

**Sermon on the Mount**  
**Part 2**  
**Fulfilling the Law**  
**Pastor Charles Price**

I am going to read from Chapter 5 and Verse 17 down to Verse 20. And I trust what I have to say today may be liberating for some of you. Some of these truths I want to share this morning are some of the most precious truths to me personally, and I trust they become that to some of you in a fresh way. Let me read you Matthew 5 Verse 17 where Jesus said,

“Do no think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

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

“Anyone who breaks 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 practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

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

And I suggest to you those must have been some of the most discouraging words that ever left the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I'll tell you why. Ever since God had given to Moses, on Mount Sinai, the Law, the Ten Commandments, and then the explanation of those Ten Commandments, you could write one word across the history of Israel and it would be the word 'failure'.

The historical books of the Old Testament record the details of that failure. The poetic books weep and mourn about that failure. The prophetic books preach about that failure. And with this history of failure, Jesus has come on to the scene preaching good news – that's what the word "gospel" means.

And I imagine as these people went up the hillside to listen to Jesus preach the Sermon on the Mount that many of them may have said to one another, "What do you think the good news is going to be?"

And I imagine somebody might have replied, "You know I think the good news is going to be that God is going to be a little softer, a little easier to get on with. Up until now God has seemed to be so hard to please. Maybe the good news is He is softening a little bit."

And I suggest somebody else might have said, “You know I agree with that. I think the good news is that instead of having Ten Commandments, after today we’ll maybe have only six. We’re going to ditch a few.”

And the reason why I suggest that was the kind of conversation they were having is because Verse 17 seems to anticipate that, when Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets”.

In other words, He says, “Please don’t get the wrong idea. I have not come from heaven with an apology for a law that you have been unable to keep. There is absolutely no embarrassment about the law that was given to you on Mount Sinai. I have not come to abolish it or to modify it or to reduce it. I have come,” He says, “to fulfill them.”

And it’s about that I want to talk. And I believe if we grasp this, it may for many of us be certainly liberating, maybe even revolutionary, because I think it is vital we understand this, particularly as we go through the Sermon on the Mount that we understand this at the heart of what the Sermon on the Mount is about: Jesus fulfilling the law.

And I want to talk about three things regarding the law. I want to talk about the purpose of the law, first of all, and ask the question, “Why did God give the law?”

Secondly, the effect of the law; what does the law actually do for us?

And then thirdly we’ll talk about the fulfillment of the law. What did Jesus mean when He said, “I have come to fulfill it”?

Let me talk first of all about the purpose of the law. Why was it that God gave the Ten Commandments, which is the element of the law that He is talking about here? And why, when Jesus gave the Ten Commandments, did He give a requirement that is so high, so demanding, humanly speaking so unreasonable that nobody has been able keep them? That doesn’t sound very fair does it?

You know if I was meeting you for the first time, knew nothing about you, I would be quite prepared to look you in the eye and say to you, “You have broken the law of God”, and you probably wouldn’t get hot under the collar, you probably wouldn’t react, you probably wouldn’t blink. If you reacted at all you would probably look me back in the eye and say, “As so have you.”

Because you know and I know that no man, no woman, no boy, no girl anywhere has ever kept the law of God. Every one of us in this building this morning has broken the law of God.

Now that raises a very important question: Why has God given a law that nobody is able to keep?

I don't know if you have ever been involved in making rules but if you have a family you probably make rules. And you will know that a basic principle when you make rules is this: any rule people can't keep is a bad rule.

And yet God has given to us in the Ten Commandments a set of rules so high, so demanding, none of us have been able to keep them.

That raises the big question: Why did God give the law in the way that He did? Was it because He was having a bad day when Moses came up Mount Sinai – maybe a few angels playing up in one corner of heaven – and here's Moses asking for something, so pow, pow, pow and zapped him with difficult laws? Well of course not. God doesn't have bad days.

What then is the criterion? Is there a criterion to determine what the law should be? And I think the answer is that there is a criterion. And to discover what the criterion is I want to compare with you two verses in the New Testament that describe what all sin involves.

The first one is in 1 John 3:4, and while you are turning there let me just remind you of something you may well be familiar with: that the word "sin" in its original English usage literally means to miss the mark.

