesus is calling for as a standard of perfection of righteousness is not the rigid external holiness of the Pharisees; instead He is calling for a deeper, spiritually intense holiness that comes from the inner most spiritually pure heart of Covenant believers—a perfection of holiness and obedience to the Law that was promised by Yahweh through the 6th century BC Prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel:

- *“The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt; for they broke my covenant and I had to show myself their master, says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer will they have need to teach their friends and kinsmen how to know the LORD. All, from the least to the*



greatest, shall know me, says the LORD, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.” Jeremiah 31:31-34.

- *“I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees.” Ezekiel 36:25-27*

These two passages that look forward to the Messianic Age link the New Covenant to a New Law and a new heart generated by the Spirit of God. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is inaugurating the New Law founded upon an inward righteousness that is manifested by the Spirit of God and evidenced by external acts of mercy— for Yahweh loves such a heart of holiness! The link between the Spirit that God will put into our hearts, and His love clearly shows that we cannot live one without the other. It is the Spirit who circumcises the heart of the Children of God. This is why entry into the Kingdom is impossible without a holiness deeper than that of the scribes and the Pharisees—**it is because such a righteousness is evidence of the new birth through water and the Spirit and no one enters the Kingdom of God without being reborn from above!**

- John 3:3: [Jesus] *“Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”*
- John 3:5-7 *“Jesus answered, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh and who is born of spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I told you, ‘You must be born from above.’”*

Question: If Jesus fulfilled the purification rites and ritual sacrifices so that they are no longer necessary, what remains of the Sinai Covenant that He will transform but leave in place?

Answer: The moral law and the ritual of worship—but devoid of animal sacrifice. The established liturgical worship of the Old Covenant including a centralized Church hierarchy, the priests, altar, holy water, incense, hymns, prayer, Sacred Scripture readings, holy days of obligation, and animal sacrifice including the most important Tamid sacrifice, called the “**perpetual sacrifice**” which was the sacrifice of **two** lambs offered daily for the sins of the people. All of that is now transformed into the New Covenant liturgy of the risen Christ—the Mass, in which there are priests, an altar, holy water, incense, hymns, prayer, Sacred Scripture readings, holy days of obligation and the celebration of the offering of the **perpetual sacrifice** of the Holy Eucharist encompassing the **two** aspect of the nature of Jesus the Lamb of God, the humanity and divinity of the risen Savior, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity—the sacrifice of Calvary, contemporary to every generation and offered daily for the sins of humanity! Note: the



Hebrew word “tamid” means “**standing**” as in continual or **perpetual** [see Exodus 29:38-42 where Yahweh commands that this sacrifice is “*a perpetual burnt offering for all your generations to come...*” [New Jerusalem translation].

OLD COVENANT LITURGICAL WORSHIP	NEW COVENANT LITURGICAL WORSHIP
The centralized Church hierarchy located in Jerusalem	The centralized Church hierarchy located in Rome
The ministerial priesthood	The ministerial priesthood
Altar of sacrifice	Altar that represents the table of the Last Supper, the empty tomb, and the sacrificial altar.
Holy water for ritual purification	Holy water to signify interior purification
Incense in worship representing the prayers of the people rising up to heaven	Incense in worship representing the Prayers of the people rising up to heaven
Hymns from the Psalms and music	Hymns including those from the Psalms and music
Prayers and petitions of the faithful offered to God	Prayers and petitions of the faithful offered to God
Readings from Sacred Scripture: the Torah, Writings, and the Prophets	Readings from Sacred Scripture: the Old Testament, the Gospels and the New Testament
7 Annual Holy Days of Obligation	7 Holy Days of Obligation [in the North American congregation]
The Tamid, a sacrifice of two lambs daily for the people was the most important of all sacrifices commanded to be a perpetual sacrifice for all generations.	The Eucharist, a perpetual sacrifice of the risen Jesus in His humanity and divinity, offered every hour of the day around the world for the people for all generations.



Confession for sin to a priest

Confession of sin to a priest

In fact, Catholic liturgy has more elements of Old Covenant worship than modern Rabbinic Judaism. Modern Judaism has no altar, no sacrifice, and no priests.

Please read Revelation 5:2-9.

