

Taking *Me* Seriously
Matthew 5:17-20

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I have a confession to make, and it does not come easily. This past year of driving, Candace and I got slammed with photo radar tickets. They crept up on us quickly, without even knowing. In January, when we bought a new van, I went to the registration office to change the plates from our SUV, and I was informed that there were two outstanding tickets on our registration, and we would need to pay them in order to get the registration changed. I was a little upset by this, as just a week earlier, the City of Edmonton had just mailed out tickets that people 'received' on the road as far back as October, and Candace and I both got 1 ticket, both doing 13 over the speed limit. We paid them off quickly, not wanting them to hinder our registration, and here they were still stuck on our account. I explained to the woman at desk the situation, and she asked for the receipts. No problem, I had them online. I pulled them up and showed her. She typed them into the computer and said, "Oh, it seems these fines are for other tickets," Other tickets!? What other tickets. They had been mailed out in March and April to our old address, and the previous address never forwarded them to us, and so, the fines had an extra juicy 20% on top of them that our government so needs. 400\$ later, I left the registration office quite disparaged. The fact remained though, we deserved the tickets because we were caught speeding. We can balk photo radar all we want, but when we get a ticket its because we are breaking a current law. That got me thinking, I wonder what other laws I've broken, that maybe I don't even know about. I'm sure there were some laws in place in Canada that many people even know about, and commit, but because of the change of time or place, are outdated, or made irrelevant. In Uxbridge, Ontario, it is illegal to have an internet modem faster than 56K. I don't know what year 56K modems became irrelevant but it was probably around the time I was born. Let's take an eve further leap back; in all of Ontario, if you do not pay your hotel bill at the end of your stay, the government has given the hotel the right to take your horse and sell it for compensation. That will teach those Toronto cowboys. It's also illegal in Ontario to drive your sleigh on a highway...*unless* at least two bells are attached to let others know you're there. I can imagine that would go over well during rush hour on the 401. And if that horse pulling that sleigh dies once you get off the 401 and onto Yonge Street, it is fully illegal to drag that dead horse down Yonge street, on a Sunday. And if the dragging of that horse down Yonge Street on a Sunday offends a man so much he challenges you to a pistol duel, rest assured, it is illegal to accept an invitation to duel anywhere in Canada. And if during the altercation, the dead horse on Yonge Street begins to stink up the street, by the way, that's illegal too.

We smile and laugh at these laws because they all don't apply to us anymore. They did, and were important for people 100 years ago perhaps, who rode horses consistently before cars were widespread, but now, the fact that they exist is so irrelevant we find them humorous. For a time, and for a specific people though, these laws served and protected the decency of Canadians. They had intention, they were passed probably because each of these offences happened more than once and had enough clout to be dealt with. It's easy for us, looking at these 19th century laws, to see which ones we would be fined for, and which ones the police themselves have probably

completely forgotten about. And there are laws in the Bible, too. Laws that seem irrelevant to us at times, and some we say we no longer have to obey because of Christ. The difficulty with the 613 laws of the Old Testament, unlike Canadian law, is that it is much harder to tell which laws are completed, and no longer require our accommodation. So the question is, how seriously then do we take the law?

When I first started attending church, back in 2010, I did not receive the information I needed to know about Godly living in the Old Testament. This was not by much fault of church leaders, but because breaking down the understanding of every word of God is not really a sermon topic, but instead a sermon series that could last millenia. When we read the Word, we want a systematic breakdown of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; we want chapter by chapter, verse by verse, Greek by Greek, so that we absolutely without a doubt know what Matthew 5:17 means. This is not a bad heart, towards God. This is an important and amazing way to preach, called expository preaching. The only issue is that when you want to knock a particular point home, it falls short. Since my last sermon, I was wondering where I should go. We discussed The Great Commission, how to act on it; tangible ways to be serious about it. We discussed discipleship, being a real disciple of Christ. But something encompasses both sermons I want to reinforce; its called 'Taking the Word of God seriously.' *"There are too many Christians who are end-users."* Murray Cornelius, leader of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Africa said in class this past week. *"This means people love to bask in the grace and mercy God pours out on them, His providence, but do not think to return Him the favour."*

I was an end-user Christian, and statistically, so are many Christians. I spoke about my testimony briefly in my previous sermons, how I came from a non-Christian family, came to youth group here at SVBC, as an atheist. God changed my heart and transformed me. He revealed Himself to me in tangible ways, and through the logic of His moral law. The problem I began to run into, was taking the Bible seriously, especially understanding the Old Testament's relevance to my life. If you had asked me "do you take it seriously" I would have certainly said yes, but my Bible reading and understanding of the fulfilment of Christ were little to nonexistent.

Now, of course, a new Christian does not understand how to take the Bible seriously, because he does not understand much about God. Are there parts of the Bible that must be taken more seriously than others? Are there parts of the Bible that as Christians we disregard? I became greatly confused as a new Christian because while reading the Old Testament, I saw many of the 'ceremonial laws' which I was told we do not need to obey, interspersed between laws that we currently obey. While reading the Old Testament, at the same time I was reading the New Testament, I began feeling like there were two different gods in the Bible; the God of the Old Testament, who was angry and vengeful, and then the New Testament God who was kind, loving, and sacrificing His Son for us. To me, at first, I only had to pay attention to the New Testament God, because the Old Testament God changed when Jesus came.