The word "sin" was used in archery. If you took an arrow and you fired it at a target and you missed the target, it was called sin. If you missed by a centimetre it was called sin. If you missed by a metre it was called sin. If you missed by a kilometre it was called sin. If you shot in the opposite direction it was called sin. Why? Because sin is not a measurement of how bad we are; sin is a measurement of how good we are not, if you appreciate the difference.

You know if you miss a bus by a minute, you have missed it. Miss it by ten minutes: you have missed it. Miss it by thirty minutes: you've missed it. Missed it by an hour: you have missed it. You don't congratulate yourself when you miss a bus by a minute and say, "Wow, that was fantastic. I only missed it by a minute today." It is probably even more frustrating.

Do you know there is a very real sense in which God is not particularly concerned with how bad people are? We sometimes become very concerned with how bad other people are because we like to measure ourselves against them.

God is concerned with how good people are not, if you understand, whether we have missed the mark; whether it's an inch or a mile is irrelevant. That means that the word "sin" is a relative word; it's not an absolute word; it's a relative word. You do not know what sin is unless you know what the mark is that we have missed, if to sin is to miss the mark.

Now the first of these two verses, which I am going to read to you – 1 John 3:4 says this:

“Everyone who sins” (doesn’t matter what the nature of the sin is)

“Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.”

Now John says there, “Every time somebody sins, no matter what the nature of that sin is, we know what they have done – they have broken the law of God, they break the law. If my left hand here represents the law, every time somebody sins, they have come short of the requirements of the law. The law represents a target that we miss when we sin, according to John.

Now that doesn’t answer the question, why is the law what it is? Why didn’t God make it a little easier to encourage us a little bit? But let me read the second verse and this will help us understand why the law is what it is.

It’s in Romans Chapter 3 and Verse 23, and it’s a verse many of you will be familiar with. Romans 3:23, and Paul writes there,

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Now, says Paul, every time somebody sins we know what they do (no matter what the nature of the sin is), they fall short of the glory of God.

Now put those two verses together. My left hand represents the law of God. John says to sin is to come short of the law, to break the law; sin is lawlessness. Paul says to sin is to come short of the glory of God. So my right hand here represents the glory of God (and to sin is to come short of it).

If you put these two verses together, John says the law is the target that we miss; Paul says the glory of God is the target that we miss. That tells us that the law of God and the glory of God equal the same thing.

Therefore, to answer the question why is the law of God what it is, we have to ask another question – what is the glory of God?

Now the word “glory” occurs in Scripture with slight variation of meaning depending on its context but essentially the glory of God is the character of God.

Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says,

*“The glory of God is the character of God, what He essentially is and does. It is His moral character.”*

It’s the kind of thing John had in mind when he wrote in his Gospel, John 1:14,

“The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

And when John says, “We saw His glory”, what exactly did he see? Is he meaning we saw a bright light suspended above Jesus’ head? That’s how artists have sometimes portrayed it.

No, he is saying, “We saw in Jesus Christ the moral character of God. We saw the glory of God that we have come short of.” In other words he is saying this, “Those of us who were kids with Jesus in Nazareth, who kicked a ball up and down the road with Him, who played with Him in the fields and went hunting in the hills and hiding in the woods with Him, in the way He acted, the way He reacted, the way He treated His friends, the way He talked to His mother, we saw what God was like.

When He began to work in His father’s carpenter shop, the way He went about His business, the way He paid His bills on time, the way He invoiced accurately for the work that He had done, the way He would get up early in the morning to put on somebody’s roof that had blown off in a gale of the night before, we saw what God was like.

When He began His public ministry, the way He would sit next to a woman everybody else was embarrassed to be seen with, we saw what God was like. When He crossed the road and touched lepers that nobody in their right mind normally touched because they were unclean with this contagious disease, we saw what God was like.

When the disciples tried to drive the children away because they deemed them to be a nuisance, He said, “No, let them come”, and they probably climbed all over Him and they loved Him and He loved them, and we saw what God is like.”

Because the glory of God is the moral character of God, it is the expression of what God is like in His character.

