



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

## SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS



## Pursuing Perfection

Tim Badal | December 1, 2013 | Matthew 5:17-20

The Upside-down Kingdom Series, Lessons Learned from the Sermon on the Mount, Part 10

We are continuing our series entitled The Upside-down Kingdom looking at lessons learned from the Sermon on the Mount. We're in the second chapter of this series. In the first chapter we focused on Kingdom Attitudes and studied the Beatitudes found in the first part of the Sermon on the Mount. Last time we began focusing on the second chapter of Kingdom Actions and we learned what it means to be salt and light in the world.

One thing Jesus has been teaching us through the Sermon on the Mount is that it is not good enough for us just to have good thoughts and attitudes. True gospel attitudes will always lead to gospel action. In other words, what we believe will always direct how we behave. That's part of what Jesus will teach us in this section on actions. As we look at different attitudes, Jesus tells us, "Hey, your attitude may be right but it's about more than just the external. Your attitudes need to move you from the external back toward the internal as well." Jesus is teaching the people that following God is not simply adhering to the right things; it is also a heart issue. Then right when you think it's only about the heart, He says, "It's not just about the heart. It's about going from the inside out." We're going to see that paradigm over and over again.

This concept is countercultural for Jesus' audience because they've been inundated through the teaching of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law with the idea of finding perfection by doing all the right things. Some of us think Christianity is a bunch of dos and don'ts even today. We think, "I'm blessed if I do these things. If I don't do them, God will be angry with me and I'm done." While there is a level of truth to that, that's not the whole story.

During the days of Jesus Christ, the religious leaders created a whole litany of rules and regulations that made following God a burden rather than a joy. Jesus wants to free us from that burden. He wants us to know that His yoke is light and it brings joy. It's not a burden. It's not about doing things for doing's sake, but doing so in a joyful relationship with the God Who has saved us. So this is what Jesus is going to do in our passage: He's going to turn the way people saw religion upside down.

Now, I want to preface that comment a little bit. We're going to wade through some heavy theological waters. This is why we teach the Bible verse-by-verse. This is not a passage I particularly want to teach. It's not a message you're going to laugh about and say, "Man, I really enjoyed that sermon. He really nailed it." But it's going to help us understand how we're to approach God and—more importantly—how we are to approach Scripture as followers of Jesus Christ. If we don't understand how to do this, then we aren't going to understand the place God's Word has in our lives.

So with that, let's hear from our Savior, Teacher and Lord. In Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus says the following:

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and

teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Let's pray.

Father God, we ask a simple blessing on our time. I pray that as we study Your Word, it will change us and make us generous with others and with You. I pray that it will make us holy in our walk with You and that we'd be bright and shining lights to those around us. I pray that as we look to Your Word and are changed by it, that we would be salt and light; let Your Word change our attitudes. Let it move us to action so that we may glorify You and honor You in the process. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

We live in a day when perfection is being pursued by young and old alike. Here in America, we live relentlessly by the Lexus advertising tag line "pursuit of perfection." We pursue this perfection in our outer beauty. We long to look the best we can to the point of wanting to pursue perfection. I read a recent newspaper article that talked about how record numbers of people are running to plastic surgeons to find that perfect look. Some of us struggle with that.

Others of us are looking for perfection in relationships—especially some of our younger people who are looking for that perfect companion for life. Well, I found the last one. Her name is Amanda. There's none left, so you're only going to find imperfect ones now. Seriously, we look for that perfect someone to spend that perfect lifetime with, and many of us find ourselves disappointed because we've learned that our "perfect someone" isn't all that perfect.

We pursue perfection with our jobs. We try to find the perfect job and if we can't, we're discontent. We are always looking for greener pastures.

Even in this holiday season, some of us have been scouring around for the perfect gifts to give our loved ones. This pursuit of perfection is part of our lives. It reminds us that we are imperfect people. If we were perfect, we wouldn't long for perfection. But because we're frail and have faults, we long for that which is perfect.