Question: In Revelation chapter 4 St. John is taken up into the heavenly court and witnesses the heavenly liturgical worship of the Most Holy Trinity. What or who is it that John sees before the throne of God in Revelation 5:6? The New Jerusalem translation gives a more accurate translation of verse 6: *“Then I saw, in the middle of the throne with its four living creatures and the circle of elders, a Lamb **standing** that seemed to have been sacrificed...”*

Answer: John sees Jesus the Lamb of God **standing** before the throne of God as a sacrificed Lamb—Jesus, in both His humanity and His divinity is the perpetual sacrifice that the two Tamid lambs only prefigured. Jesus’ perfect sacrifice is the perpetual, on-going sacrifice that is present and contemporary to every generation since His perfect sacrifice on the Cross and His Resurrection.

It is as Jesus told the Apostles in the Upper Room after His resurrection in Luke 24:44, *“He said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled.’”* In His sacrificial death on the cross and in His resurrection Jesus has fulfilled and transformed not only the Law but all of creation. St. John Chrysostom writes concerning this passage and the passing away of heaven and earth in Matthew 5:18, *“And here He signifies to us obscurely that the fashion of the whole world is also being changed. Nor did He sit it down without purpose, but in order to arouse the hearer, and indicate, that He was with just cause introducing another discipline; if at least the very works of the creation are all to be transformed, and mankind is to be called to another country, and to a higher way of practicing how to live.”*

The Old Testament was only a partial revelation of God. Jesus of Nazareth “fulfilled” all the Old Testament in the sense that He brought the Law given to Moses and the teaching of the prophets to completion in His Incarnation, His ministry, and His work of redemption: Hebrews 1:1-2 *“In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe...”* [see CCC #s 1962-1974].

Question: What was left from the Law that was transformed but still in place in the New Covenant besides the new form of liturgical worship that would be established on the Lord’s Day of Resurrection?



Answer: It was the Moral law that remained and this is what Jesus addresses in the 6 antitheses which are the higher standards of conduct Jesus demands of the Christian disciple living the Beatitudes of the New Covenant Law.

THE SIX ANTITHESES: SIX EXAMPLES OF CONDUCT JESUS DEMANDS OF THE CHRISTIAN DISCIPLE [Matthew 5:21-48]

These six examples of Christian perfection in Matthew 5:21-48 are referred to as the six antitheses. An antithesis is a contrast or opposition of words or sentiments. Using the repeated formula *“You have heard it said / But I say to you”* and *“It was also said to you / But I say to you,”* Jesus makes the contrast between the accepted interpretation of the Mosaic law and His teaching which internalizes and intensifies the Law of Moses to yield a new standard of obedience. Jesus will use this formula to teach six examples of New Law Christian conduct, and He will use the formula six times in 5:21-22; 27-28; 31-32; 33-34; 38-39; and 43-44 but in verse 26 His additional *“I say to you”* makes His use of the authoritative *“I say to you”* number seven times. Six is the number representing man and rebellion in Scripture while seven represents fullness, completion, and especially spiritual perfection [see the document *The Significance of Numbers in Scripture* in the Resources section of Agape Bible Study]. The seven times repetition of Jesus’ command *“I say to you”* emphasizes the spiritual perfection to which He calls Christian disciples of all generations.

“You have heard [It was also said] / I say to you” Formula

<p>1. Matthew 5:21-22 Teaching about unrighteous anger</p>	<p><i>“You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment. But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment...”</i></p>
<p>2. Matthew 5:27-28 Teaching about sexual immorality</p>	<p><i>“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”</i></p>
<p>3. Matthew 5:31-32 Teaching</p>	<p><i>“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce.’ But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife [unless</i></p>



about divorce	<i>the marriage is unlawful] causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”</i>
4. Matthew 5:33-34 Teaching about the swearing of oaths	“Again, you have heard that it was said to your ancestors, ‘Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow.’ But I say to you , do not swear at all; not by heaven, for it is God’s..”
5. Matthew 5:38-39 Teaching about retaliation	“ You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you , offer no resistance to one who is evil.”
6. Matthew 5:43-44 Teaching about love of enemies	“ You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you , love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you...”