Now, if this was true of Jesus (as it was), it was actually intended to be true of all human beings when God created us in His image. We have talked a number of times about what is the image of God? It is essentially His moral image – that is, when He created Adam and Eve in His image and placed them in the Garden of Eden – if you and I were a fly on the wall in the Garden of Eden (unless flies came after the fall, which they probably did), and we saw the way Adam treated Eve, we would have seen what God was like.

He would have been very kind because God is kind. He would have been loving because God is loving. If we saw the way Eve treated Adam, we would have seen what God was like. She would have been gentle and patient. If we saw the way they handled the animals in the garden, the way they patted the dog, stroked the cat, fed the guinea pig, cleaned out the chickens, we would have seen what God was like. Because, to be made in His image means you look at the image and you see what the real thing that it’s the image of is like; it’s His moral image.

Now having been created in God's moral image, something of course went wrong. We sinned and came short of the glory of God. We no longer showed what God was like. So if the law of God is equal to the glory of God, when God gave the law, the reason why He gave the law was in order to reveal what He is like so that we might understand what we are supposed to be like having been created in His image.

So when God said in the law, "You shall not steal", it's not because stealing isn't nice, though of course it isn't, but that isn't the reason. The reason is more profound than that. The reason why God said, "You shall not steal" is because God is not a thief, and human beings were created to be in His image, so do not steal.

When He said, "You shall not bear false witness", it's because God never tells lies and human beings were created to be in His image, so don't bear false witness.

When He said, "You shall not commit adultery", it's because God is totally faithful and human beings were created to be in His image, so don't ever commit adultery.

When He said, "You shall not covet", it's because God is not greedy and human beings were made to be in His image, so do not covet.

And the whole law was given to reveal what God is like because we were created in order to express what God is like. But we sinned and came short of the glory of God, so we're confused. And the law was given to show us what God is like.

Even when it says, for instance, "Six days shall you labor. On the seventh day do no work", it tells us why: because God rested on the seventh day. Not because He was tired of course, after six days of hard creating, but because He was finished.

And Adam was to enter into the finished work of God; the seventh day never ended in the Book of Genesis. And that's why for Adam, the first day was a day of rest because He was created on the sixth day, which was the best day to have been created, because if he had asked that night, "What's happening tomorrow? He would have heard it's a day off. That's why our calendar reflects that, because we rest in the sufficiency of God and work out of that position of rest. God rested because He was finished.

And when it says, "Children, honour your parents," it's because, within the Trinity, the Son says, "I always do those things that please the Father". And you were created to be in the image of God, so children, honour your parents.

You see the law was not an arbitrary set of rules, you know, "there's a mess down there on earth so let Me give them some rules to help give them some guidelines." No the law is far more profound than that. The law is a revelation of the character of God. It reveals what God is like because in so doing, it reveals what we are supposed to be like, having been created in His image.

And so my first point is: the purpose of the law is to reveal the character of God. And it's important we understand that if we are going to understand the rest of what I have to say this morning. Does that make sense? The purpose of the law is to reveal the character of God.

Now, if that is true, the second thing I want to talk about is the effect of the law. That is, what does it do for people? Because if the purpose of the law is to reveal the character of God, the effect of the law is to reveal the failure of human beings.

When Moses came down the mountain with the tablets of stone in his hand, the first command said, "You will have no other gods before Me", for the simple reason there are no other gods. That's a statement about God's uniqueness.

Second command: "You shall not make for yourself any graven image and bow down and worship it." And when Moses came down the mountain he discovered that the Israelites, in his absence, had pooled their gold, melted it all down, built a golden calf and were having some kind of orgy and celebration around this golden calf. And when Moses saw them worshipping the golden calf and the first command said, "No other gods", second command, "No graven image", Moses was shocked. So shocked, you remember, he took the tablets of stone and he smashed them on the ground and had to go back up the mountain and get some more.

Moses was shocked; God was not, because God did not learn something new about human beings. Human beings learned something new about themselves. They discovered, when the law was given, that we are not what we are supposed to be and they discovered further, neither can we be what we are supposed to be.

That's why it says in Romans 7:7,

"I would not have known what sin was except through the law."