The pursuit of perfection is nothing new; it just presents itself in a different way. The name of the game during Jesus' life and ministry was a relentless pursuit of perfection. The group of people Jesus was preaching to had learned that the only way they could be right with God was by following these rules and regulations to the utmost—by doing every one of them with utter perfection. When they failed to keep all of them, the Pharisees, rabbis and teachers of the law would beat them down because they were not living up to the potential they had reached.

We need to understand that when Jesus came to teach on this subject, the God-fearing Jew knew and understood that there were 613 different laws within the Old Testament that they were called to keep. Some of them were positive affirmations that said, "Do this." Others said, "Don't do that."

But by Jesus' time, the 613 laws had turned into thousands. Many of them had nothing to do with the Law of God itself, but the Pharisees, the Chief Priests and teachers of the law had built fences around those laws. They saw that it would be a terrible thing to break God's Law so they created all these other rules so that they would never crash through all those and actually break God's Law.

It is like the sand and barricades at airplane runways. Why are they there? Because they don't want the planes to go off the runway, they create things to slow you down. The Pharisees said, "It would be a terrible thing to break the Law of God so we're going to add all these rules to keep you from actually breaking the Law." As a result, followers of God in Jesus' day found themselves burdened by religiosity. They were burdened by following rules and the regulations rather than following God.

All of these things smacked of hypocrisy and showmanship. Over and over the rabbis would nail the people to the wall every Saturday in the temple. They would ask, "Are you doing these things?" all the while forgetting that when they preached the laws of God, they never preached about God Himself.

Jesus says the people of His day were burdened and heavy laden. Remember that Jesus says, “Hey, put on My yoke for My yoke is light. My yoke won’t bear down on you and keep you from joy.”

So what Jesus articulates in the Sermon on the Mount absolutely agitates the chief leaders of the day. There is no mention of law in the first 12 verses of Jesus’ message. He doesn’t say, “Well, Moses told us this and we need to do it. Not only that, but we need to do this, that and the other thing before we even get to what Moses said.” Jesus says nothing about regulations. In fact, He says nothing about doing; it is more about being. When our attitudes are right, then our relationships will be different.

At some moment in Jesus’ message—whether He hears it publicly from the Pharisees who are in the crowd or whether He simply knows their thoughts because He is the Son of God—He addresses the Pharisees’ concerns. We’re not sure why but we know that Jesus pauses His conversation about attitudes in verse 17 as if He’s answering an accusation. He says, *“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 we’re going to get into what theologians call the subject matter of law and gospel. Some of you may have heard that phrase before; there are many books written about it. In those books, people are trying to answer these questions:

- What is Jesus doing with the law?
- How do we take the law and live as followers of Christ under grace?
- How do we apply these Old Testament truths to our lives?

Those are some pretty heavy waters. We’re going to try skimming the top, all the while going underneath like good swimmers to see what’s happening. Then we’ll come up and try to apply these things.

When Jesus says, “I did not come to abolish the Law and Prophets but to fulfill,” we have to ask the question, “What is the Law and what are the Prophets?” In a nutshell, Jesus is talking about the 39 books of our Old Testament Scriptures. By the time Jesus comes onto the scene, we have the Old Testament in its complete canon form. In other words, the Jewish Scriptures were agreed upon from Genesis to Malachi as the spoken Word of God through the prophets. At Jesus’ time, they hadn’t heard from God in 400 years but they understood that those words contained what God was articulating to His people.

Now here’s the problem. Most rabbis of that day hadn’t been preaching the Old Testament very much. They were preaching interpretations of the Old Testament. It would be like me teaching you from a commentary of the Sermon on the Mount rather than teaching you from the Word of God. I would be teaching man’s interpretations of God’s Word instead of God’s Word itself.

We are told at the end of the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus taught with authority because He taught the Word of God to God’s people. It must have been refreshing for the people to hear God’s Word spoken so they might live according to it instead of just relying on what their rabbis and priests told them to do.

So let’s look at four things we need to understand about Jesus’ statement, “If you want to pursue perfection in regards to the law...”

