

II. Fulfillment of the Law – Jesus’ relationship to the Torah (5:17–20)

Christ Fulfills the Law

17 “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. **18** For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one [b]jot or one [c]tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. **19** Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **20** For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jot - Smallest Letter - Tittle - Smallest stroke in a hebrew letter

1. Jesus’ Shocking Statement

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets...”

- Most of His audience *assumed* He would overturn the old system.
- Instead, He honors it — but then raises it to its **truest, deepest meaning**.
- Jesus is not the destroyer of the law; He is the **telos** (goal, completion, heartbeat) of the law.

Jesus isn’t scrapping God’s law — He’s revealing what it was pointing to all along.

He is referring to the old commandments *as they were truly meant*, not the later distortions — AND He is preparing the ground for the new, deeper commandments He is about to reveal.

It’s a **bridge verse**, intentionally pointing in *both* directions.

the immediate context is:

“I did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets...”

So the “commandments” here **cannot exclude the Torah** — He is affirming its validity and authority.

He is saying:

- The law is not garbage.
- The law is not a failed system.
- The law is not being erased.
- The law still reveals God’s will.

So in its first sense, **“the least of these commandments” means the commandments in the Law and Prophets.**

2. What “Fulfill” Actually Means

The Greek *plēroō* means:

- to complete
- to bring to full meaning
- to fill up with true substance

Jesus is saying:

“Everything the law was trying to shape in humanity — I am.”

He reveals:

- the mercy behind the sacrifices
- the purity behind the purity laws
- the love behind the commandments
- the justice behind the prophets

3. The Law Outside vs. The Law Inside

This begins the whole section where Jesus transitions the crowd:

From behavior → to the heart

From external rule → to internal transformation

From ‘avoid sin’ → to ‘become like the Father’

Jesus is not adding new rules — He’s **revealing what righteousness *actually* is.**

4. The Call to a Deeper Righteousness

“Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees...”

A terrifying statement — **unless** you realize:

- Pharisees had *perfect rules* but *broken hearts*
- Jesus offers a *transformed heart* that naturally lives the truth
- The new righteousness is not stricter... it’s *truer*

This is the righteousness of:

- love
- humility
- mercy
- purity of intention
- peace

It’s the righteousness of the **Beatitudes**, now lived out.

*“Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called **least in the kingdom of heaven.**”*
(Matt. 5:19)

Not *excluded*.

Not *condemned*.

Not *cast out*.

Not *lost*.

Not *hell-bound*.

Least... in the Kingdom.

Which means — unmistakably — they are *still inside*.

What Jesus is Revealing (and What Humans Don't Want to See)

1. Jesus' kingdom has degrees of honor — but not degrees of access

This is the opposite of religious fear-talk.

Men say:

- “Break a law? You're out.”
- “Fail once? You're condemned.”
- “Fall short? God rejects you.”

Jesus says:

- “Fail the smallest commandment? You are still MINE. You are still IN the Kingdom. But your understanding and your honour will be small.”

This is **Fatherhood**, not authoritarian religion.

2. Jesus' standard is relational, not punitive

Breaking the least commandment does not expel you from the family.

It only reveals:

- a smaller maturity

- a smaller grasping of love
- a smaller reflection of the Father

But never exclusion.

A child who doesn't understand the house rules is still a child of the house.

3. But religious systems can't tolerate this

Why?

Because religion is built on:

- control
- fear
- boundary lines
- measuring
- moral superiority

So they invert Jesus' words:

- Where He says "least **in** the Kingdom," they preach "outside the Kingdom."

They turn His mercy into a threat.

They turn His invitation into a warning.

They turn His Fatherhood into a policing mechanism.

4. Jesus is exposing the difference between God's heart and human judgment

Humans condemn quickly because it makes them feel:

- safer
- purer

- superior
- justified
- more certain
- more righteous

But Jesus sees:

- the heart
- the journey
- the intention
- the wound beneath the behaviour
- the destiny within the child
- the gold within the clay

He says:

“Even if they fail the *smallest* command — they remain My child.”

This is why sinners ran *toward* Jesus and not away.
He carried no condemnation in His presence.

Religious men threaten hell for the smallest failures.
Jesus offers a Kingdom where even the smallest soul still belongs.

1. The Greatest Commandment

Jesus says the greatest commandment is:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

And the second is like it:

Love your neighbour as yourself.

(Matt. 22:37–40)

So what happens if someone breaks *that*?

Religion screams:
“Hell.”

But Jesus never said that.

Not once.

2. Breaking the greatest commandment is simply... the human condition

Nobody — not one person on earth — fully obeys the greatest commandment.

Nobody loves God:

- with all their heart
- with all their mind
- with all their strength
- with all their soul

Not consistently.

Not perfectly.

Not by nature.

If God condemned every person who fails that commandment, heaven would be empty.

So the question you're asking touches the deepest truth:

We all break the greatest commandment daily — and yet He still loves us, still draws us, still forgives us, still calls us His.

4. Breaking the greatest commandment does not remove someone from God — it reveals their need for Him.

Break the greatest commandment... and what happens?

According to Jesus:

You become:

- the lost sheep
- the lost coin
- the lost son

And the Father:

- goes after you
- searches for you
- runs to you
- embraces you
- restores you

The greatest commandment you break calls forth the greatest love God gives.

The equation is astonishing:

The greater the commandment,
the greater the mercy when it's broken.

The most dangerous way to teach others to break the commandments

Teaching that some people deserve less love.

When a religious leader says:

- “THOSE people don’t deserve mercy.”
- “Those people are beyond forgiveness.”
- “Those people are outside grace.”

They are:

- killing the law's purpose
- killing the gospel
- and teaching the opposite of Christ

Jesus says:

“Whatever you do to the least of these, you do to Me.”
(Matt. 25:40)

Teaching someone to despise “the least”

teaching someone to despise Christ Himself.

This is the *highest form* of breaking the commandments.

VI. The Call to a Greater Righteousness (v.20)

“Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees...”

A. Pharisees obeyed the *outer*. Jesus requires the *inner*.

B. The new righteousness is not stricter — it is **truer**.

C. It is not behavioural perfection, but heart transformation.

D. This prepares the way for:

- anger → heart murder
- lust → heart adultery
- oaths → inner truthfulness
- retaliation → inner nonviolence
- enemy love → divine likeness
“God does not want actors performing righteousness — He wants sons and daughters becoming righteous.”

A Final Insight: Righteousness That “Exceeds” Is Actually Righteousness That Is *Alive*

When Jesus says:

“Unless your righteousness exceeds...”

He isn't saying:

- “Be better than Pharisees.”
- “Try harder.”
- “Outperform the best.”

He is saying:

**Their righteousness is dead.
Yours must be living.**

Pharisees had:

- accurate doctrine
- strict behaviour
- zero heart transformation

Jesus requires:

- living love
- living mercy
- living purity
- living peace
- living desire

- living trust
- **The physical world is the temporary stage — the inner world is the real story**
Everything Jesus teaches in Matthew 5 is built on a single assumption:
The heart is reality.
The body is expression.
The world is passing.
The spirit is eternal.