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Isaiah 58:3-9          Page 1

Psalms 112:1-9        Page 2

1 Corinthians 2:1-12 Page 2

Matthew 5:13-20      Page 13

## **Isaiah chapter 58**

### **New International Version**

**1** Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins. **2** For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God.

They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.

**3** Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' 'Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. **4** Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

**5** Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? **6** Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? **7** Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? **8** Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

**9** Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. 'If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,

## **Psalm chapter 112**

### **New International Version**

**1** Praise the LORD. Blessed are those who fear the LORD, who find great delight in his commands. **2** Their children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. **3** Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures forever. **4** Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous.

**5** Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely, who conduct their affairs with justice. **6** Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever. **7** They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the LORD. **8** Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.

**9** They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor, their righteousness endures forever; their horn will be lifted high in honor. **10** The wicked will see and be vexed, they will gnash their teeth and waste away; the longings of the wicked will come to nothing.

## **1 Corinthians chapter 2**

### **New International Version**

**1** And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. **2** For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. **3** I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. **4** My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, **5** so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

**6** We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. **7** No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined

for our glory before time began. **8** None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

**9** However, as it is written: 'What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived' -- the things God has prepared for those who love him--

**10** these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. **11** For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. **12** What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us

### Context Summary

First Corinthians 2:1–5 begins with Paul asking the Corinthians to remember what he was like with them when he first came to Corinth. He did not tell them about Christ with impressive speaking skills and displays of knowledge. In fact, he was weak, fearful, and trembling. That was a deliberate tactic on Paul's part, for their good, so their faith would be based on God's power and not on any amount of impressive human wisdom.

1 Corinthians 2:1, NIV: And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.

### What does 1 Corinthians 2:1 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Paul seems to return to his train of thought from the middle of the previous chapter, where he said that Christ did not send him to preach the gospel with words of eloquent wisdom, which would risk emptying the cross of Christ of its power (1 Corinthians 1:17). He is also continuing to make the case for why the Corinthian Christians should not swear their allegiance to a teacher or preacher (1 Corinthians 1:12–13), but to Christ alone.

Paul now reminds them of when he first came to Corinth and began proclaiming the testimony of God. Paul spent over a year and a half in Corinth leading people to faith in Christ and helping to establish the church there. Many of his readers

would remember well when he first showed up. Paul's arrival marked a significant change in their lives as they began a relationship with God.

Paul wants them to remember that he did not preach the gospel to them as if he were performing. The Corinthians would have been very familiar with ancient speakers who amazed their audiences with lofty speech and displays of their own wisdom. Such speeches were part of the entertainment and wisdom culture of Greek and Roman society. Skilled orators would travel from place to place to entertain crowds in this way.

Paul did not present himself or the gospel in this way, however. He did not wrap the great truth of Christ's crucifixion for human sin in a fancy package to impress the Corinthians. Paul did not perform the gospel—he was not focused on making it entertaining or spectacular. Instead, he presented it to them as plain truth

1 Corinthians 2:2, [NIV](#): For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

### **What does 1 Corinthians 2:2 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

In the previous verse, Paul reminded the Corinthians that when he first came to their town, he did not present the gospel to them with lofty speech or human wisdom. In other words, he did not call attention to himself by performing feats of verbal gymnastics as some entertainers of their day did. He did not wow them with a display of his great personal wisdom. Orators of that era were much like entertainers—and Paul did not want to confuse the compelling truth of the gospel with mere entertainment.

Now Paul adds that he made a conscious choice not to display his knowledge about anything at all except for Jesus Christ and His crucifixion. It is not that Paul did not know about anything else, of course. He was well educated and experienced (Philippians 3:4–5; Acts 17:1–4). At least for these particular people, Paul wanted to be sure they weren't attracted by spectacle or entertainment. His mission was not to impress them with all he knew and could talk about. Paul decided to focus on a simple, culturally radical mission: to deliver Christ's message to them.

1 Corinthians 2:3, [NIV](#): I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling.

### **What does 1 Corinthians 2:3 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Paul is reminding his Corinthian readers of his first encounters with them, when he first arrived in town to preach the gospel. He did not wow them with his great speaking skills. He did not try to impress them with his expansive knowledge and wisdom. He decided to only talk about Christ and His crucifixion.