## **Looking at the Permanence of the Old Testament**

## **Examining the Different Practices of Looking at the Old Testament**

## **Understanding the Purpose of the Old Testament**

## **Holding on to the Promises of the Old Testament**

# 1. Looking at the Permanence of the Old Testament

We need to understand that there is permanence to the Old Testament and what that means. As we begin our study today, we need to understand that Jesus is talking about the 39 books of the Old Testament. We need to understand that what Jesus the Messiah—the One Whom the prophets spoke about, Who is going to come once and for all to deal with sin—says about the words written about Him and about us as humanity are absolutely, positively true and trustworthy.

## **The Old Testament has not been abolished...**

Jesus says, “Okay. I know we’ve been looking at attitudes and I haven’t mentioned the Law. I know the Pharisees are gathering their ammunition against Me to say that I don’t believe in the Old Testament Scriptures.” But once and for all, Jesus does say He believes wholeheartedly—in the words Paul would articulate years later—that *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Now to understand this passage, we need to remember that during the Apostle Paul’s time the Old Testament was the only Scripture anyone had. So Jesus is saying, “I didn’t come to abolish the Old Testament. I am in agreement with what y apostle will say years from now, that what I am teaching you comes from the Word of God. It is the Word of God and it is useful in our lives.” He wholeheartedly affirms the Old Testament.

Notice that Jesus is clearly teaching the people that they no longer have to live under the yoke of the law. They don’t have to be burdened by all of the law and its requirements. But there’s a reason: the reason is that Jesus doesn’t have to abolish the Old Testament because when He came, He fulfilled it.

## **...but still plays an active role...**

Notice what Jesus does. Jesus says the Old Testament has not been abolished but still plays an active role. It has a different role than it did before Christ but there’s still an active role to the Law that will be there until it’s accomplished.

Jesus doesn’t say that the Old Testament is no good anymore. What we have in the Old Testament is now a fuller picture because of Christ. As New Testament Christians under grace, we need to be careful that we don’t fall into what they were accusing Jesus of—we can’t say, “Well, the Old Testament was for Israel. Now we’re the church and we have our own testament—the New Testament.”

If you are a little more theologically astute, you know that what I just said was an absolute mouthful. There’s a book called The Five Views of Law and Gospel and I’m picking one of the five views from that book. I believe—and I believe the elders do as well—that the Old Testament has not been abolished. It’s still an active part in our lives as believers. This is important because not all of evangelicalism affirms that. This tension is going to be there until the second coming of Jesus Christ. We need to understand this truth because it is going to inform how we study the Scriptures. It’s going to inform how we interpret the Bible and God’s calling. We need to be very careful about what we hear.

For example, look at the topic of the sanctity of marriage. We go to the Old Testament and say, “It is not good for one man to lie with another man as he lies with a woman.”

Others in evangelicalism might say, “Well, we don’t believe that anymore. After all, now we plant one type of crop next to another and have linens that are woven of two different kinds of fabric. We enjoy eating pork chops. So how can you affirm one thing about the Law and not another?” We’ll talk about that in a moment, but first we need to understand the role that the Law plays for us as followers of Jesus Christ.

## **...until it has been accomplished.**

It is of critical importance for us as a church to know and understand this: The Old Testament has not been abolished, it plays an active role and it will play that active role until it is accomplished.

When Jesus says, *"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,"* He is saying that everything He will preach will be 100% positively in accordance with the Scriptures. In fact, He is saying that everything in His earthly ministry will be within the guidelines and understanding of the Old Testament. His teachings and the Old Testament will be in harmony and unity. But by saying that, Jesus is also declaring that everything He says will be in disharmony and disunity to what the chief priests and rabbis say. Wow!

Think about this for a moment: if you were to leave after hearing this sermon and say, "Hey, I know you all just heard a sermon from Tim but let me tell you the truth. Let me tell you where he was wrong and how my interpretation is right." That's what Jesus is doing to the chief priests and rabbis. He is new to the scene and sounds like an upstart rabbi. Jesus is telling everybody, "What you have been hearing in the temple is wrong." Do you think the Pharisees were upset by that statement? I wouldn't have wanted to sit next to one of those priests because Jesus would have been agitating them. They would have said, "You're throwing it all away, Jesus. You're a false teacher." But Jesus is going to say, "Everything I say is going to be absolutely right in accordance with the Old Testament."