You can be up to your neck in sin with a totally clear conscience about it and I have met and talked to people up their neck in sin who couldn't care two hoots for one simple reason: they don't actually know what the law is because they don't even know what God is and who God is.

And Romans 7 says that.

"I would not have known what sin was except through the law."

But then when the law came it exposed to me my sin, my failure. It's like playing with a bow and arrow out in the field. You can have great fun. You can pull back the arrow and feel the tension on the bow and the muscles rippling down your arm and then you release it and there's a tremendous surge of energy as the arrow shoots out of the bow.

And you have a great time until somebody comes into the field and says, “Hey, hang on a moment. Let me put up a target here.” And they set up a target. “Now hit the bull’s eye.” And you pull back the same arrow in the same bow with the same tension on the string and the same muscles rippling down your arm and you release it and you miss. Now previously you were having fun; now they have spoiled it by putting a target up because it exposes you are not a very good shot.

Well that’s what the law does. And Romans 3:20 says,

“Through the law we become conscious of sin.”

The law doesn’t make us a sinner. It makes us conscious of the fact I am missing the mark, which is why it is essential that we understand and teach the law of God. Because one of the things God has to do for you and for me - and until we really, really understand this, we’ll not make a lot of progress in the Christian life – what He has to do is expose to us our failure, the fact I myself cannot be what I am supposed to be.

And Jesus rubbed that in pretty severely here in the Sermon on the Mount because He said in Verse 21, “Have you heard it said, ‘You shall not murder or kill?’”

And of course they had heard that. They probably tried their best to live by that. “I say unto you,” said Jesus, “if you are angry with your brother, even though you would never dare to put a knife into his back, you wouldn’t put a bullet between his eyes, you are already guilty of murder.”

And they probably said to themselves, “What in the world are you saying?”

“Have you heard it said that you must not commit adultery?”

Yes, they had heard that.

“I say unto you”, said Jesus, “if you look after a woman, or look at a woman and lust after her, even though you may not know her name, even though you never find out where she lives, even though you would never have the courage to go and knock on her door, you are already guilty of adultery.”

They probably stood there saying, “You are kidding! What are you talking about?”

“Have you heard it said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth?’” Tit for tat – it sounds reasonable doesn’t it?

“I say unto you,” said Jesus, “if somebody hits you in the face, don’t hit them back. Turn the other cheek. If they take you one mile, go two. If they take your coat, give them your cloak as well.”



“Have you heard it said, ‘Love your neighbor; hate your enemy’?” (That’s reasonable doesn’t it?) “I say unto you, ‘Love your enemy. Pray for those who despitefully use you.’”

And I can imagine the beads of perspiration standing on the foreheads of these people as they probably said to each other, “I thought He was going to preach good news. This isn’t good news; this is terrible news. It was bad enough before when we couldn’t do these things. Now we can’t even think about them!”

What was Jesus doing? Well He was doing for them what He must do for you and for me. He was backing them into a corner where you can say, “I don’t murder, I don’t commit adultery, I don’t do this, I don’t do that”, to expose to them that actually in their natural state, we cannot be the people we were created to be.

Now whenever Jesus does that, as He does – and by the way, if there is any ambiguity left, anybody a bit confused, He finished at the end of Chapter 5 by saying, “Be perfect therefore” (that’s how He sums it up), “Be perfect therefore, even as your Heavenly Father is perfect.”

In other words He said, “Ladies and Gentlemen, here’s my summary. Would you please be as perfect as God.” What do you think they said at the end of that sermon? Do you think they said, “Wow that was a good message. Oh, I like that; I’m going to buy the CD.”

No, it tells us exactly what they said at the end of Chapter 7. They were “amazed at His teaching.” Were they amazed that it was so good? No, they were amazed because it was so ridiculous. “No one ever spake like this man.” Not because, “Wow, isn’t He good!” but “Wow, isn’t He crazy!”

“What do you mean, ‘be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect’?” When Jesus said that, He was saying nothing new. He was simply repeating what God said in the Garden of Eden, “Let’s make man in our image.” (When you look at man you see what God is like.)

He repeats what God said when He gave the law on Mount Sinai, that reveals what God is like. Because He is saying, in effect, that the criterion by which you are to be measured is actually God Himself and His moral perfection.