Seventh use of “I say to you” without the formula

7. Matthew 5:26	<i>“Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny.”</i>
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#1: TEACHING ABOUT UNRIGHTEOUS ANGER

Please read Matthew 5:21-26:

In this passage Jesus is addressing the destructive power of unrighteous anger. Righteous anger directed toward injustice and sin is permitted, within limits. It is permitted to hate a sin like abortion and to feel righteous anger with those who participate in the murder of babies. Righteous anger can be constructively generated into taking a public stand against such sins, however, it is not permitted to let that anger fuel personal hatred against abortion doctors or destroy abortions clinics with bombs or fire. Jesus begins this teaching about unrighteous, destructive anger by referencing the



Old Covenant commandment “*You shall not murder*” [“murder” is probably a more accurate translation than “kill” because this action refers to the shedding of innocent blood; see Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17]. Jesus raises the bar on the Mosaic commandment “*You shall not murder*” by addressing the root of the act of shedding innocent blood, which is unrighteous anger.

There are 4 words that deserve our attention in this passage: *raca*, *moros*, *Gehenna*, and *Sanhedrin* or *Council*.

1. Most Bible translations interpret this Aramaic word *raca* as “insults”. It is a Semitism and scholars tell us that it is not an easy word to translate. It can mean “foolish”, “stupid”, “blockhead”, or “crazy”, but in any case it is an expression of reproach and conveys contempt for a person. That this Aramaic word is used in the Greek New Testament text without any explanation is probably evidence that it was widely used in Jesus’ time as an insult [usually when Semitic words are used in the New Testament an explanation of the word is given].
2. The other word translated as “fool” is in the Greek *moros*, from which we get our word “moron,” one devoid of any sense. But most scholars believe this Greek word does not give the full force of the meaning of the Aramaic word Jesus used. From the progression of the severity of judgment in this passage we are led to understand that this word carries more force than *raca*. It is believed that the Aramaic word was one which conveyed the meaning of one who is devoid of all moral and religious sense so as to become an apostate—one who separates from the Covenant. For the Jew the degree of contempt for such a person approaches hatred and condemnation for such a person in this life and in the next, for example the contempt for the Samaritans.
3. The word *Gehanna* is not found in the Old Testament and is used by Jesus in the New Testament to identify the “fiery pit” created to house Satan and the fallen angels. It is a place of eternal punishment. In the Old Testament blessings and punishments were temporal but in the New Covenant blessings and punishments are eternal!
4. The *Sanhedrin* was the highest judicial body of the Old Covenant people. In the 1st century BC Judea had become the Roman province of Judea, but the Romans allowed the Jews to control their own civil and religious judgments. The Sanhedrin, however, was not permitted to impose the death penalty—only the Roman overlords had the power over life and death.

Note: see the Anchor Bible Dictionary volume 5 for items #1 & 2, page 605; for item #4 see page 975.

Question: In this passage Jesus points to three degrees of faults and their corresponding punishments or judgments which are committed against charity [charity is defined as love in action]. What are the three degrees of fault and judgment?

Answer: St. Augustine [Augustine] notes that our Lord points to three faults we commit



moving from internal irritation to showing a total lack of love. Augustine identifies the three degrees of faults and punishments as:

FAULT	CORRESPONDING JUDGMENT
1. feeling angry [verse 22a]	Falling under the “judgment” of God
2. insulting remark [verse 22b]	Chastisement of “the Sanhedrin” [the council]
3. hatred [verse 22c]	Eternal punishment “by the fires of hell”

[see Augustine, *Homilies on the Sermon on the Mount*, II.9]

Jesus’ teaching is that to coming to the point of endangering our immortal souls is generated by a sin that begins in the heart! The heart must be healed before the sin is manifested in an action that can have eternal consequences.

Question: What restriction does Jesus impose on worshipers in Matthew 5:23-26?

Answer: Reconciliation of “anger against a brother” or “an opponent” is urged in Matthew 5:23-24. One must not come to God’s sacrificial altar with the sin of anger in one’s heart. The Rite of Peace in the celebration of the Mass allows us one final opportunity to make amends before coming forward to receive the Lord in the Eucharist.