As we move on, look in the text at how Jesus does this. These are some of the headings He's going to address: anger, lust, divorce, oaths, retaliation and loving your enemies. Six times Jesus will say, *"You have heard it said."* Well, who did the saying? The Pharisees, the chief priests and the teachers of the law did. Jesus says, "You've heard them say this, but I say to you."

Jesus begins to reorder the religion of the day into a relationship that is vibrant with Himself. Over and over again He's going to demonstrate that New Testament kingdom living is not to live under the Law but to fulfill it. Just as Christ came to fulfill the Law as our Savior and King, the believers' role is not to live under the Law but to fulfill it in their lives. We're going to talk about how that is fleshed out in our last point.

There is something else that we need to understand. When Jesus says *"the Law or the Prophets,"* He's not talking generically. He gets incredibly specific in our text. He says, *"For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."* What in the world does that mean?

The *iōta* signifies the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. The dot (*keraiā*) is the smallest punctuation mark in the Hebrew language. How many iotas and dots are there? I did some research and there are 66,420 iotas and dots in the Hebrew language. Jesus says not a single one of those is going to pass away until they are fulfilled.

Some of those words found their fulfillment in Christ's first coming and some will find their fulfillment in His second coming. This is why we follow some aspects of the Law and some we don't. This answers the question, "Why can we eat pork chops but we can't do other things that the Old Testament Law forbids?"

There are three aspects of the Law that we need to know and understand:

1. **Ceremonial laws** – These were the laws of worship. As part of the Israelite's laws, God said, "This is how you're going to do things if you are going to worship Me. I'm going to order your life of worship because I want things to be done in a right and orderly way. You can't just come into My temple and do whatever you want." So the ceremonial law

said what you could and could not do regarding being clean and unclean. The Book of Leviticus talks about these laws.

Some of the ceremonial aspects of these laws had to do with simple sanitation in a day and age when that was a necessary thing. God said, "I want my people to be healthy. I don't want widespread disease to break out." Other ceremonial laws instructed the people in how they should live in relationship to one another.

2. **Judicial laws** –We see these laws repeatedly. If someone killed someone else, was it premeditated or was it an accident? If it was premeditated, their life was to be taken from them. If it wasn't premeditated then they would receive a punishment and have to pay restitution, but they would not lose their life. Judicial laws were used by God—as King of the theocratic Jewish nation—to tell them how to deal with crime and punishment. Some of these laws are still seen in how we apply them to our own legal system today. But we're not bound by these laws because we are no longer in a physical nation under God; rather we are a Kingdom of people, of saints from every tribe, tongue and nation. God is building a spiritual Kingdom, not just the physical kingdom of the nation of Israel.
3. **Moral laws** – We see these in the Ten Commandments. When we talked about the Ten Commandments a couple years ago, we looked at how all of these still apply to us today and how we need to understand the Law's bearing in the Christian's life.

Now you might ask, "Well, how do we then deal with the Law in grace? How do we know where the law still applies and where it doesn't?" Here's the great thing: we don't just have the Old Testament; we also have the New Testament. Scripture always interprets Scripture, so we take the New Testament—which is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, and correcting and training unto righteousness—and bring the two together.

Then we ask the question, "What about the ceremonial laws?" The chief ceremonial law for the Hebrews was the issue of circumcision. So what does the New Testament say about circumcision? Romans 2 says cutting off the flesh isn't what's important anymore; it's about a circumcision of the heart. Even the prophets talked about that. Ezekiel 36:26 says, "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." He is saying God will literally circumcise the heart.

The New Testament believers struggled with this. They began to ask the question, "Do Gentiles who come to know Christ need to be circumcised?" The answer is no. This is what the prophets meant when they talked about circumcision of the heart.

In Acts 10:9-16, Peter had a vision of a great sheet coming down from heaven with unclean items on the sheet. A heavenly voice cried out to Peter and said, "Take, kill and eat."

Peter asked, "How can I do this? They are unclean."

Jesus answered, "No longer are these things unclean." Those things were unclean for the people under the Jewish laws and requirements, but those things have now been declared clean because of Christ.