Now Paul adds that, in fact, his presentations were marked by weakness, fear, and much trembling. It is unclear if this was normal for Paul or something unique to his time in Corinth. Some scholars suggest that he may have been sick or suffering through a period of low confidence. Others argue that perhaps Paul was not very impressive in person, generally, and understood that about himself. He remarks in 2 Corinthians 10:10 that one complaint people have with him is that his written words are strong while in person he is "weak" and his speaking is of "no account."

Paul's point now is that his weakness as a speaker at that time was actually a good thing because it put all of the focus on the cross of Christ and none of the focus on his presentation skills. Orators of his era were entertainers—amazing crowds with their verbal performance skills. Paul's apparent lack of theatrics, in its own way, was a major advantage in proving the truth of his message. The gospel can stand on its own without being "dressed up" by showmanship.

1 Corinthians 2:4, [NIV](#): My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,

### **What does 1 Corinthians 2:4 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Paul continues to describe how he presented the gospel about Jesus Christ and the cross to the Corinthians when he first arrived in town. He did not put on an impressive display of speech and human wisdom, as some traveling teachers of their day were known to do. In fact, Paul wrote in the previous verse that his time with them was marked by weakness, fear, and trembling.

Now he emphasizes once more that his presentation and the message itself were not delivered with persuasive words of wisdom. In other words, he did not dazzle them with impressive arguments in order to convince them to believe in Jesus. Instead, he brought the simple message of Christ and the crucifixion with a demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power.

What was this demonstration of power? What did the Corinthians experience that helped them to believe the message of the gospel? That is not explicitly revealed here, but it was how God showed the Corinthians that Paul's teaching was backed by His undeniable power. The fact that this did not come as a result of some emotional, theatrical display was further proof that Paul's message was true, and not merely a cleverly-crafted sales pitch.

1 Corinthians 2:5, NIV: so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

### **What does 1 Corinthians 2:5 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Paul concludes the thought from the previous two verses. He has emphasized that when he first came to Corinth, he himself was not very impressive. Not only were his presentations marked by weakness, fear, and trembling, Paul also made a choice not to try to impress the people with his own vast knowledge or skill with words. Instead, he presented the truth about Jesus as clearly and simply as he could. This would have been a major contrast to entertainers of his era, who were known as skilled speakers.

In addition, God somehow accompanied Paul's teaching with a demonstration of His power and His Spirit. The advantage of this, Paul now writes, is that their faith in Christ rests on God's power and not on Paul's persuasiveness with words of human wisdom. Recognizing the truth of the gospel, without the distraction of showmanship, further proved the message was true.

It is not known what form this demonstration of God's power took in Corinth, but God often used signs and wonders during the time of the apostles to confirm that they spoke for Him.

### Context Summary

First Corinthians 2:6–16 describes the difference between human wisdom and God's wisdom. Human wisdom is limited to what can be observed and worked out with human reason. Scripture points out the value of reason and knowledge (Colossians 2:8; 2 Timothy 2:15), while demonstrating a difference between what man's mind can achieve and what God's Spirit can reveal. God's wisdom, including His plan to offer salvation through Christ's crucifixion, must be received and believed spiritually through God's Holy Spirit. Without the help of the Spirit, people cannot believe what is spiritual, so they reject all spiritual truth as foolishness. Christians, though, have access to the mind of Christ because of God's Holy Spirit with us.

1 Corinthians 2:6, NIV: We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

### What does 1 Corinthians 2:6 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Paul has rejected human wisdom as a means of teaching the simple message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Human wisdom involves the observation and analysis of life from a limited human perspective. Being limited and fallible, human wisdom rejects anything which can't be comprehended or worked out by human intelligence. While reason, evidence, and knowledge are important, they don't infallibly lead a person to accept truth (James 2:19; Romans 1:18–23).

Paul describes this human wisdom as the "wisdom of this age." Like all human knowledge, and human opinions, the "wisdom" of any particular era, or culture, is temporary and changing. Paul also calls this limited human wisdom the wisdom of the "rulers of this age." Those rulers, too, are temporary, doomed to pass away. Some Bible scholars suggest that the reference to "rulers" here means human governments and authorities. Others believe them to be supernatural powers: angels and demons involved in human affairs. In either sense, their authority is limited and will be gone when this age comes to an end.