Jesus tells a short parable in verses 25-26 to illustrate the dangers of the sin of anger. The sever judgment of the Judge in the parable is a warning of the fate in store for unrepentant sinners when they stand before the judgment throne of God.

Question: The judgment in the parable is not eternal punishment but what kind of punishment for bearing an angry and unforgiving heart? The “prison” mentioned by Jesus is a metaphor for what place of purification from sin? See Matthew 5: 25-26.

Answer: Either the punishing side of Sheol [see CCC#633; Luke 16:22-26] or the purification available to the Christian soul in Purgatory [see CCC# 1030-32]. Jesus cannot be referring to Gehenna, or eternal punishment, because there is no “release” from Hell/Gehenna “*Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny*” [Matthew 5:26]. For more references to Purgatory see CCC# 1033-36; 1 Corinthians 3:10; 1 Peter 3:19; 4:1; 4:6, 12].

St. Paul warned the Christian faith community at Ephesus of the danger of unrighteous anger.



Question: What advise does St. Paul give the Christians of Ephesians 4:27-32?

Answer: *“Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sunset on your anger, and do not leave room for the devil. [...]. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were sealed for the day of redemption. All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.”* Ephesians 4:27, 30-32

#2: TEACHING ABOUT SEXUAL IMMORALITY

Please read Matthew 5:27-30:

Once again Jesus refers to the 10 Commandments concerning the prohibition against adultery [see Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18], and once again He raises the standards of conduct by addressing the interior root of the sin using the formula *“But I say to you.”*

Question: How does Jesus raise the standard beyond the infidelity of a married person?

Answer: The lustful glance at any woman, married or not, is now judged to be a sin. Under the Old Law only adultery and coveting one’s neighbor’s wife were considered sinful, but Jesus is teaching that to look at any woman with lust, which is a disordered desire, not only soils the soul of the man but lust is also a design toward denigrating the holiness of the woman. There is a difference between the **right desire** between a man and a woman joined in a covenantal union who give themselves to each other unselfishly in love as opposed to lust which is a **disordered desire** only selfishly motivated to use the other person for sexual gratification. Notice that Jesus says the sin begins in the heart. It is the heart which represents the total character, intellect, and will of a person. Then in verses 29-30 Jesus uses hyperbole [an exaggerated statement] to emphasize that no sacrifice is too great in order to avoid the judgment of an eternity in Gehenna.

#3: TEACHING ABOUT DIVORCE

Please read Matthew 5:31-32:

Divorce was not permitted under the Sinai Covenant until Moses permitted divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Please read Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

Question: Under what condition did Moses permit divorce?

Answer: Moses permitted divorce for “something indecent” which could refer to adultery but could also be loosely interpreted to be anything that displeased a husband. The



great Rabbi Maimonides wrote that Moses only permitted divorce in order to prevent a greater sin—the murder of the older wives as the result of men wishing to marry younger women. Although God allowed Moses to make this exception, Jesus is clearly teaching that divorce is a sin in God’s eyes. That Jesus viewed any disillusion of a marital covenant union as a sin is evident in an encounter with Pharisees in Matthew chapter 19.

Please read Matthew 19:1-9.

Question: What question did some Pharisees put to Jesus and what was His response?

Answer: They asked if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause and Jesus responded that it was not lawful. Using the authoritative command Jesus responds, *“I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, unless the marriage is unlawful, and marries another commits adultery.”* Jesus also pronounces divorce unlawful in Mark 10:11-12 and Luke 16:18.

Question: What exception to the law of divorce did Jesus give in Matthew 19:9 and in Matthew 5:23?