So here's what we know to be true: it seems that from a New Testament understanding of Scripture, the ceremonial laws have been fulfilled in Christ, so we no longer have to live under those regulations. It seems that the judicial elements of the law have been fulfilled in Christ as

the great Lawgiver. But we see that the moral laws are still alive and well in the New Testament and we are called to live differently as followers of Jesus Christ.

There is no aspect of the moral law where Jesus says, “You’ve heard it said, do not kill. But I tell you this, go ahead and kill anybody you want.” He doesn’t say that. In fact, He not only says that the moral laws are still applicable but He goes even further and says they are taking on even greater meaning. We see that the moral laws are not only fulfilled in the perfection of Christ, but now—because of Christ’s perfection—we are called not only to the outward adherence of these laws but the inward as well.

In many ways the Law now becomes even greater in the life of the believer than it was before. Next time we’ll look at how Jesus says, “You’ve heard it said, ‘Do not murder.’ I say to you, if you have a murderous thought about your brother, if you call your brother ‘old empty-head,’ you are convicted of murder in the heart.” That is convicting! Jesus didn’t diminish the Law; He expanded it. He expanded it through the heart, not just through the outward aspect of it. So Jesus is telling us the Law has a part in our lives—a greater part than many of us even realize.

## 2. Examining Different Practices of Looking at the Old Testament

That leads us to three different ways people can wrongly look at the Old Testament.

### **There are those who disregard it.**

There were people in Jesus’ day—and there are people today—who disregard the Old Testament and its teachings right out of hand. Who are those people today? They are people we work with; they’re people who live in our neighborhoods. Some of us have them as spouses. Others of us have family members who disregard the Word of God. These are people who hear the Word of God, know what it says, but turn around and say, “That’s not for me. I don’t need to do those things.” Inevitably, they say the Bible is outdated, like in the sanctity of marriage argument. These people say the Bible does not have bearing on our lives and they wiggle out of having to sit under its teaching.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 1 that the people in the world are under sin and are faithless, ruthless, unloving, uncaring, disobedient and rebellious. Paul says God’s wrath is being revealed against sinfulness and against all sinners because *“Though they [the unbelievers] know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them”* (Romans 1:32).

God has declared His Word and yet people say, “Ah phooey, I’m not going to believe that. I’m not going to make that part of my life. I’m not going to allow my life to be dictated by what Scripture has to say. I know what the decrees of God are but I’m not going to do them.” Some of you are going through the motions in a pharisaical way, but all the while in your heart you are disregarding the Scriptures. Beware, because the Bible says you will not inherit the Kingdom of God if you disregard what He says.

### **There are those who distort it**

Let’s move from the unbeliever to the believer. Some Christians deny the place of the Old Testament in the believer’s life. Some of you have a Scotfield Study Bible. That was the first study

Bible I ever owned. Scofield was a trendsetter. He was a lawyer and Bible teacher and he talked with a friend who was a Bible commentary writer. He said, "Commentaries are great but I think we need to put the commentary—the study notes—right into the Bible." So in 1909 Cyrus Scofield presented and published the first study Bible. It had the biblical text on the top of the page, and the study notes at the bottom of the page.

Now that's great. Study Bibles are wonderful, but here's the thing you need to understand: those notes at the bottom of the page are not the inspired, inerrant Word of God. I've been in some small groups where people say, "This is what my study notes say; therefore that's what it means." No. That's one man's interpretation of the passage. That's part of the struggle that we have with study notes.

Scofield had a certain understanding of law and gospel that is fleshed out in his study Bible. He was called the father of dispensationalism. Dispensationalism is a way of interpreting the Scriptures. I have much respect for the realm of dispensationalism, but where dispensationalism gets it wrong is the issue of law and gospel or law and grace. The law is contained in the Old Testament and we now have Christ. The Scriptures say the law came through Moses and grace comes through Christ. Because of that, dispensationalism says the Old Testament is no longer operative in the life of the believer; the only thing that's important is the New Testament Scriptures.

