

“You Have Heard it Said”: Jesus Teaches Us How to Understand God's Law

DARRELL DELANEY

I have, and always will be, a fan of music. In the hay day of 1990s R&B music, there were hit songs that came out, and people loved them; but my favorite was when the musicians took that same song and remixed it into a new sound, rhythm and key. Remixes were a staple of the 1990s. To hear an already good song in a new way wowed people, and many looked forward to new remixes to come. In this episode of *Groundwork*, we will see Jesus’ remix teachings from the law, and how these remixes are helpful and vital for us today. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we are at the half-way mark of our six-part series on the Sermon on the Mount. The first episode was on the Beatitudes in the first twelve verses of Matthew [Chapter 5] and the second episode was on being salt and light; and today, we are going to talk about various topics that Jesus dealt with in one fell swoop.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right. Some of this sounds sort of outdated or old fashioned and so forth, because Jesus is going to talk a lot about the law and what we need to do to live a new life and so forth and so on; and really what he is going to be talking about here Darrell falls for Christians into the category of gratitude. So, we are going to talk about the law...you know, sometimes people think that the law...well, we are saved by grace, right? Not by the law, right? The law was the Old Testament. Now we are saved by grace. The law doesn’t matter. Jesus teaches the law does matter. It doesn’t get you saved by keeping it, but once you are saved, you are set free to then keep the law; because the law is God’s operating instructions for creation.

DARRELL DELANEY

I like how you brought up the fact that it is gratitude, because we learn that in the Heidelberg Catechism: it is guilt, grace and then gratitude...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the fact that we have a new life...we need to know how to live that new life. We can go back to the law to find out what that is. When the people in his time saw Moses’ law, they knew that was for life and for conduct. What we don’t need to mix up is the fact that we don’t earn our own righteousness with that kind of practice, but out of the righteousness we have already been afforded by Jesus, we get to live a new life; and he goes into that in this passage.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; in fact, Jesus is going to make it as plain as he can, beginning in verse 17 now of Matthew Chapter 5: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸For truly I tell you, 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. ¹⁹Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly 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. ²⁰For 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.”

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, I love the fact that Jesus says: I did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. That is good news for us for a couple of reasons. I think the first one is that even though we are under grace, we understand that Jesus did everything in the law that we couldn't do. I mean, the Israelites found out years and years ago that they could not keep the law, and they needed somebody to come in and atone for the sins that came from them breaking the law; and the second thing is that because he did that fulfilling, he has earned the righteousness that he gives to us as a grace gift through salvation and faith. So, we get to enjoy the benefit of him fulfilling that law in his life and his work, even though we didn't do that law ourselves.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; sometimes Jesus is called the end of the law. On one level, people think: Oh, so it is done, huh; the end. No, not *end* in the sense of over and done with. The Greek word is *telos*. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law; and in two ways: One, he kept it perfectly, and now credits us with that perfect righteousness. So, we get credit as if we had kept it perfectly, even though we didn't.

DARRELL DELANEY

Thanks Romans 5.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and the other sense in which Jesus is the fulfillment of the law is that in his own life he embodied what the law is; and guess what? Keeping the law makes you gracious and kind and open and hospitable, and all the things Jesus was; and all the things the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were not. So, isn't it interesting, Darrell, he says: Your righteousness has to surpass that of the Pharisees.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, man; that is a zinger at the Pharisees because it seems that the Pharisees had all the external things down: the piety...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

They would do the ceremonial washings in front of people, they would give alms and offerings in front of people so that everyone would see their good deeds, and Jesus actually tells us that it is not about all the externals. There is something that needs to happen in our hearts, and if we don't have a heart change, all of those actions are futile—all of those actions only bring glory to us as people, they don't point back to our heavenly Father. There is a pride and self-righteousness that can come from us checking off our legalistic boxes...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

He is saying: Pharisees...you have to do more righteousness than that. You cannot be like those people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so, it is not an external matter. We are going to get to that in just a second...the first example of that. I do think in the popular imagination, though, Darrell, it also probably made people think: Well, nobody could be as good as the Pharisees. So, there is a sense in which Jesus is saying: Well, you are right about that, too. It is all about grace. I mean, you are going to have to be transformed by grace to have any chance to keep this law; because, as Jesus is going to go on to say what you just said, Darrell, it is a matter of the heart. It is a matter of what is on the inside, and Jesus gives us the first example of that in terms of what it really means to not murder.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it says here if we continue in Chapter 5:21, it says: “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ ²²But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