Now why does Jesus expose their failure? Why does He expose your failure? Why does He speak to you and to me about our sin?

Let me tell you why. It is never in order to humiliate us. It is never in order to embarrass us. It is never that he might rub our nose in our own dirt. It is always that He might, when we recognize it, clean us up and change us. But we have got to accept the diagnosis before we ever experience the remedy. We have to know the bad news, if you like, before we get to the good news.

If you are a physician, a medical doctor, forgive me for this illustration, but you are good people of course; you are always fixing people. But when you go to visit your doctor, you know, they often sound pretty negative don't they because they always want to know what's wrong with you. I mean it's not very nice is it?

Suppose you want to avoid that because you are into positive thinking and positive talk, and so you go to visit your doctor and you walk in with a smile on your face. And you say to her or to him, "Good morning Doctor. I'd like a bottle of pink medicine please."

He's say, "I can't just give you a bottle of pink medicine."

"Yes, you can. I had some last time – that strawberry flavoured stuff."

"No, I can't just give you some strawberry flavoured pink medicine. What's wrong with you?"

And you say, "Here we go again. That's so negative."

And so he asks you some, you know, personal and maybe some embarrassing questions. "Do you get up in the night?"

"Yes."

"How many times?"

"Oh, about 54."

"What color is it?"

"Well it's kind of blue."

"Blue? Hmm. Tell me if this hurts." And he gets his finger and pokes you.

"Ah, yes! You say, "It hurts!"

"I thought it would. How about this side?"

"Ah, yes, that hurts as well."

"Good."

Now why in the world does he ask you embarrassing questions and then poke you where it hurts? I'll tell you why. Because he's a good doctor.

First, “what’s wrong with you?” And having made a diagnosis, he will sit you down and say, “I have some good news and some bad news. Here’s the bad news: you are sick. Here’s the good news: I’ve got a remedy. It’s a bottle of pink medicine.”

But we will not know the remedy until we actually get the diagnosis. And do you know, there are many of us, and many of us are Christians, and we’re trying to sidestep the diagnosis. “Just give me the medicine. Just give me a band-aid, but don’t deal with the cause.”

And the Sermon on the Mount, as I said last week, drills down behind the symptoms to the fact it’s not simply what we do that is our problem; it’s actually what we are. That is where the rot is. And only when we know the depths of our need and only when we come to a point sometimes of almost despairing about that, we really discover the provision that God makes.

Which leads me to the third point. First was the purpose of the law is to reveal the character of God. The effect of the law is to reveal the failure of human beings. Thirdly, the fulfillment of the law; what does Jesus mean when He says, “I have not come to abolish the law. I have come to fulfill them.” That is, to make them work. He didn’t mean simply vicariously as an example to us. That wouldn’t help very much. But “I have come to make them work.” How does He fulfill the law?

Let me read to you three verses from three parts of Scripture and then I’ll tie them together. The first is in Colossians Chapter 1 and Verse 25 to 27. Let me read it to you. Paul says there,

“I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

(Sorry that was the wrong verse but that was just to see if you were listening. It’s the next verse. That was Verse 24. I was thinking, “that doesn’t sound very interesting and then I realized it was the wrong verse.)

Here it is. Verse 25:

“I have become its servant by the commission God gave me” (that’s his servant of the church) “by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness – the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.”

Let me pause there a moment. Paul says, “I am preaching to you the word of God in its fullness now.” There is nothing to add to it now. This is the full, final revelation and it includes what he calls a mystery – up until now there’s been a mystery. Up until now when a prophet has preached, he has gone home, sat down and scratched his head and said, “there is something missing; there is a mystery here.”

When Moses received the law, he went back to his tent, sat down, scratched his head and said, “Something is missing here; there is a mystery about this.”

“Now,” says Paul, “I am declaring to you that mystery.”

Verse 27:

“To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of” (what?) “glory.”

And that, by the way, does not mean heaven. In evangelical slang the word “glory” has come to mean heaven. We say people die and go to glory. That is not the biblical use of the word. What is glory? It is what you and I have come short of. “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” It is the moral character of God. It is what John says we saw in Jesus. “The Word became flesh, lived among us and we saw his glory.”