Growing up—especially in Bible churches—some of you probably never heard Old Testament teaching from the pulpit. There are even some Bible churches that will not teach the Sermon on the Mount because it was for the Jewish people. The Book of Matthew was written for the Jewish people. They say that what is being fleshed out in the Sermon on the Mount is what's going to happen in the earthly millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ. So I have to ask the question, "If that's the case, then why in the world does Jesus spend so much time talking about persecution?"

I have a problem with Scofield because he creates a discontinuity. As a result of that, four things take place:

- People see the Old Testament as outdated.
- People see the Old Testament as strictly law and the New Testament as strictly grace.
- People reduce the Old Testament to just a place where you can find moralistic stories.
- Many churches have totally gotten rid of the Old Testament from their teaching and focus instead on the Epistles—Acts and beyond—in the New Testament.

This is not how it should be. This is not where Village Bible Church stands. All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. The Old Testament is just as important as the New Testament. They play different parts. They are two sides of the same coin, but both are needed.

### **There are those who depend on it for righteousness**

Some people take the law and say, "If you don't get the law right—if you don't do everything that it says—then you're never going to make it in God's Kingdom." In Jesus' day, this was the Pharisees. This is seen today in the Seventh Day Adventist movement. Now you're thinking, "Man, Tim's calling everybody out today." In some ways we are because it's a tough theological thing to talk through. Seventh Day Adventists say salvation is found through adherence to the Old Testament laws. They depend on the law to get them their salvation.

We need to be very careful because we are not saved by works but by grace. Some people may say, "You're walking a fine line here." Yes, I am. I'm walking the fine line of Ephesians 2:8-10, "For

*by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*" You are saved by grace, not by yourself. Whether you do everything in the law or everything you're called by your church to do, you're not saved by that. You're saved by the grace of Almighty God. We are created in Christ to do good works that God has prepared for us in advance. Those works are seen in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Works are not what save us. They are what show us that we're saved.

### 3. Understanding the Purpose of the Old Testament

The purpose of the Old Testament is three-fold, and it's for the unbeliever and believer alike.

#### **The Old Testament is meant to guard against sin**

Psalm 119:9 says, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word." David is talking about the Law. We can guard ourselves from sin by looking to the Word. Romans 7:7, "What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin." So what does the Law do? The Law shows me what's out-of-bounds and what is in-bounds. It helps me guard against sin because I know that as I pursue something, I can look to the law and ask, "Is this right? Is this good or is it sin?"

#### **The Old Testament is meant to give us a sense of guilt**

Our family spent this Thanksgiving in Galena, Illinois. If you've ever traveled from here to Galena, you know that there are state troopers all over the place. On our way home, we saw seven or eight police officers using their radar. I wasn't driving because if I had been, I probably wouldn't be here today. I would probably be incarcerated because I have a lead foot. Amanda was driving because she drives within the speed limit. On our trip, I would tell her, "Hey, there's a police officer. Watch your speed." Every time, Amanda would inevitably look at her speedometer. Now Amanda knew that she was driving the speed limit. Amanda doesn't speed; she's perfect. I don't know if you knew that or not but I think I said that earlier. Seriously, she would still check her speedometer. When brought before the law, we think, "Let's just double check. Let's just make sure that I'm not outside of where the law wants me to be."

I can assure you any time you see someone being pulled over, they're not bragging and saying, "My name is Tim Badal. I was driving 55 miles over the speed limit. Look at me, ha ha!" No, usually they have their head down. It goes down the moment that officer comes to the door and says, "Excuse me, do you know the reason why I pulled you over?"

You think, "Yes, I know the reason why you pulled me over. I broke the law." That's when you start the song and dance of being brokenhearted and giving your excuses, but the law is the law. So for the unbeliever, the law shows them their sin and the sinfulness of their sin. That's like the police officer asking, "Do you know how fast you were driving?" That's when you think, "Oh, boy. I wasn't just speeding a little bit; I was speeding a lot. I really blew it." The law tells the unbeliever, "You're absolutely, positively blowing it."

But in the life of the believer, James says we are to look into the law intently as a mirror. As a believer we are to get up every morning, look in the mirror of the law and say, "Well, I need to

clean this and that up.” We use the mirror because we can’t see ourselves without it. If we don’t look into the law once in a while, we can forget what we’ve been saved from. We need to recognize that we have been saved from a lot.

