

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount Series

Sermon 13

You and the Law

A few weeks ago, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was in Istanbul for an opening ceremony and he was walking with an entourage of bodyguards and local officials. He passed by a cafe and on the second floor of the cafe were onlookers who were smoking cigarettes. The windows of the cafe were open but it would still be considered a closed area. President Erdoğan looked up and said to the cigarette smokers, "There is a fine." He repeated his words to the smokers and to the local officials surrounding him. No one stopped smoking.

President Erdoğan listened to the officials as they seemed to be making some explanation but Erdoğan was not satisfied with their comments. He wanted the police to be called and action to be taken. President Erdoğan was shocked and dismayed that in the presence of the nation's president that they would continue to smoke in spite of the warning.

Question: Did the law that forbids smoking in a closed area prevent the people from smoking? Why not?

I know a man who has an illegal house built on government land. I asked if the police ever came by to do anything about it. "They came once and I gave them 500 TL. They came again and I gave 500 TL more and that was it. We have a house here."

Question: Did the law that forbids building on government property prevent the man from making a squatter's house? Why not?

I was standing on the street one day and a man was installing a sign on a storefront. He had his truck parked in the second lane, blocking all traffic from using that lane. The parking lane of course was already full.

A policeman came and scolded the man with loud words. The man came down from his ladder and got in his truck and drove away leaving all his tools right where they were. Three minutes later the policeman was gone and the man returned and parked his truck in exactly the same place and went back to his work as if nothing had happened.

Question: Did the law against parking in the second lane prevent the man from doing it? Why not?

I was travelling south on the Izmir-Çanakkale road when the police at a check point pulled me over. The police said to me, "I have a friend who is going to Izmir, can you give him a ride. I said, "Sure."

The friend was a fellow police officer and I took the opportunity on the long road to ask him some questions. "When the people double-park in the city the police call with a megaphone to clear the street but they do not write a ticket. But if my car headlight goes out and I don't even know it, the police write me a ticket with no warning. Why is that?"

The policeman said to me, "We are taught by our superiors to behave towards Turks as family but with foreigners we can do our job properly."

Question: In all these scenarios do people and police really take the law seriously? Why not? Why is there a general understanding that the law is not very important? Why do people continue to violate the law without the least bit of remorse or hesitation? Why do they laugh about it when they break the law?

In our culture, law and order and discipline are less important than doing what we want. Law and order and discipline are less important than the relationships between those who enforce the law and the people.

One reason people may not take the law seriously is if they think that the law is stupid. The traffic light is red but there is no pedestrian crossing. Why is it red? That is stupid. It should not be red now. Gas is almost 5 lira a liter, I will run the light.

Another reason people may not take the law seriously is if they think the law is inconvenient.

Why should I not make an illegal u turn here when to do it the legal way will cost me ten minutes of time plus the gas? There is no other close place to turn. It is inconvenient to drive further.

I don't have the money to buy a house legally. It is inconvenient for me to save.

I want to shop at this store but the product is heavy and I don't want to park far away and pay for parking. Besides I will only be a few minutes (= 20 minutes).

If my customers can't park in front of my shop, I will go broke. I know it is illegal to block off the parking spaces but I have to do it in order to make a living.

Taxes are so high that if I report all my sales, I will not be able to have a good income. I will hide my sales from the finance ministry.

In all these scenarios, there is no fear of punishment. From police and people alike, there is a general understanding that the law is cumbersome, silly, inconvenient and should not be taken seriously. The most important thing is to do what we want to do regardless of law. Our attitude toward the law reveals our attitude toward the lawgiver. If we think the law is stupid we are saying that the lawgiver has made a mistake. If we think the law is cumbersome we think that the lawgiver has not considered our situation. By our disobedience we are saying that our needs and desires are superior to the needs and desires of the lawgiver.

Some people are waiting for an election time when all their pirate electric and water and squatters houses will receive a general amnesty. We live in hopes of our violations of law receiving a general forgiveness. That is our culture. The question is, does God operate on those cultural norms?

What is God's law? God's law for mankind is the ten commandments. We will see in the sermon on the mount that this is the law of the kingdom of God. Jesus will discuss it heavily and we will review it.

Sin is the violation of God's law.

^{NKJ} **1 John 3:4** Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

What is the penalty of sin?

^{NKJ} **Ezekiel 18:20** "The soul who sins shall die.

This death is eternal and we see the contrast between eternal life and eternal death in the following verse:

^{NKJ} **Romans 6:23** For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Lying is a sin. It is the violation of the eighth commandment. But people regularly tell lies. Why do they tell lies? It is convenient. It is profitable in business. It hides the shame of our ignorance. But when we lie, what are saying about the lawgiver? Are we saying that the lawgiver has made a mistake? Are we saying the lawgiver has not adequately evaluated our situation and need and therefore we need to tell a lie? Are we putting ourselves, our desires, our needs, above the desires of the lawgiver? Our attitude about the ten commandment reveals our attitude toward God. By violating God's law we are placing ourselves above God.

Pretty serious, huh?

Some people today think that God's ten commandments do not apply to them. They think that the ten commandments were only for Jews and that we do not need to obey them. What did Jesus say?

Matthew 5:17-18 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 jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

Heaven and earth have not passed away. God's law is still in force. What did Jesus mean when He said that He came to "fulfill" the law?

We see the same word used when Jesus was baptized.

Matthew 3:13-15 ¹³ ¶ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ And John *tried to* prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" ¹⁵ But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit *it to be so* now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.

Jesus fulfilled the law by obeying it.

In the sermon on the mount Jesus talks about the law of the kingdom of God and we will see that it is the ten commandments. For now I would like you to think about your relationship with the lawgiver. Are His laws valid for all times and in all circumstances or do you think you need to make an exception for yourself when it is convenient? Do you need to lie to make money, make your life easier or protect yourself from shame? If you think you sometimes have to lie, what are you saying about God the lawgiver? Are you saying that your desires are superior to His wishes? Are we saying that God's law is not very good because it didn't take into consideration our circumstances?

The men who were smoking in front of President Erdoğan were not afraid of any punishment even though the President warned them. Many times in Turkey there is a way to avoid punishment of law. We use connections to avoid the penalty. But is God serious when He says that the wages of sin is death? Or do we think that it is an empty threat? Do you believe that you can go on lying and enter the kingdom of heaven? In the garden of Eden God told Adam and Eve that if they ate of the forbidden fruit that they would die. Satan said to them, "You will not die." Adam and Eve believed Satan. Who do you believe?