Wow!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Some people have pointed out that what Jesus is going to do here...and we are going to see in the rest of the program with more of the Ten Commandments is that Jesus radicalizes the commandments in the sense of the Latin word *radix*, which means *root*. Jesus is getting to the root of this; and so, here he is saying: Hey, you never shot somebody; you never slipped a knife in between somebody’s ribs; you never actually, literally took a life? Good; but you know what? When you are angry enough to curse somebody, that is murder, too. I want you to be loving. A loving person doesn’t murder a person physically, but a loving person doesn’t murder them emotionally either.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, and that word *raca* is not a compliment at all...

SCOTT HOEZEE

No.

DARRELL DELANEY

That word *raca* is a contempt word, is disrespectful, a public humiliating word. If you yell out *you fool* to someone and everybody is watching, you literally, essentially murdered their character in front of the people; and I know people who could say: I haven’t stabbed somebody; I haven’t shot somebody; but you actually could do it in 140 characters or less on line, where you gossip something, you inadvertently or you intentionally destroy someone’s character; and Jesus is saying it is not just about what you do physically, but it is your heart and your intention and your motive behind it; and I would love for Jesus to continue to challenge us this way, and God forgive us when we go astray in this area.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; murder by tweet. I mean, you can do it. It happens every day, because it does, indeed, get at the position of your heart over against other people. Now, we should point out that in the Bible there is such a thing as wisdom and folly, and the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament talks a lot about fools. We don’t mean that—that is not what we mean here in terms of somebody who is wise versus being foolish. This is a contempt word, as you said, *raca*, or fool in this sense, is a way to destroy someone’s character and mind and heart; and Darrell, we know sometimes bullying of young people...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Does lead to their physical death. They commit suicide. If we ever needed to see the connection between what Jesus is saying here and actual, physical death, that is a very, very sad example. Jesus is getting at the root—at the radix; he is radicalizing the law, and he is going to keep doing that in what comes up next; so, stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, let's jump right back into the teachings of Jesus here, as he is talking about the law and the deeper parts of the law here in Matthew 5; some of the Ten Commandments are coming in here. We just looked at what he really thinks *thou shalt not murder* means. It also means what comes out of our mouths as reflective of what is in our hearts; but now, he is going to go on in verse 23 and talk about something that is not strictly in the Ten Commandments, but it is important.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, it says here: "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. ²⁵Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is talking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, this is interesting. Here, Jesus makes a connection between worship—proper worship of God—and everything else going on in our lives, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, anybody who wants to treat Sunday, let's say, going to church, as something separate from their Monday through Saturday life, Jesus is saying no. They are deeply connected. If you've got problems with somebody, if you are yourself guilty of some injustice...you owe somebody something...or if you yourself, you know, have an adversary, don't worship God until you get that straightened out. Again, just like we said with murder, get your heart in the right place, then come and worship God.

DARRELL DELANEY

You know it is interesting that Jesus says, not just if you have an alt with your neighbor, but if your neighbor has an alt with you. So, then you have to be in tune and connected in your relationships to know...not just your vertical relationship with God...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

But your horizontal relationships with one another we need to address and make sure that there...if there is anything we can reconcile. We can say: I did my part; and if they don't forgive me, that is fine, but I tried...I made an effort. I think it is really interesting how many Christians actually take each other to court and actually sue each other. I feel like if we had this conversation or a way to reconcile, we may not make it to court. We might be able to settle outside of court. I know sometimes people see that as a bad thing when you settle outside of court, but this is actually a good thing in this case.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; it is a matter of our relationships. Jesus is very concerned about our relationships; and he wants us, as far as it lays with us, anyway, right? I mean, as you said Darrell, a minute ago, sometimes we try to reconcile with somebody. We really want to and they don't want anything to do with us, you know; well, you have hit a wall. That doesn't mean you cannot go to church. It doesn't mean you cannot take the Lord's Supper. You did your best, and maybe this person will come around; but try anyway; try. Don't come into worship with your heart a cauldron of resentment and anger. You know, nobody can see it, but God can...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it taints your worship, right? It taints your worship; so, don't do that. So, that is an important warning about worship; but then, Jesus returns now also to another of the Ten Commandments in verse 27 of Matthew 5:

“You have heard it said ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Jesus is talking about adultery. He is still following the Ten Commandments here. Of course, we know adultery is when you have a romantic relationship with someone outside of your spouse; and today we would call it cheating; and Jesus is saying that that shouldn't happen, not only in the physical act, but if you look at someone with lust in your heart, you literally committed adultery with them in your heart. So, he is also tying, not just the physical act, but the heart condition; and it is very important for us to check our hearts in these matters.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and I think in our modern-day context in particular, I don't know if in Jesus' day there was any equivalent of pornography, but these are things designed to incite lust in us, for people other than the person to whom you are married; and Jesus uses radical language here to tell us: Look, just like with murder, this is about your heart and your internal disposition, you know; better you could gouge out your eye than spend your whole life looking at the wrong thing, or looking at other people and objectifying them for your own pleasure and so forth; again, very radical language. Clearly, Jesus is trying to get our attention.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think that it does get our attention; and Paul picks up on it in Ephesians 5:3 when he says: But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or lust of any kind. We see in this culture that we have a hypersexualized culture that gives more than hints everywhere, and we have to actually, you know, listen to Jesus' teaching here, even though he is using hyperbole again, where he says if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; but there are ways that we can abstain from feeding our sinful flesh and our sinful desires, if we limit what we see; if we limit what we touch. Those things are ways to actually honor God and keep it pure; because ultimately if we are believers, we are the bride of Christ and

Christ is the groom, and we need to be faithful to our spouse in this case. So, we need to walk faithfully and allow God's grace to help us when we fall down.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and it is a challenge today. I mean, Darrell, you cannot see a TV ad for a cheeseburger...

DARRELL DELANEY

Hello!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Without somebody trying to, you know, make it have something to do with sex and lust. So, it is a very great challenge, but Jesus definitely is getting our attention through radical imagery. He has one more related thing that we will look at yet in this segment, starting in verse 31.

DARRELL DELANEY

Jesus says here: "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So again, Jesus is getting our attention here. He wants us to get down to the root; again, the radix, the radicalizing of the law here; and he is saying the covenant of marriage is important. It is sacred. It is all-important, and you can never treat it casually. You cannot just...and he has been talking mostly to men here, because in Jesus' day, women couldn't initiate a divorce...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Only the man could. So, Jesus is saying you cannot just, you know, say: Divorced; you know, hand her a piece of paper and it is done, like it's no big deal. No; in God's eyes, marriage is for life, and we need to respect that as much as we can.

DARRELL DELANEY

And you know, I just want to put my pastoral hat on here, if I can, Scott. You know, for people who go through traumatic situations, domestic abuse or anything that brought harm to self or others, I do not counsel them to go back into those situations because they don't want to break this divorce rule here; because it could be something that could be way worse if they stay in that situation; but I do know that this teaching was, I think, for people who had selfish interests: I just don't want to be married anymore. We have irreconcilable differences, but cannot really name the differences; but he dealt with the heart again. If it is a lust-controlled person who is not able to stay faithful, that is not a reason to divorce. So, Jesus is trying to help us understand that God does not like divorce, but for those who have already experienced divorce and you are in a remarriage, there is forgiveness. If you confess those things, God can forgive those things and give you grace.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think a lot of churches have discovered that, you know, there are lots and lots of ways to break the covenant of marriage...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Obviously, cheating...you know, adultery breaks it; and Jesus singles that out here. But you are breaking your covenant...you are being unfaithful as a spouse when you beat your wife up or you abuse children...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or you are a danger in some other way. There are lots of ways, and as you just said, Darrell, God understands that and is the God of grace and of new beginnings. But as we wrap up this episode, let's see what Jesus said about oaths and some other things that go to our practical, daily lives; so, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and Scott, we have covered a lot of ground following Jesus' teachings through the Sermon on the Mount; and in this final segment, we want to let people know Jesus' teachings on how important it is to keep your word, but also some practical steps on how to walk out these teachings.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; verse 33 of Matthew 5: "Again, you have heard it said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.'"³⁴ But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne;³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.³⁷ All you need to say is simple 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