Now, he says, this is the hidden factor until now. Christ in you – not alongside you, not as your example, not simply holding your hand. But Christ in you, living His life in you, is your hope of hitting the target, your hope of what you have come short of – your hope of glory.

Now let me read you a second verse. I will come back to that and tie it together in a moment. Jeremiah 31 and Verse 33 is where God speaks about the New Covenant and He says this – Jeremiah 31:33 – he says,

“ ‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.’”

The New Covenant, says God to Jeremiah, will not involve a re-writing of the law but a re-locating of the law. Up until now it has been on tablets of stone kept in the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies in the temple in Jerusalem. “ I am going to take that same law, those same commandments, that same law, and I am going to write it in your minds and in your hearts. I am going to remove it from the external tablets of stone to internalize it in your heart, in your mind; I will be your God,” He goes on to say, “and you will be My people.”

Let me take you to the third verse. Ezekiel 36 and Verse 27 – and this is God speaking to Ezekiel now about the New Covenant. And He says to him in Verse 27,

“I will put my Spirit in you”

By the way, that is going to be something new, which took place at Pentecost. Jesus said to His disciples in John 14:17 about the Holy Spirit, “He is with you and will be in you.”

That's what happened at Pentecost - "I'll put my Spirit in you" and listen to this, as a result,

"...and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

"I will put My Spirit in you and do you know what will happen? You will follow My decrees, you will keep My laws."

Now let me put these three statements together. Christ in you is your hope of glory, hitting the target that you have come short of. "I will put My law in your mind, in your heart. I will be your God. I will put My Spirit in you and I will move you to follow My decrees."

And what this means, I suggest, is this: that what was a command under the Old Covenant will become a promise under the New Covenant. What were commands under the Old Covenant will become promises under the New Covenant.

And I am going to tell you a story I've told you before several years ago but I don't know a better story to illustrate this point than this true story of a man who was converted to Christ in a prison in the northeast of England some years ago.

He was in prison for stealing; he was a thief. And while he was there somebody had come to visit him regularly who was a Christian, who in the course of time had brought him into a relationship with Christ and he had become a Christian.

And on his release from prison one of the first things he wanted to do was to visit a church. He didn't know which church to go to so he picked one at random, went in, sat down at the back, looked up to the front and there on the wall in the front of the church were written the Ten Commandments; there were five down one side; there was five down the other. And he thought to himself, "That is the last thing I want to see. I know myself; I know my history; I know my failure; the last thing I want to do is to sit and read these laws which only condemn me."

But he did read them. Maybe the service was a bit long or became a bit tedious but he began to read them. And as he began to read them he realized he was reading them very differently to any way that he had read them before.

Previously when he read them they had said things like this: "You shall not steal" (it was a command). This morning when he read it, it said, "You shall not steal" (it was a promise).

If I can put words into his mouth – he didn't say this, but if I could put words into his mouth, he might well have said, "Thank You Lord." Why?

Because Christ in you now is your hope of hitting the target, your hope of glory.

It used to say, “You shall not bear false witness” (it was a command). But this morning when he looked at it, it said, “You shall not bear false witness (it was a promise).

He might have said, “Thank You Lord.” Why?

“Because I am going to put My law in your mind. I have put it in your heart; I am your God.”

It used to say, “You shall not commit adultery” (it was a command). But this morning it said, “You shall not commit adultery” (it was a promise).

He might have said, “Thank You Lord.” Why?

“Because I have put My Spirit in you and I will move you to follow My decrees and keep My laws.”

It used to say, “You shall not covet” (it was a command). But this morning it said, “You shall not covet” (it was a promise).

He might have said, “Thank You Lord.” Why?

“Because I have not come to abolish the law. I have come to fulfill them.”

And the very thing that had only ever been commandments now had become promises as the Spirit of Jesus Christ now lived in him for the purpose of fulfilling the law. Isn't that fantastic? I mean that's what the Gospel is about. It's about putting the life of God back into human experience, that through us He might restore the character of God, that once again we begin to behave in a way which reflects His character, His glory and His goodness.