Answer: Divorce was only to be permitted in the case of an illicit or unlawful marriage. Since Jesus spoke against divorce so consistently most Catholic Biblical scholars agree that Jesus is granting an exception in cases where another violation of Mosaic law had occurred; for example a marriage between a couple with too close a blood tie. Such marriages are forbidden in Leviticus 18:6-18. Marriages that violated these prohibitions were considered to be incest [in Greek *porneia*]. Marriages to gentile pagans who refused conversion could also be considered unlawful marriage [see Ezra chapters 9-10 and Acts 15:20]. St. Paul explains the holy aspects of matrimony in Ephesians 5:21-33, linking the covenantal marriage to the mystery of salvation and in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 Paul addresses the problems the gentile Corinthian Christian faced when he or she accept Christ as Savior and the spouse did not. In those cases Paul encourages the continuation of the marriage unless the unbeliever wishes to dissolve the marriage in which case the separation was permitted and the Christian judges as “not bound” [see 1 Corinthians 7:15-16]. The Catholic Church has remained faithful to Jesus’ teaching concerning the sanctity of marriage: *“Divorce is a grave offense against the natural law. It claims to break the contract, to which the spouses freely consented, to live with each other till death. Divorce does injury to the covenant of salvation, of which sacramental marriage is the sign. Contracting a new union, even if it is recognized by civil law, adds to the gravity of the rupture: the remarried spouse is then in a situation of public and permanent adultery..”* CCC # 2384; also see CCC #s 1650-51; 2382; 2385-86.

#4: TEACHING ABOUT THE SWEARING OF OATHS



Please read Matthew 5:33-37:

This teaching is often misunderstood. Jesus is not forbidding all oath-swearing but is instead cautioning against frivolous oath-swearing. To swear an oath is a serious affair because it invokes the divine. An oath calls upon God to be the judge of the oath keeping—in the event that the oath-maker fails in his/her obligations God delivers the judgment. In courts of law in our nation it has been our tradition to place our right hands on a Bible and swear to “*tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God.*” Such an oath invokes God as the judge of our truthfulness and even if we deceive the State we are acknowledging through the oath that we cannot deceive God. Evidently in Jesus’ time oath-swearing was being abused.

Question: In addressing the serious offense of unnecessary oath-swearing Jesus is calling for Christians to exhibit truthfulness, sincerity, and acts of virtuous solemnity. How is Jesus calling Christians to live these virtues?

Answer:

1. Truthfully say what you will or will not do;
2. Being sincere in your promises, and
3. Solemnly carry out what you have said you will do.

Oath-swearing in fact presupposes untruthfulness. Jesus reminds His disciples that to tell a lie places us within the realm of the “prince of lies”, the devil. Jesus is calling the Christian to a higher standard of truthfulness that makes oath-swearing unnecessary. See the CCC#s 2150-54 for more information.

#5: TEACHING ABOUT RETALIATION

Please read Matthew 5: 38-42:

Question: How do you view this Old Covenant command?

Answer: Most people regard the Old Testament command “*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*” as unreasonably harsh. On the contrary, this commandment was meant to moderate vengeance, to protect the innocent family members of an accused or convicted perpetrator of a crime, and to ensure that the punishment visited on the offender did not exceed the crime. It was common in ancient cultures for a man’s entire family to suffer the death penalty or to be sold into slavery for his offense. The *lex talionis*, the law of reciprocity or equivalent compensation, recorded in Leviticus 24:20, and also found in the Code of Hammurabi, a Babylonian law code dating to the 17th century BC, demands that the punishment fits, but does not exceed, the crime.



What Jesus is demanding of the Christian seems an almost impossible standard of conduct, to *“offer no resistance to evil.”* Jesus is not demanding that Christians become the “footstools of the wicked” and He is not rejecting the law of reciprocity, but what He is rejecting is vengeance on a personal level. He knows that legitimate justice should be in divine hands. In Romans 12:19 St. Paul teaches, *“Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath [of God], for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’”* This is the way the meek and merciful peacemakers of the Beatitudes strike back at their enemies—through God’s justice. That is not to say we do not seek civil justice for wrongs—without civil laws society would be in anarchy for there would be no other deterrent for the behavior of the unrighteous non-believer. But when the civil laws do not bring justice we are promise God’s justice. Whenever we are seeking redress for wrongs inflicted upon us we must be willing to acknowledge that ultimately justice must be left in the hands of our just and true God—to deliver justice either temporally or eternally.

#6: TEACHING ABOUT THE LOVE OF ENEMIES

Please read Matthew 5: 43-48

To *“hate your enemy”* is not a teaching found in the Old Testament. There is, however, a command to love one’s neighbor in Leviticus 19:18 which Jesus will repeat in Matthew 19:19; 22:39; and Mark 12:31. Jesus will also repeat this teaching concerning love of one’s enemies in the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6:27-35.