This is what Richard Dawkins, renowned atheist scholar, says about Yahweh from his book, *The God Delusion*; "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive,

bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”

This is what the world thinks of our God. Millions of people have read this book, including in parts, myself. Millions of people have read this quote and have completely misunderstood God in every act he could be understood. When questioned on this, what would you say? What if a person came to you and said “God is a... 18 negative adjectives about egotism... Bully. What do you say?” At that exact moment, how seriously a person takes God becomes infinitely evident. It did for me; this exact situation happened to me about 6 years ago, when an atheist friend of mine was reading the *God Delusion* by Dawkins and came to me with this quote. And she asked me, what do you think? We don’t really have to obey all those laws, right? They’re old and useless anyway. Just love!

It was at that moment, I realized how underequipped I was. I could talk Jesus just fine, explain the forgiveness of Christ and His death on the cross, His resurrection and the plan He had for their lives, but I could not rectify Christ with decisions that were made by God in the Old Testament, and so I started believing and recanting a classic lie. “Christ did away with all of that. Jesus came and completed all the Old Testament, God has changed. All the Old Testament was necessary to get where we are. The end.”

And what a disservice to God it is when we disregard His Word because we cannot understand it fully. What a disservice it is to people asking real questions about God, when I gave that answer to my friend that simply covered my arsears. The problem was that I did not take God seriously. I was an end-user Christian; I received all the blessings but did not give a thought to get to know God. It wasn’t until only a few years ago when that cycle was broken for me; when I began to take really understanding His Word seriously. Not just come to church on Sunday, sing songs, shake hands and go home. This will be my 3rd sermon from Matthew, and I haven’t planned this. I don’t know why God is revolving me around Matthew but, I am consistently amazed at the words of Christ in this ex-tax collectors Gospel. If you have a Bible with you, turn with me now to Matthew 5:17 and we will be reading until 20. If you don’t have one, it will be on the screen behind me. This is the sermon on the mount, Christ is speaking to His closest disciples from His heart. He names the bless-ed, He commands the disciples to be the salt, the rich mineral that brings out flavouring, of the earth. To change the flavour of the Godless world, and then 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**. 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**. 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. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

My response to my friend about Christ was *true*! But completely premature, making it wholly *untrue*. It would only be true after Christ came again. The Old Testament and the New Testament are not different gods, or one God who changed, they are the same God, timeless and

unchanging. Christ Himself says it clearly here, “Don’t think I came to destroy the OT.” It is the same God with the fullness of all of His attributes displayed differently through time. Christ has not come to abolish, but to fulfill.

Let’s break this down. First, we know Christ came as the fulfilment of the Old Testament; now when Christ says “The law and the prophets”, by the way, it is a regular Jewish term for the Old Testament itself. Christ isn’t distinguishing between whether he’s fulfilled the law *and* the prophets, but it’s understood to mean to law/prophets. They have the same relevancy and importance to Christ’s mission.

It has been said that because Christ has died on the cross, we no longer are committed to doing the sacrificial laws of the OT; the freewill offering, the sin offering, etc. This is a fact. Why? Because Christ was the ultimate sacrifice. For the sins of man, the blood of rams and goats and turtledoves could not satisfy the just punish due for these acts. Only a sinless God-man could satisfy the requirements, and this was known to God from the beginning. This is where the excuses start, about taking the Old Testament seriously. If Christ has fulfilled it why obey it?

Second, we must understand that all the Mosaic law, that is the laws put in place by God through Moses, whether moral or ceremonial, were meant for a purpose. This purpose was to keep Israel holy until the coming of Christ. What is holiness? It’s about being separate from the rest of the world and having a mindset that is purely set towards God. It’s about having a repentant heart towards your God, and then actually acting on that repentance. The Mosaic law was a means to an end. It was a way of communicating the desires of God, of His love, through physical and mental devotion while the Spirit was not indwelling people, but instead dwelling among people. It was not devoid of feeling; the Israelites acutely understood the cost of sin when they gave up their prized animals as sin offerings. It took thousands of years of this system until God gave up His prized Son to complete the job of those offerings. Hosea 6:6, “I desire steadfast love, not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings.” Even in that time, while living under the law, God reveals that the law has a fulfillment. He wants steadfast love for Himself, rather than a physical sacrifice. He wants the heart of man to be turned towards Him, not just the deeds of man. Deeds can never satisfy fully, and we know that for we are justified by faith and we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, Romans 5:1. What God is not so clear on is His destiny for the moral law.

We want to take Him seriously, we read the Old Testament and we become confused. What about Leviticus? There are instructions on top of instructions in a book like Leviticus. Not only are there laws for pure living, but they are weaved in between the ceremonial and moral. Paragraph by paragraph, his intentions change. The end of chapter 17:11 says “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.” Moments later, in Ch. 18:6, it says “None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the Lord.” These are two vastly different things. We know, and it’s even Canadian law, that you cannot marry a close relative.

-In vs. 18 and 19, Jesus is demanding total fidelity and obedience to the law.

-Matthew's Jesus says in vs. 21-48, 'my demands are even more stringent than other interpretations of the law.'