That's why it says in Romans 8 and Verse 3; let me read this – Romans 8:3 – Paul writes there:

“What the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature”

(That is, the law could tell us exactly what was right, but it couldn't change us because of our own inherent fallen nature.)

“What the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.”

(That is, to present Himself as a substitute to pay the penalty of our sin.)

“And so he condemned sin in sinful man” (listen to this bit), “in order” (this is the result, the purpose), “in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be

fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”

What the law could not do, says Paul, Christ has done – well, God has done – by giving us His Son that now the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us. Notice it does not say, “fully met *by* us” because you and I cannot do this, but “fully met *in* us who live according to the Spirit” and not according to the old nature.

Now it means when the law says, “You shall not steal”, you don’t because you are more disciplined than you used to be? No. Because the Spirit of God now lives in you and the Spirit of God never steals.

You don’t bear false witness. Why not? Because you are a little more disciplined about that? That isn’t the reason. Because the Spirit of God now lives in you and He never tells lies.

And you begin to live in a way which is according to the law of God. And when we understand this, you’ll discover that possibly you have got a new Bible, that things you used to think were commandments, that you try and buckle down and conform to, are actually promises that are liberating.

I wonder if there is anybody here this morning that has a problem with stealing – some people do. I have got a promise for you. You’ll find it in Exodus Chapter 20. It’s not where you expect to find promises because Exodus Chapter 20 tells us this promise written on tablets of stone when Moses came down from Mount Sinai. But now, written by the Holy Spirit in your heart it has become a promise that says, “You will not steal.” That’s a promise. You let the Spirit of God fill your life; you’ll not steal.

Anybody here who is greedy? I have got a promise for you. It used to be a command; it’s in Exodus Chapter 20. It used to be written on tablets of stone. Now it’s written by the Spirit in your heart. It says, “You will not covet.” What does that mean? That means you will be satisfied.

“The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want. I shall not covet. I won’t need anything else.” You’ll be satisfied.

Anybody here facing sexual temptations that are almost more than you can bear? Well here’s a promise; it used to be a command written on tablets of stone; now it’s written by the Holy Spirit in your heart. It says, “You will not commit adultery.”

Nobody living by the Holy Spirit of God ever commits adultery. You’ve got to turn your back and grieve Him and quench Him and do your own thing if you’re going to do that, but not living by the Spirit of God.

Anybody here where things are far too important and you get things out of proportion and important things become unimportant and vice versa? Well here’s a promise for you. It

used to be a command; it used to be written on tablets of stone, in Exodus Chapter 20, now written by the Holy Spirit in your heart. It says, “You will have no other gods before me.” You will get your priorities right.

And you see, the response to a command is to obey it. And there’s obedience here (we’ll see that more next week). But the response to a promise is “Thank You.” Because “this is not what I do for you”; this, as Romans 8:4 says, “that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us”. By whom? By Jesus Christ who lives within you by His Holy Spirit. And you say, “Thank You.”

And this is the New Covenant. It doesn’t change the law, it doesn’t take it away, it doesn’t have any less requirements because the law reveals the character of God, which is why back in Matthew 5 and Verse 18, where we read earlier, Jesus said there that,

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

Jesus said, “This law is more secure than the earth on which you stand and even more secure than the heaven that you anticipate. Why? Because the law reveals God’s character. God is immutable – that is, He does not change. So there is no change to the law; there is only the change to the means by which it is fulfilled. It is no longer external; it’s internal; it is written by the Spirit of God in our hearts. And it has become a promise.

Does that mean we can be perfect? You might say, “Well it sounds as though you are saying that.” But the answer to that question is “No.” There is no provision for perfection in this life. But as Paul said in 2 Corinthians Chapter 3 – let me read you this verse as we close – 2 Corinthians 3:17,18 – Paul writes there (and he’s talking about the Old and the New Covenant here, comparing them and he says there,)

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect

(Notice this:)

“...the Lord’s glory”

(That is with nothing between us – we reflect His glory),

“...are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

Notice the tense of that statement there. He doesn’t say, “*We have been* transformed into His likeness” (past tense), nor “*We will be* transformed into His likeness” (future tense), but “*We are being* transformed into His likeness” (in the present continuing tense).