### **The Old Testament is meant to guide us to the savior**

When we just live in grace, we forget that the wrath of God is being revealed against all godlessness. So the Law reminds us as believers, “Listen up. You really blew it, but look how matchless the grace of Jesus really is.” That’s what we need to understand. The Old Testament will **always** guide us to our Savior.

John 5:39 says that the prophets were telling of Jesus’ coming in the Old Testament. If you look at Genesis through the book of Malachi, you can see Jesus in each of the books of the Old Testament:

- **Genesis** – He’s the Seed of the woman.
- **Exodus** – He’s the Passover Lamb.
- **Leviticus** – He’s the High Priest.
- **Numbers** – He’s the Pillar of cloud by day and the Pillar of fire by night.
- **Deuteronomy** – He’s the Prophet unto Moses.
- **Joshua** – He’s the Captain of our salvation.
- **Judges** – He’s the Judge and Lawgiver.
- **Ruth** – He’s the Kinsman-Redeemer.
- **1 and 2 Samuel** – He’s the trusted Prophet.
- **1 and 2 Kings and Chronicles** – He’s the reigning King.
- **Ezra** – He’s the faithful Scribe.
- **Nehemiah** – He’s the Rebuilder of broken walls.
- **Esther** – He’s Mordecai, the Savior of His people.
- **Job** – He’s the ever-living Redeemer.
- **Psalms** – He’s our Shepherd.
- **Proverbs and Ecclesiastes** – He’s true Wisdom.
- **Song of Solomon** – He’s the Lover and true Bridegroom.
- **Isaiah** – He’s the Prince of Peace.
- **Jeremiah and Lamentations** – He’s the Prophet weeping over sin.
- **Ezekiel** – He’s the wonderful four-faced Man.
- **Daniel** – He’s the fourth Man in the fiery furnace.
- **Hosea** – He’s the eternal Husband, forever married to a backslider.
- **Joel** – He’s the Baptizer of the Holy Spirit.
- **Amos** – He’s the great Burden-bearer.
- **Obadiah** – He’s the Savior.

- **Jonah** – He’s the great foreign Missionary.
- **Micah** – He’s the Messenger with beautiful feet.
- **Nahum** – He’s the Avenger of all wrongdoing.
- **Habakkuk** – He’s the Evangelist pleading for revival.
- **Zephaniah** – He’s the Lord Who is mighty to save.
- **Haggai** – He’s the Restorer of the lost heritage.
- **Zechariah** – He’s the Fountain open to the house of David for all sinners who need cleansing.
- **Malachi** – He’s the Son of Righteousness arising with healing in His wings.

Jesus is the theme of every passage in the Old Testament. So what do we do with that?

## 4. Holding onto the Promises of the Old Testament

Here are the promises I want you to walk away with today. You and I are no longer under the law in the sense that we use the law as a covenant between God and our works. You see, salvation is not of the law but of grace. This is the whole argument in the Book of Galatians. I’m not disputing that; I am adhering to that. But on the other hand, the grace found in salvation does not release us from the Law and the Prophets being a rule for life and godliness.

So I have three things to say to those who have tasted God’s grace and enjoy living in a new covenant with God, who live it out even now through Christ as a fulfillment of the Law. I have three things to answer the question, “How do you live it out?”

### **Love the Lord and others**

In Matthew 22:36-40, we are told what commandment is most important. Jesus says there are two, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”* How do we fulfill the law? We recognize that God has forgiven us much and we forgive others much. We recognize that God has saved us from much and we worship Him much and we proclaim it to all those who will listen.

To love the Lord God means to not just believe and have the right heart attitude about God, but to live differently in response to Him. It means to demonstrate the validity of our faith and the result of our belief by having an all-consuming love for God and the people He’s created. There was never a time or place in the Old Testament where God commanded external obedience apart from internal motivation.

So Jesus is saying, “If you love Me, you will obey My commands. All of them. You will obey them and fulfill them.” We will do it not because we have to, but because we want to. So make loving God and others your number one pursuit in life.