DARRELL DELANEY

Of course we know, Scott, an oath is a vow...it is a promise to do something; and when people usually swear by something, they swear by something greater than them or of great value to them. So, if I say: I swear to God or I put down my mother's life or my children, this and that, we find those things that we swear by to be precious; but Jesus is saying you don't need to do all of that. All you need to do is make a commitment and follow through on that commitment. If your yes is yes and your no is no, we can trust you at your word; and that was the point, I think, of what Jesus is saying.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and it is interesting, Jesus is saying, you know, look, don't bring in heaven or earth or Jerusalem or anything else, or don't even swear on your own head. None of it belongs to you. It is God's earth, God's city; it is God's head. You cannot even change the color of the hair on your head. So, just say yes or no; and if you are a person of good character...here is what Jesus is getting at...if you are a person of good character and you tell somebody yes or no, that is all you need to say. They believe you. I don't know about you, Darrell, but you know, people who kind of jump up and down on one leg and try to bolster their promises with lots of colorful language...they always seem kind of shaky to me, you know: Oh, I swear on the eyes of my children. It is like why are you being so dramatic? I think you are lying to me. If you were really confident...if you really want me to believe you, just say: I promise; you will see, I promise you. That is all you need to say, Jesus says. Because otherwise, you are probably trying to cover something up.

DARRELL DELANEY

If you have a consistent track record, you don't have to do that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that is really what Jesus is saying. He says our character will shine through; then our words really mean something. I know people who have promises broken and people's word that have not meant anything; and Jesus is saying if you live out the way you are supposed to live, then you can just say yes or no.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and you know what, Darrell, we have both had this; everybody has. If you know somebody who has repeatedly broken their promise to you, it doesn't matter what they say: Swear to God! You know, they can swear by anything they want, I am not going to believe them again, and neither are you, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You don't help yourself by invoking heaven or earth, Jerusalem, your own head, your children, your mama. It doesn't matter, if you break your promise consistently, I just don't believe you; and Jesus says be the kind of person who can be believed.

DARRELL DELANEY

That's a beautiful thing. So, I mean, what have we learned here? We have been thinking about many of these teachings that Jesus has done. I know the first thing is that God cares about what we do, but he also cares about our hearts. That is very important because heart and motive are connected to our actions.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and that is what we have been saying, that Jesus goes to the root, and the root of the law, unlike the Pharisees who only kept it on the outside, but on the inside Jesus will later say: You are like whitewashed tombs—you look great on the outside, but inside you are full of dead bodies. Be good on the inside, Jesus is saying. God looks at the heart, and the heart is also the locus—the location—from which the rest of your life gets lived out. So, be good on the inside.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think another thing that we learned, too, is that relationships are important; and how we treat others matters to God: what we say, what we do, and how we respond to people. You mentioned earlier people who we think are beneath us, whatever position or status they have, follow how we treat them and care how we treat them, because God cares about how we treat them as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; don't come to worship...I mean, this is what the Old Testament prophets really assailed the Israelites for. They spent all week living lives of injustice, and then they come to the Temple of the Sabbath and say: Well, I guess this makes it all okay. God says no, it doesn't. What you do the rest of the week matters. But of course, all of this is because we have been transformed by grace. We are not trying to earn our way into the kingdom. This is how we act after we have been brought into the kingdom. The righteousness we live is purely by grace alone.

DARRELL DELANEY

That righteousness is not earned by pious, external actions, but it is a gift given to us. Thank you, God, for that. But also, that God's standards are different than these standards of the world.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and it is the right way to live, right? I mean, that is the great thing. We forget, Darrell, that in the Old Testament the law of God was regarded by Israel as a gift of grace. It is a gift to be given the owner's manual for life, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

If you ever tried to program a DVD player or something without the owner's manual, you know it is impossible. You need the instructions; and when you have them, things go so much better. God wants us to flourish. God wants us to live lives of delight; and that is why Jesus is the end—the fulfillment—of the law. He himself perfectly embodies the law. He himself perfectly fulfilled the law, and he gives us credit. So, all we can say is thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we continue our study of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount by examining his teaching on prayer and the prayer he teaches his disciples, the one we now know as the Lord's Prayer.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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