Paul now adds, though, that there is a place for teaching a different kind of wisdom to those who are mature in Christ. By this, he seems to mean the gospel should be presented in the simplest form possible without flourish or unnecessary complication. This not only prevents a person from being distracted by showmanship (1 Corinthians 2:1–2), it also keeps the message accessible to people of all intellectual ability.

However, once someone has come to faith in Christ and is occupied by the Spirit of God with a mind to follow Christ, that person is considered mature and ready to learn the more complicated truths of God's wisdom.

1 Corinthians 2:7, NIV: No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

### **What does 1 Corinthians 2:7 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Paul describes mere human wisdom, with its limited perspective, as fatally incomplete in understanding the gospel of Jesus Christ. Reason and evidence are important, but they do not force a person to accept the truth (James 2:19; Romans 1:18–23). Gospel truth doesn't need to be dressed up in showmanship to be understood and accepted (1 Corinthians 2:1–2).

Paul points to a higher, better, wisdom, which he does teach to those who are mature, meaning those who are in Christ and have God's Spirit with them. Paul describes this wisdom of God as secret and hidden. God decreed this wisdom before "the ages"—before time began—for the glory of those who believe in Christ. God's wisdom is secret and hidden in the sense that it cannot be obtained by mere observation of the world. Evidence can point towards God (Psalm 19:1), but it won't help those who don't want to seek God (Matthew 7:7–8). God's wisdom is above and beyond what humans can perceive in our natural state apart from Him (Isaiah 55:8–9). God must reveal His wisdom to us or we will not be aware of it.

At the heart of this hidden wisdom is the gospel itself, God's plan put in place from before the beginning. Paul put it this way in Ephesians 1:4–6, "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons



through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.”

1 Corinthians 2:8, NIV: None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

### **What does 1 Corinthians 2:8 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Paul has written that God's secret wisdom for the world, established before time began, included His plan to sacrifice His Son for the sins of humanity. In the previous verse, Paul wrote that God decreed this for our glory.

Our sin made it impossible for us to share in Christ's glory. We fell far short of it (Romans 3:23). God's plan, His secret wisdom, would make it possible for our sin to be forgiven by Christ's death instead of our own and for us to be declared righteous based on Christ's righteousness and not our own.

All of this hinged on the crucifixion of Jesus, whom Paul now calls the "Lord of Glory." The rulers of this age—the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman government that killed Jesus—did not, of course, understand this. They didn't know that they were fulfilling a role in God's plan. If they had known, they would never have killed Jesus.

It's unclear whether Paul means that they would not have wanted to bring God's plan to pass or that they would not dared to kill the Son of God. In either case, their blindness to God's secret wisdom caused them to do exactly as God had decreed.

1 Corinthians 2:9, NIV: However, as it is written: 'What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived' -- the things God has prepared for those who love him—

## What does 1 Corinthians 2:9 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Paul has been comparing human wisdom with God's wisdom in the previous verses. Human wisdom is based on what can be observed by the human senses and worked out from human logic and reason. It was highly valued by the intellectuals of Paul's day. Reason and knowledge are applauded in the Bible, but not given the same lofty status as they are in an ungodly world (Proverbs 1:5; Colossians 2:8).

The problem with human wisdom is that it has no way of accessing God's wisdom. God's wisdom must be revealed and then believed or else it remains secret and hidden (Isaiah 55:8–9). God established His wisdom before time began. It always included His plan to sacrifice His own Son to pay for human sin and make it possible for those who believe to share in His glory forever. The rulers of this age could never have known that.

Paul now quotes from Isaiah 64:4 to sum up these ideas and reveal that the motive behind God's secret wisdom has always been to provide for His people. Isaiah wrote that no eye has seen, ear has heard, or human heart has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him.

How could we know? Human wisdom can't bring us to the understanding that the Creator God loves His people or that He has prepared the glories of eternity to share with them. At best, we can *understand* this by the intellect. But we cannot *trust* in it without faith in God (James 2:19). We must *believe* by *faith*.

1 Corinthians 2:10, NIV: these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

## What does 1 Corinthians 2:10 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Before the foundation of the world, God planned to bring believers into a relationship with Himself based on love. That relationship would only be possible, however, by the death of His Son on the cross to pay for our sin.

