

Session 2 – Do I Really Have to Keep ALL the Rules?

Matthew 5:17–48

Understanding what Jesus
meant when He said He came to
fulfill the Law, not abolish it.



A Common Question

When people encounter Jesus' teaching, a natural question arises:
If Jesus came with grace and forgiveness...

What happens to all the rules in the Bible?

- Do they still apply?
- Do they still matter?
- Are Christians supposed to follow them?

Jesus addresses this question directly in the Sermon on the Mount.



Jesus and the Law

“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 5:17

Jesus makes something very clear:

He did not come to throw away Scripture.

Instead, He came to **complete its purpose and reveal its true meaning.**



What Does “Fulfill” Mean?

To fulfill something means:

- to bring it to its intended goal
- to complete what it pointed toward
 - to reveal its full meaning

The Law pointed toward:

- the character of God
- the need for transformation
- the coming of the Messiah

Jesus does not cancel the Law.

He reveals what it was always meant to accomplish.



The Problem With Rule-Keeping

By Jesus' time, many religious leaders believed righteousness meant: **carefully obeying every rule.**

But something had been lost. **The focus had shifted from a transformed heart to external behavior.**

Jesus begins exposing the difference between **external obedience** and **true righteousness.**



A Righteousness That Goes Deeper

“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:20

To Jesus’ listeners, this would have been shocking.

- The Pharisees were known as the **most religious people in society**.
- Yet Jesus says something deeper is required.
- The Kingdom of God is not about **looking righteous**.

It is about **being transformed from the inside out**.



Jesus' Teaching Pattern

Jesus now repeats a pattern several times:

“You have heard that it was said...but I tell you...”

He is not changing Scripture.

He is revealing **the deeper heart behind it.**



Anger and the Heart

²¹ “You have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’ ²² But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.

Matthew 5:21-22

- Most people assume they are doing well if they have never committed murder.
 - But Jesus says the issue goes deeper.
 - Anger, contempt, and hatred are **the roots from which violence grows.**

True righteousness addresses the **condition of the heart.**



Reconciliation Matters

³ “So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, ²⁴ leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.”

Matthew 5:21-22

- Jesus teaches that **relationships matter deeply to God.**
 - Worship and devotion cannot be separated from how we treat others.
- Kingdom righteousness includes:
 - Humility
 - Repentance
 - reconciliation



Lust and the Inner Life

27 “You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’²⁸ But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Matthew 5:21-22

Again Jesus goes deeper.

- The issue is not only physical behavior.
 - It is the **desires and intentions of the heart.**
 - God’s goal is not merely restrained behavior.
 - It is **purity of heart.**



Responding to Harm

38 “You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. 40 If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. 41 If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. 42 Give to those who ask, and don’t turn away from those who want to borrow.

Matthew 5:38-42

This law originally existed to **limit revenge**.

- But people used it to justify retaliation.
 - Jesus invites His followers into a radically different posture:
 - Generosity
 - Restraint
 - unexpected grace



Loving Enemies

43 “You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. 44 But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! 45 In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. 46 If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. 47 If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that.

Matthew 5:43-47

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”

But Jesus says:

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

This reflects the character of God Himself.

God shows kindness even to those who oppose Him.



Key Insight

Jesus is not making the Law harder.