Question: Please read Leviticus 19:18. What did God command in this passage?

Answer: *“Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your fellow countrymen. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

The Old Covenant people of God interpreted one’s “neighbor” as only extending to a member of the covenant people of Yahweh, and hatred of one’s enemies as natural and therefore acceptable.

Question: Jesus is teaching that this limited interpretation is no longer acceptable and He is extending the command to love not only to pagan gentiles but He is also including what other classification in the ranks of the “loved neighbor?”

Answer: His is extending the command to love even to the enemy and the persecutor.

Question: What reason does He give for this radical redefinition of those we must love in Matthew 5:45?

Answer: As children of God Jesus calls upon us to imitate our Father in heaven who grants His blessings of sun and rain to both the righteous and the unrighteous. In the



same way that God does not withhold His blessings so too must we not withhold our love.

Question: This passage contains the key teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. What is that key verse?

Answer: It is Matthew 5:48. The Christian must be *“perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* In the gospels this word Greek word, *teleios*, occurs only 3 times; here in this passage [twice] and in Matthew 19:21 where Jesus tells the Rich Young Ruler to go and sell what he has and give it to the poor if he wants to be “perfect”. This standard is an impossible demand without the action of the Holy Spirit in the Christian’s life.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is calling His disciples to a higher standard of faithfulness than was require of the faithful who had lived under the law of the Sinai Covenant. St. Paul taught in Romans 10:4 that *“Christ is the end of the Law for the justification of everyone who has faith”*, which means that yielding to the sovereignty of God only through obedience to the Law is not enough. The old Mosaic Law has been superseded by God’s action in the Incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth who is the goal or true meaning of the “Law of God” and without whom the true meaning of the Law cannot be understood or lived. In Romans 13:8-10 St. Paul also speaks of how “love”, as defined by Christ, has fulfilled the law of the Old Covenant. In this passage Paul writes: *“for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law”*, and *“Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law.”* Christ is the end and the fulfillment of the Old Covenant Law in two ways:

1. He fulfills the purpose and goal of the Old Covenant Law. As He stated in Matthew 5:17 *“I have not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it.”* He does this by perfectly exemplifying God’s desires for man created in His image; no other man except the Son of Man could perfectly keep the Law without sinning.
2. He is also the termination of the Old Covenant Law because without Christ the Old Law was powerless to offer the gift of eternal salvation. The Law was in essence a foreshadow of Christ. The sacrificial system was a temporary measure of salvation meant to instruct and prepare humanity for the coming of the Messiah [see Hebrews 10:1-4]. Christ was the reason for the animal sacrifice and purity laws; the Law pointed to Christ in whom it was fulfilled. Only through Jesus Christ is the gift of salvation given to man.

Under the New Covenant when the love of Christ directs our moral decisions and our relationships to one another the intent of the continuing moral law expressed in the Old Covenant is safeguarded and is fulfilled. In fulfilling and transforming the Old Covenant Law, God requires in the New Covenant that the New Law of obedience of faith be lived out in the love of Christ demonstrated by charity to all men and women and fulfilled by



the Holy Spirit dwelling in each Christian heart which beats with the life of the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth!

Questions for group discussion:

Question: In Matthew 5:34 Jesus cautioned not to swear by heaven, nor by earth, nor by Jerusalem, which was the center of the Old Covenant Church. All of these belong to God. How often do you hear oath-swearing that is actually a form of self-cursing when God's name is used to form the curse as an expression of exclamation [i.e. "G_d damn" or "Oh G_d!"]? Have you ever been guilty of such an offense? Which of the Ten Commandments does this action violate?

On the question of the application of Christian love:

Question: What does the Catechism of the Catholic Church teach about "love of enemies" in CCC# 1825? How is it possible to love those who do not love us?

Question: What does the Church teach about revenge? Please see CCC #2262.

Question: What is the Church's teaching in the Catechism concerning love in marriage as opposed to lust? What is the difference between right-ordered desire and disordered desire? Please see CCC #s 1604; 1643; 2351

Question: What does the Church teach concerning the love of God and neighbor? Please see CCC #s 2011 and 2196.

Question: Is sin an offense against love? What does the Catechism teach on this matter? Please see CCC #s 1849; 1855.