These secrets of God's wisdom could not be worked out by human wisdom, Paul has written. They must be revealed to humans to be understood and believed by us. How could we possibly believe such a thing, though, even if it is true?

Paul now turns to the means God uses to allow us to come to faith in Him. It's not a mechanical process, though. It's a person, whom Paul will describe as the Spirit of God. God reveals the truthfulness of these things to us through His Spirit, making it possible for us to believe something we cannot observe with our own physical senses. Evidence can lead us towards God (Psalm 19:1, Romans 1:18–23), but only faith and the Spirit can lead us to *accept* God (Matthew 7:7–8; John 4:44).

How does the Spirit Himself know these things? Paul describes the Spirit as being in constant search mode, searching even the depths of God. The Spirit bridges the communication gap between ourselves and God. He searches and understands what is spiritual and makes it possible for us to perceive it.

Of course, the Spirit is God, just as Jesus the Son is God. Though three persons with separate roles, they are one God. We call this the Trinity.

1 Corinthians 2:11, NIV: For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

### **What does 1 Corinthians 2:11 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Paul has written that the only way for any human beings to know God's hidden wisdom, including God's plan for the salvation of believers, is for the Holy Spirit to reveal it to them. It cannot be figured out through human observation and wisdom. Those fallible means can give us intellectual knowledge (Psalm 19:1; James 2:19), but not trusting faith (Matthew 7:7–8).

Now Paul describes God's Spirit working in a similar way to our own spirits. Nobody can use their human senses to know what other people are thinking, either (1 Samuel 16:7). Only our own spirit, and God, can be aware of our own thoughts. If our "spirit" does not tell what those thoughts are, they will remain secret.

In a similar way, nobody knows God's thoughts except His own Spirit. The difference is that, mysteriously, God can task His Spirit to come and reveal His thoughts and plans to us. That's the means by which we come to faith in Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:12, NIV: What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us

### **What does 1 Corinthians 2:12 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Paul knows that the Corinthian Christians have received God's Holy Spirit, because they have come to genuine faith in Christ and have been saved (1 Corinthians 1:4–9). Every believer who trusts in Christ for salvation is given by God the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul will state this clearly later in this letter (1 Corinthians 12:13), as he has in his other letters (Romans 8:9; Ephesians 1:13–14).

Paul writes that, as Christians, we have not received the spirit of the world. In other words, we have not been given an attitude that only accepts those things which we can observe for ourselves and work out with human wisdom and reason.

When we came to faith in Christ, that worldly spirit was replaced with the Spirit of God. Through Him, we gain the ability to understand what can only be understood spiritually, apart from our physical senses. God has freely revealed these things to us about His Son and the opportunity to be included in His family. He wants us to know them and trust them as true.

Put negatively, this knowledge from God and the ability to believe it is not available to those who do not have God's Spirit with them. Intellectual knowledge can never force a person to trust in God (James 2:19; Romans 1:18–23).

## Matthew chapter 5

**13** You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

**14** You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

**17** Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. **18** For 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. **19** Therefore 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. **20** For 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.

### Context Summary

Matthew 5:13–20 describes the essential role Jesus' disciples and followers serve on the earth. They are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. These metaphors represent the impact Christians are meant to have in the world. That's why it matters so much that they do the good works God gives them to do. Otherwise, they will stop being useful as salt and light. Instead, they should do those works, allowing their light to shine in the dark world in order that all who see will give glory to God.

Matthew 5:13, NIV: You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

## What does Matthew 5:13 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Matthew is recording Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The prior passage recorded the Beatitudes, and now Christ turns to a series of short teachings on various topics. First, He addresses the need for disciples of Jesus to live according to the virtues described in the Beatitudes. These are needed in order to be "salt" and "light" in the world (Matthew 5:14).

Jesus says to His disciples, "You are the salt of the earth." Then, as now, salt served a variety of functions. Before the days of refrigeration, salt was used widely as a preservative by rubbing it into meat. In some cases, it could be used as a kind of fertilizer. Also, of course, it was used to bring flavor to food. Jesus' call for followers to be "salt of the earth" carries those uses, symbolically, into our spiritual lives.

