

Do you think you can keep all United States laws? That would be 50 titles of the United States Code where the laws are recorded. Included under those 50 titles would be many chapters, parts, sections, paragraphs, and clauses. Then you would have to also know the 50 titles of the Code of Federal regulations, which govern agencies and organizations in the United States. In addition there are the 48 volumes of the United States Reports which contain the Supreme Court decisions on laws. These three all stand underneath the authority granted by the Constitution of the United States as the supreme law of the land.

With that many laws each of us might just be breaking some right now and not even know it. Truth is we probably only worry about the laws we know. We need to break it down into something more manageable otherwise we'll go crazy trying to keep up. We feel if we can keep the ones that especially pertain to us then we're really keeping the law. God's people did the same thing. They took the Law given to them by God through Moses and they made it more manageable. If they didn't they'd be breaking it all the time.

During his teaching the disciples in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus addresses the size and scope of the Law of Moses. God's expectations are high. Jesus didn't come to do away with that high expectation, he came to fulfill it. He didn't come to start erasing laws or saying they didn't need to be kept, he just came to keep them. So it really is Jesus that becomes the end of the Law for us and the beginning of how to live according to God. In the gospel this morning Jesus shows us that we can...

Be as perfect as your heavenly Father
Live like Jesus
Love like Jesus

While you maybe never thought about it you have probably used it as an excuse. The person who cut you off, I'm going to cut them off when I get around. Eye for an eye. The person who wrecked your video game, I'm going to wreck one of theirs. Eye for an eye. The person who stole something had something stolen from them. Eye for an eye. We generally understand "eye for eye" to mean that it only seems right and fair that the person causing the suffering suffers just as much. We also use "eye for eye" to be the barometer for how severe the punishment should be. Punishment should be reasonable and should fit the crime.

Jesus didn't come to overturn that system; that worked for the government. There's a fuller expression for living like him. **"You have heard that it was said, Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth. But I tell you, do not resist an evil person."** With that we are introduced to the law of love. For those that want to live like Jesus revenge or retribution must be left to the government. The law of love is shown and demonstrated in four examples Christ speaks of: turning the other cheek, letting someone have your cloak, going the extra mile, and giving to those that ask.

Each of these can be understood simply. Picture yourself as a child playing with toys. You have one toy you're playing with and another kid comes and knocks you on the head with their toy. The natural reaction is to take a swing at them. If another comes to take your toy away the natural reaction is to fight back. If someone makes you play with a toy you don't want to your natural reaction might be to think you'll get them back by playing with a toy they don't want later. And if someone asks you to play with your toy your natural reaction might be to simply say no.

The law of love takes each of those in the opposite direction. **"If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."** Be willing to suffer and don't look to get revenge at all. **"If someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well."** No matter what happens, no matter what happens, the law of love leaves no room for hatred of the person taking your stuff. **"If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles."** Don't be resentful. Instead go with it and go even further. **"Give to the one who asks you."** Willingly offer to help without expecting anything in return.

Jesus asks beyond our ability. Who can do these things? We can't do them as children, how can we expect to do them as adults? I guess we just give up, why bother trying. I'll be walked all over, taken advantage of, suffer loss, and potentially put my family in harm's way. My only other option is to seek to do what's fair and what feels right. Pick and choose where we'll apply the law and where not.

Jesus' life was a demonstration of the law of love perfectly. Not once did Jesus call down retribution on the people putting him to death. Jesus never punched back when the soldiers were mocking and slapping him. Jesus helped those who wanted his help and even those who didn't know they needed his help. Jesus did exactly what was expected of us. He did it for our benefit and on our behalf. The perfection he achieved he credited to us. In Christ we have lived the law of love and in Christ we have achieved the perfection God demands.

Now we daily live like Jesus. He's not asking for the impossible. It's challenging yes, but doable with his grace. We practice patience when people wrong us. We're willing to let go of our rights. We show a willingness to suffer wrongs so we might win the person for Christ if we have opportunity. We can be as perfect as our heavenly Father as we live like Christ. Just as we get comfortable with that we hear what Jesus says next. Jesus is asking people to love, not their friends, family, or people who are nice to them. Jesus is asking people to love their enemies. That's love like Jesus.

Loving everyone can be an exhausting concept. There are a lot of people out there I just don't care for. The Pharisees recognized that and gave permission for hatred as they added to the original Law of Moses. Jesus quotes what the Pharisees must have been teaching, **"You have heard that it was said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy."** The original quote was **"Love your neighbor as yourself."** Match the degree and intensity of your love for others with your love of self. Don't limit who your neighbor is at all. Love everyone was always God's intention.

Someone might ask, "Just how far are we supposed to take this whole 'love your enemies' thing?" Jesus pressed it. **"But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those that persecute you."** So Jesus is trying to say that the friend who lied I have to love. The criminal who broke into my car I have to love. The person who kills in the name of another religion I have to love. That's counterproductive. It's much easier to love those that love you.

Jesus' point: you can't love someone based on who they are. Try loving the person that hurts you and you'll only dwell on the hurt. Your love for them must be based not on who they are, but on who Jesus is. That's the higher standard God holds Christians to. It really is God's standard to love like Jesus. **"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him."** The ultimate in loving someone who didn't deserve to be loved starts with me. While I was still a sinner running from God he sent his Son Jesus after me and won me with free forgiveness of sins. He loved someone like me who lied to him, robbed him, and didn't do what he asked of me. He loved me when it seemed counterproductive. He loved me in Christ so now I can love like Christ.

The sincere love planted in our hearts by the Holy Spirit will respond to Christ's love for us and reach out to others in love. The goal is not too high for us. We can achieve this not because of our strength but because of Christ's. We reach this goal only by the grace of God. We realize we won't fully reach this goal until we reach heaven.

It would be almost impossible for you to be aware of every single one of this country's laws and keep them all, all the time. There are hundreds of thousands of laws and regulations. More important is if you realize you aren't keeping one that you correct your behavior. The list of God's laws is even more worrisome. We know we're not keeping those all the time. The punishment for failure is much worse than any government could give. That's why God wants us right there with our eyes open to the need for Jesus our Savior. He lived as perfectly as God his heavenly Father. Forgiven of our sins we live like Jesus and love like Jesus. In Christ we too live perfectly as God our heavenly Father.