

## Q. If we are no longer under the law, why did Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, raise the standard of the law?

A. It's pretty common for preachers to say that Jesus raised the standard of the law or amplified or magnified it. This question is based on this belief that Jesus came to magnify the law. Those who teach that Jesus magnified the law usually cite Isaiah 42:21 and tie it to Matthew 5.

Isaiah 42:21 says, "It pleased the LORD, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify the law, and make it honourable." Those who say that Jesus came to magnify the law claim that this is a prophecy of Jesus' ministry. But as versions such as the *English Standard Version* make plain, this verse is simply a plain statement of what God did in Israel: "The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify his law and make it glorious." There is no reason to suspect it of being a prophecy of Christ.

I also want to point out the simple fact that Jesus never said that He came to magnify, amplify, or raise the standard of the law. But many believe that this is what Jesus did in Matthew 5, in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus says, "But I tell you" ("But I say unto you" in the King James Version) six times (Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, and 44) in response to teachings in the Old Testament law. Was He magnifying the law, or was He contrasting His teachings with the law? For example, in Matthew 5:21, Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said to the ancient ones, 'You shall not murder;' and 'Whoever shall murder shall be in danger of the judgment.'"

In this verse, Jesus stated the law: "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13), and referred to the judgment that someone who broke it was to receive: "Now these are the ordinances which you shall set before them.... One who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death" (Exodus 21:1, 12).

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Then Jesus said, "But I tell you, that everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council; and whoever shall say, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of the fire of Gehenna" (Matthew 5:22).

In the other five times that Jesus makes these declarations:

He declares that adultery is not just the physical act forbidden in the Ten Commandments. It is also sexually lusting after someone who is not your mate (Matthew 5:27-28).

In verses 28-32, He teaches that His followers are not to abide by the divorce standards of the Old Testament, which, He says, actually cause people to commit adultery.

In verses 33-34, Jesus says that, in contrast to the Old Testament allowance for vows as long as they are kept, Christians are not to swear at all.

In verses 38-42, Jesus explains that while the Old Testament says, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," His disciples are to not resist evil, but are to turn the other cheek, give to those who sue them, go the extra mile, and lend without expecting repayment.

And, instead of settling for the Old Testament standard to love your neighbor but hate your enemy (as implied by the Old Testament Scriptures where God tells the Israelites to utterly destroy their enemies), Jesus declares, "But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven" (verses 43-45a).

Keep this last statement about "children of your father" in mind because it is a clue to what Jesus is really doing here.

There are two common misunderstandings about Jesus' teachings in these verses. One is that He was merely correcting the Pharisees' misunderstanding of the law. Anyone who can read the Old Testament should be able to see the fallacy of this view. I deal with this more

completely in "The Sermon on the Mount" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/sermononthemount.htm>). But the question this article is addressing comes from another view. It is the belief that Jesus was amplifying or raising the standard of the Old Testament laws so that we could live holier, more pious lives. Let's see why this view doesn't hold water.

### **Jesus Did Not Raise the Standard**

Jesus did not raise the standard or amplify or magnify the Old Testament laws. The truth is that the Old Testament laws—including the Ten Commandments—were a lowering of the true standard. The Old Testament laws were a mere shadow or type of the real standard of righteousness, which is God's righteousness.

What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the seed should come to whom the promise has been made. It was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not between one, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could make alive, most certainly righteousness would have been of the law.

Galatians 3:19-21

The implication of the last sentence is that righteousness cannot be by the law. The Old Testament law, rather than being a perfect standard of righteousness, was added as an overseer to keep the sinful people in line until the coming of Christ. In Galatians 2:21, Paul wrote, "I don't reject the grace of God. For if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nothing!"

Rather than raising the standard or amplifying the Old Testament law, Jesus fulfilled the law and, thus, ended it. I've written about this in, "In what way did Jesus fulfill the law?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/jesusfulfilllawqa1.htm>). If Jesus was fulfilling and ending the law, He would have no reason to magnify it.

In Matthew 5, knowing that He would be fulfilling and ending the law, Jesus gave us examples of God's *true* standards of righteousness. (We will see why He did this later.) In Matthew 19, we read of the rich man who asked Jesus what he should do to have eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the commandments. The man replied that he'd been doing that since his youth. Jesus expected this answer. He wanted to get the

man to realize that all of his commandment keeping hadn't saved him. Then Jesus told him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Matthew 19:16-21). This is God's standard of righteousness. Notice how similar Jesus' words here are to what He said at the end of Matthew 5:

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? If you only greet your friends, what more do you do than others? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Matthew 5:43-48

### **Not by Our Works**

How are we to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect? Will we attain perfection by giving all we have to the poor, loving our enemies, blessing those who curse us, and so forth? Scripture answers:

But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love toward mankind appeared, not by works of righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy, he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly, through Jesus Christ our Savior; that, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Titus 3:4-7

Jesus did not intend for us to attain our own righteousness by living by these standards of true righteousness. Any attempt to attain our own righteousness by our works is self-righteousness. Nothing we do can make us more righteous than Jesus Christ made us on the Cross. By His blood, He paid the penalty for our sins and instituted the New Covenant, under which there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1). Yes, no condemnation even for hating our brother without a cause, lusting

after a woman, being wrongly divorced, swearing, returning evil for evil, and hating our enemies. And we can be thankful for that, because, if we are honest with ourselves, we know that even we who are born again fall short of God's righteousness all of the time.

### **Why, Then, Did Jesus Tell Us to Do These Things?**

Jesus gave us the standards of the Sermon on the Mount, which can be extrapolated to all areas of our lives (what He stated were only some examples), for two reasons. One is so that we can know that we cannot attain to such perfection. We must rely on Jesus' death paying the penalty for our sins and His righteousness being counted as ours (Romans 5:18-19).

The second reason Jesus gave us these standards is so that we would know how to live in a way that shows God's love to the world rather than offend or hurt others. When we are patient or kind toward our brother, when we do good to our enemies, we are shining God's righteousness into the world. Lusting after someone in our minds can eventually lead to taking real action, which, in turn, causes marital rifts and broken hearts in both families. So to refrain demonstrates true love for others. It all boils down to love. We are to love our brethren in Christ, our neighbors, and even our enemies.

So, just because God doesn't save us by our doing these or any other works doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to live by these standards for the sake of others. This is part of our freedom in Christ. Being saved by His death (Galatians 3:13) and receiving His imputed righteousness, we are now free to try to live by these standards without fear of failure and condemnation.

The Old Testament law required obedience and carried punishment for disobedience: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who doesn't continue in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them'" (Galatians 3:10). Had Jesus been magnifying the law, He would have been magnifying its demands and, therefore, increasing its curse. Paul calls the administration of the Old Testament law—specifically the Ten Commandments—the "service of death" (2 Corinthians 3:7). But Jesus came to give us life (John 10:10).

Jesus did not, in the Sermon on the Mount or anywhere else, raise the standard of the Old Testament law or magnify or amplify it. By His death on the Cross, Jesus paid the penalty for transgression of the law

for all those who trust in Him, and He fulfilled and ended the law. In the Sermon on the Mount, He revealed God's standard of righteousness. It can be summed up in one word: love. It carries no penalty or condemnation. God does not require us to keep it for salvation. Our righteousness comes from Jesus. But because of our salvation, we do try to emulate our loving, heavenly Father.

You may also want to read: "What Is the Law of Christ?"  
(<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/law-of-christ/>)

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