As salt preserves meat from rotting, believers in Jesus, distributed around the world, help to preserve humanity from falling into godlessness, immorality, chaos, and the resulting judgment. Salt permanently changes the flavor of food, just as the influence of godly people can change a culture. The main point is that Christians serve a godly purpose in the world simply by living out what we believe about Jesus.

Christians stop serving that purpose when we stop living in faithfulness to God. The recent references to the Beatitudes put that purpose in context. When Jesus' followers stop being poor in spirit, living in repentance and meekness, having an appetite for righteousness, and being merciful, they stop serving their purpose on earth. This is just as catastrophic, and unthinkable, as if salt were to lose its flavor.

Some object to this metaphor by saying that salt never loses its saltiness, according to chemistry. This misses the point and is not true in a practical sense. Jesus' teaching can be taken to mean, in part, that certain qualities are as innate to a born-again believer as saltiness is to salt. The idea of losing those properties is unthinkable. In a more practical sense, the salt which people used daily was not chemically pure. It could be diluted, or even contaminated. That would result in something that was *supposed to be* salt but didn't taste or act like salt anymore. That made it useless, and subject to disposal.

Jesus indicates the same can happen to a disciple who stops living faithfully to Christ in the world. The point here is not about loss of salvation, but a loss of purpose. "Bad salt" isn't destroyed or burnt, it's simply ignored along with the dust of the earth

Matthew 5:14, NIV: You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.

### **What does Matthew 5:14 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]**

In the previous verse, Jesus compared His disciples to salt (Matthew 5:13). Now He compares them to light. He calls them the "light of the world," in fact. Light was a crucial symbol in the Jewish worldview. Just as Greek culture prized knowledge, or Roman culture valued glory, or modern American culture touts freedom, Hebrew culture's ideal standard was *light*. This concept factors heavily in biblical explanations of godliness and truth (Proverbs 4:18–19; Matthew 4:16; John 8:12; 2 Corinthians 4:6).

Spiritually speaking, there is no light in the world apart from Jesus Christ. His light, though, shines through every person who belongs to Him. In this way, the light of Christ is distributed into the darkness in every corner of humanity. That this light is meant to be visible to the world is also important. Jesus adds to this metaphor by referring to a city positioned on top of a hill. It is not meant to be hidden; a city on a hill is meant to be seen and found even in the darkness of night. During the time of Christ, the walls around a city on a hill were often made from white limestone, which would be relatively easy to see, even on a dim night.

In the same way, the light of Christ is not meant to be hidden on the earth. It is meant to shine out brightly from all who belong to Christ. It is meant to be discovered, in this way, by those still in the darkness. Jesus will add to this point in the following verse that Christ's light should not be covered up in the lives of His followers. It is meant to be seen.

Matthew 5:15, NIV: Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

**What does Matthew 5:15 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]**

Nights could be very dark during the time of Jesus. In fact, to modern eyes living in a time of electricity, the inky nighttime darkness of the ancient world would likely be shocking. On a moonless or overcast night, people would have struggled to see their hand in front of their own eyes. Caves and interiors of large rooms would have been naturally devoid of any light.

Light was available in the form of fire, including oil lamps. As houses grew dark after sunset, lamps would be lit and, if available, distributed around the house. Placement was key. The lamps would be put on a stand in the optimal spot to provide as much light to the room as possible. This is the point of Jesus' comment in this verse: why would anyone light a lamp in the nighttime and then put a basket over it? They would not, Jesus says. The light of lamps is meant to be seen in the same way that the light of Christ is meant to be seen in the world.

By way of analogy, believers in Jesus are the lamps. In fact, they are the only source of true spiritual light, the light of Christ. That light is meant to be seen, so Jesus tells His disciples not to hide it or cover it up for any reason. The following verse is a famous expression of the need for Christian goodness to be visible to the world. Doing the works given by God is how His disciples will distribute His light. Failing to do those good works, then, is like putting a cover over the only lamp in a dark room; hiding the light makes the lamp useless.

Matthew 5:16, NIV: In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

**What does Matthew 5:16 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]**

Jesus has described His disciples as first the salt of the earth and then as the light of the world (Matthew 5:13–15). Salt is meant it be salty and becomes worthless if it loses that quality. Light is meant to be seen by those in the darkness. It has no value if covered up and hidden.