### **Lead others to live like Christ**

Our text says, *"Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."*

We have a choice. We can say, "I'm going to teach them but I'm going to teach them my own way." That was what the Pharisees did. They heaped all these regulations on top of God's commands which actually minimized them. That's why Jesus said, "You heard it said that you can't murder, but I tell you that if you even think thoughts of murder, you've murdered." The Pharisees were saying "no" to physical murder. Jesus was saying, "Yes, physical murder is a sin, but so is thinking murderous thoughts in your heart." Jesus elevated the intentions of the heart. We need to recognize that we can't relax these things in our post-modern world where truth is relevant.

We must objectively teach the Word of God. That means sometimes you will be called intolerant. Sometimes you will be called bigots. Sometimes you will be called all kinds of things. But understand this: we are called to teach the Word of God in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2) and we are to do so to honor God.

We need to be careful when we teach the Word that we don't relax it which is what happens when we don't teach the hard stuff. We relax the Word by watering down the truth and by remaining quiet when God is calling us to speak up.

So what are we to teach? Our passage says we are to teach the commandments of God. That's the Great Commission, to go and make disciples and teach them all that He has commanded us to do.

We are called to teach the gospel. The gospel says man is fallen. Man is dead in trespasses and sin. Man knows this because of the conscience and because of the law. We have to teach what the prophets taught, "Turn and be revived by God Himself." We need to teach people to turn from their wicked ways and trust God as the only King and Shepherd. And the whole time the prophets were teaching that, they were proclaiming that there was One Who was going to come and save us from our sins.

So when we present the gospel, don't just go to John 3:16. That's part of the story but before *"God so loved the world..."*, man was lost in his sin. God came over and said, "Turn from your wicked ways. Experience joy in abundance. Do these things. Follow My ways." We turned away, shook our fists at God and said, "We will not do it."

But *"God so loved the world..."* that even after all those warnings and after all that sin had taken place, *"God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons"* (Galatians 4:4-5). God's love took care of us who were under the law so that we might fulfill the law through Christ and in doing so, we might experience joy unspeakable, contentment and the peace that transcends all understanding.

## **Look to the glory of heaven**

We need to pursue greatness in God's Kingdom. He says, "Do you want to be great?" The word "great" is the Greek word *megas*. Do you want to be *megas*? Do you want to be Big Poppy in the Kingdom of God? You should want that. You should want to be great in the Kingdom of God, but you should want it for the reasons that God wants it for you. One day we will be able to do so much more than just love the Lord God, love others and lead others to Christ. We will sit with Christ Who took the written code and all of its regulations, nailed it to the cross and is now sitting

at the right hand of the Father. He is the great One and we want to be like Him. How do we become like Him? We do it by submitting ourselves to the entirety of God's Word so that He might receive honor and praise.

So let me close with this: have you found the Lord Jesus in the Book? Have you given your life to Him? He alone is the absolute standard for your life. He is the only reason that we can live righteously. Apart from Him, we cannot do it. It's impossible. He alone is the One Who allows us to fulfill God's law and empowers us to live the Beatitude-kind of life. Through His Word, He empowers us to be salt and light in this world. Do you know Him? Do you know His Word? If you don't, turn to Him so you will be great in His Kingdom. If you don't turn to Him, you will not inherit the Kingdom of God and that is a sad commentary on anyone's life. Turn to Jesus. Receive Him as your Lord and Savior. Give your life to Him.

Let's pray.

Father God, we come before You and I know we've been given a lot to consider. I pray that we would walk away knowing that we need to not only be people who believe Your Word, but who also live out Your Word every day of our lives. Teach us, empower us, train us, correct us in our wrongdoing and rebuke us if we have done something that is not right. Remind us of Your grace. Remind us that You are faithful to cover our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness if we will truly confess it to You.

Lord, I pray that we will live in light of Your grace but not forget Your Law, for Your Law has been written on our hearts. Teach us through Your Law. Convict us of our sin. Train us in righteousness so that we might give You the glory, honor and praise for the change that happens in our lives. Now I pray that You would lead us and empower us to live differently in the light of what You've taught. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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