And this of course is the measure of spiritual growth. The measure of our spiritual growth is not that we know more of the Bible this year than last year, good as that may be, or that we engage in more Christian service this year than last year, good as that may be.

But the true measure of spiritual growth is that there is more evidence of the presence and character of Jesus Christ this year than there was last year.

Which, in very practical terms, means this: the way I, as a husband, treat my wife should more quickly remind her of Jesus Christ than it used to, of what God is like than it used to.

The way, as parents, we handle our kids gives them the freedom to go out into a dirty world but to come back home, where out there where everything is maybe confused and come back home and look into the face of Mom and Dad and say, "That's what's real."

The way we spend our money, the way we talk to our neighbors (perhaps more tellingly, the way we talk about our neighbors when they are not listening), which show more of what God is like than it used to.

Because the process of spiritual growth is that His character is more evident than it used to be until one day, from one degree of glory to another, we will one day be glorified. But that will not be in this life.

The Bible speaks of the day will come when we will be glorified. What does that mean? It means we will be fully restored into the image of God; we will be Christ-like in entirety. That doesn't mean we will be clones of Jesus because you will be you, I will be me, we'll be individuals, but we will be Christ-like in our moral character. That day is going to come.

But in this life that old nature will still fight against the Spirit, but the process of growth from one degree of glory to another is taking place.

And sometimes I need to just remind my wife that one day I am actually going to be perfect. And if she smiles, I say, "And so will you one day too."

In the meantime we're fumbling, bumbling, broken, messed up people and we still mess, but there is a work of the Spirit in our hearts. And we are usually the least conscious of it. We don't see Christ in ourselves; we see the struggle, the battles we face everyday, but the marvelous thing it is other people who through all of that see something of Jesus from one degree of glory to another.

"So", said Jesus, "I have not come from heaven with an apology for a law you have been unable to keep. I have not come to abolish it. I have not come to reduce it. I have not come to amend it. I have not come to tone it down. I have come to fulfill it, because the purpose of the law is to reveal the character of God. The effect of the law will be to

expose the failure of humanity. But the fulfillment of the law is that I, in you, will restore you into the image and character of God.”

And if you are a Christian this morning, as most of you are, and many of you watching on television, many of you are Christians, this is one of the great liberating truths of the Gospel. We haven't been given a ticket to heaven and in the meantime, in this life, you know, do your best to keep the rules.

We have been given the Holy Spirit of God Himself to live in us the life of Jesus, that all that He commands, Christ fulfills in us. They become promises and we are being transformed from one degree of glory to another.

But if you are not a Christian, and there may be many of you here this morning, and some of you listening to television, you have never come into a living, vital relationship with Christ, what I have talked about is way, way outside of your own experience or your own expectancy. All you need to do is come and say, “Jesus, I am bankrupt without You. I need You to come and live in me, to cleanse me of my sin, and then by Your Holy Spirit to be in me my hope of hitting that target as You restore the character and the image of God in me.”

If you are not a Christian you can become one right now. Just open your heart and say, “Lord Jesus, that's what I want. Please make this real for me.”

And if you are, but your Christian life is about as exciting as pushing a bus up a hill, a bus that's still got the brakes on it as well, and you think, “Where am I ever going to live this life?” You need to come and say, “God, I'm sorry, I've been trying to do it for You instead of realizing the whole point is that You do it in me.”

Let's pray together. Lord, we are so grateful, deeply grateful this morning that in our helplessness and in our inherent hopelessness and our failure and sin, the many, many times that we've fallen flat on our face and our face has been in the dirt, we realize Lord Jesus, that's all You expect of us in our own strength. But You don't expose that to humiliate us or embarrass us, but always that You might liberate us to be the people of God indwelt by the Spirit of God and portraying the character of God, as we allow You in us to work in us to will and to act according to Your good purpose. You place new desires, new motivation, new behaviour. Lord Jesus, we long that although we'll never know perfection in this life, we'll always need to say, “Sorry”, we pray that for many of us we might be filled with a fresh sense of hope and anticipation and excitement of what You want to do in us, for us and through us as we learn to rest in You. We pray it in Jesus' Name, Amen.