This verse provides the practical application of Jesus' teaching about being "the light of the world." Disciples display the light of Jesus by doing the good works which God intends for them. Even if acting in a Christlike way earns persecution from the world (Matthew 5:11–12), believers are meant to shine that light into a dark world. In other lessons, Jesus expands on the meaning of doing good works. An important point He makes later in the Sermon on the Mount involves proper motivation (Matthew 6:1). Good works done for God's sake, in ways that bring glory to God, ought to be done so that they can be seen. The light of Christian goodness is meant to shine out "so that" God will be glorified. However, in situations where the world is likely to merely praise the Christian, it's better for the act to be done "in secret" to avoid arrogance and pride (Matthew 6:2–4).

Christ is the only spiritual light in the world, and that truth is distributed through His people: His disciples, meaning born-again Christians. Believers do good for others to point towards truth (John 14:6), and to bring glory to God.

Matthew 5:17, NIV: Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

### **What does Matthew 5:17 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]**

As He gained fame through healing miracles and compelling teaching, some of Jesus' critics claimed He was teaching people to ignore the law of Moses (Matthew 12:2). Hostile religious leaders began to falsely say He was teaching a new or different law from what God gave to the nation of Israel (Matthew 12:2). Jesus was eventually accused by the Jewish religious leaders of blasphemy, primarily for His claim to be the Son of God (Matthew 26:63–65; John 8:58–59).

Jesus counters the lie that He is calling for the law of Moses to be "abolished." He tells all those who are listening His intent is not to discard the law or the Prophets. The Jewish law of Moses consisted of the first five books of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch. "The Prophets" include most of the rest of what Christians now call the Old Testament, especially books by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other prophets sent by God to deliver His messages to Israel.

The book of Hebrews explains how God always intended the old covenant to lead to a new covenant (Hebrews 8:6–8). That transition is not to eradicate what God has spoken, but to complete its intended purpose. As the Son of God, the God who gave the law to Moses and gave the prophecies to the prophets, Jesus would have no desire to wipe out those messages. Instead, Jesus declares that He has come "to fulfill" the law and the Prophets.

This is a key point of understanding Scripture: everything in the Jewish Scriptures—what we now call the Old Testament—has been "pointing forward" to the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah. The law described a life of perfect, sinless righteousness, which no Israelite had been able to fulfill until Jesus arrived. He was the first and last to accomplish this.

In addition, the sacrificial system given to Israel by God in the law required the killing of animals, blood sacrifices, to pay for human sin. They were effective only temporarily, and only until new sins were committed, then more blood had to be spilled (Hebrews 10:1–4). Jesus, though, as the perfect, sinless human sacrifice for sin fulfilled the need for that blood sacrifice once and for all (Hebrews 10:11–14).

Matthew also demonstrates throughout his book how Jesus' life fulfilled one prophecy about the Messiah after another. Jesus did not discard the words of these prophets; He fulfilled them with every word and action of His life.

Matthew 5:18, NIV: For 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.

### **What does Matthew 5:18 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]**

Jesus declared in the previous verse that He had not come to abolish the Jewish law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17). Despite claims of His critics (Matthew 12:2), Jesus' purpose was not to cast aside the words God gave to Israel. Instead, His mission was to complete the exact mission those words were meant to explain (Hebrews 8:6–8). In every way, Jesus accomplished what the law demanded and fulfilled what the prophets predicted by the power of God.

Now Jesus adds forcefully that the law will not pass away, even a little bit, until everything in it is accomplished and until heaven and earth pass away. He has come to earth (Matthew 1:18) with the mission of accomplishing everything in the law. Much of this He will do through His teaching, sacrificial death, and resurrection (Mark 8:31). The rest, He will finally and fully complete in bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth in the end times (Matthew 26:64).

*Iota* is the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet; modern English continues to use this as a metaphor for the tiniest measure of something. The word "dot" is translated from the Greek term *kerasia*, referring to a tiny stroke of the pen. In Hebrew, similar tiny marks differentiated one letter from another. So, Jesus' point is that *every letter of every word* in the law would remain in effect until He accomplished everything in it (Hebrews 9:10–11; 10:1–4). He would do this by perfectly obeying every requirement of the law, dying as the final blood sacrifice for the sins of humanity, defeating death in the resurrection, then by fulfilling every prophecy about the promised Messiah in both His immediate time and in the future.