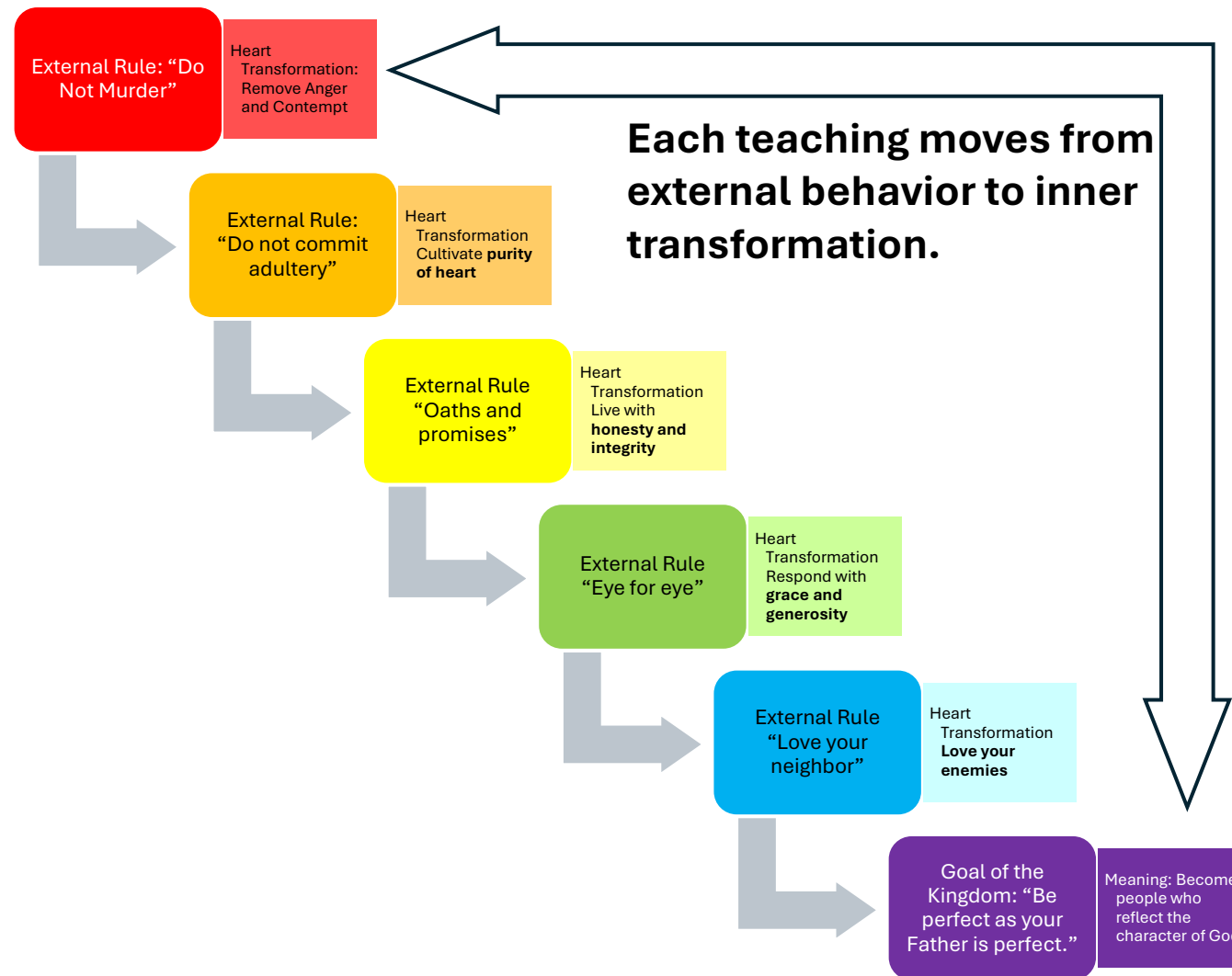
- He is revealing what the Law was **always about.**
 - The Law was never meant to produce:
 - rule-keepers
 - It was meant to produce:
 - transformed hearts that reflect the character of God.

The Law was meant to diagnose the heart, not just regulate behavior.



Key Insight

The Law Was Always About the Heart



The Goal of Kingdom Righteousness

48 But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Matthew 5:48

The word “perfect” here does not mean “without flaws or imperfections.” It means:

**complete
whole
fully formed**

Jesus is describing the goal of spiritual maturity:

A life that increasingly reflects the character of God.



Where Jesus Goes Next

After addressing righteousness and the Law, Jesus now turns to something else that had become distorted:

religious performance.

Matthew 6 will explore practices like:

- giving
- Prayer
- fasting

The question becomes:

Are we practicing faith for God... or for the approval of others?



Reflection Questions

1. Why do you think people often focus on external behavior instead of the heart?
2. Which of Jesus' teachings challenges you most in this passage?
3. How does Jesus redefine righteousness compared to common religious thinking?
4. What might transformation of the heart look like in everyday life?



Key Takeaway

Following Jesus is not primarily about **keeping rules.**

It is about allowing God to transform the heart.

- When the heart changes:
 - anger becomes reconciliation
 - lust becomes purity
 - dishonesty becomes integrity
 - revenge becomes grace
 - enemies become people we pray for

This is the righteousness of the Kingdom of God.