Matthew 5:19, NIV: Therefore 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.

### **What does Matthew 5:19 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]**

Verses 19 and 20 of this passage pose challenges for various traditions and interpretations. Jesus has declared that He has come to complete the purpose of the Old Testament, not to discard it (Matthew 5:17–18). The law will not pass away until all is accomplished; until heaven and earth pass away.

Now Jesus specifies further that His listeners are forbidden to ignore the commands of the law and the Prophets, either in their teaching or their own choices. Those who relax the commandments in the law will be called least in heaven's kingdom. Those who keep and teach them still will be called greatest in the kingdom. To fully understand this statement, it must be carefully read in context with the rest of Scripture.

Critically, Jesus does not say that one must keep the commandments in order to attain heaven. Part of this discourse is explaining that human effort will never be good enough (Matthew 5:20). And Jesus is clear that salvation comes by faith, not by good behavior (John 17:3). Careful reading shows that Jesus is speaking of both persons—those who do and those who do not obey the law of Moses—are in the kingdom of heaven. The point here is about one's rewards or status in that kingdom.

Likewise, application of Jesus' teaching throughout the New Testament is that believers in Jesus *are not required* to follow the law of Moses in order to be welcomed into the family of God through faith in Christ. As Paul will write to believers in Jesus in Romans 7:4–6:

"You also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code." Why, then, would Jesus make such a strong declaration about not setting aside the laws of the Old Testament? Some scholars suggest Jesus was emphasizing that the law remained fully in effect *at that moment*, so obedience to God in every aspect of Jewish life and practice still mattered. His death for sin and His defeat of death through resurrection had not yet taken place, and such scholars suggest the conversation would change after the resurrection.

Others teach a more likely explanation, which is that a full, complete understanding of the law cannot be undone or discarded. In a broad sense, Christians are never meant to embrace *antinomianism*, which is the attitude that no rules apply, at all. The teachings of Christ, for example, are never posed as options for true believers (John 14:15). The law of Moses had a specific purpose, and a specific audience: that does not change. Once all things are completed, those commandments are not "abolished," they are "fulfilled" (Hebrews 9:10–11; 10:1–4). Jesus' intent is not to throw away any part of God's commandments, only to understand them as they are meant to be understood.

Matthew 5:20, NIV: For 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.

**What does Matthew 5:20 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]**

Jesus has been forceful and clear about a point that can be difficult to understand: He has not come to abolish the law of Moses, but to fulfill it. It will not pass away until all has been accomplished. Those hearing Jesus' message should not be lenient on themselves or their students about obeying the commands of the law. Those who obey them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven; those who do not carefully obey will be called the least. This doesn't suggest that good deeds earn salvation, but it does make an important point about God's intent for those prior messages (Matthew 5:17–19).

Now Jesus demands a standard which would have sounded impossible to His listeners—exactly how it is meant to be taken. Scribes were professional experts on the Scriptures. The Pharisees were a sect famous for their extremely careful keeping of the law of Moses. They were so careful, in fact, that they added layers of detail, rules, and regulations *on top of* the law so they'd never come close to breaking it. Pharisees were extraordinarily strict with their students and with the common synagogue-goers about what it took to follow the law in order to be righteous.

Jesus is making two distinct points here. Matthew has already shown that the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is false. John the Baptist called them out as a "brood of vipers" in need of a repentance that will actually "bear fruit" instead of just looking good to other people (Matthew 3:7–8). Jesus, too, will clash with the Pharisees over the way they work so hard on outward appearances while sin decays their hearts. As Jesus will emphasize in the rest of this sermon, God cares far more about what is in a person's heart than how other people perceive them. God values true purity motivated by true love more than technical rule-keeping motivated by spiritual pride. So true "righteousness" is something better than the rotten version paraded by religious hypocrites.

The other point being made, which upcoming teaching will support, is that nobody can be truly, perfectly righteous. No person can live a life of moral purity worthy of heaven. As Paul will write in Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." He will add, though, in the following verse what Jesus' listeners will come to understand later on, that those who come to faith in Christ "and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ

Jesus" (Romans 3:24). Jesus is prepping His listeners to understand that they need a righteousness only He can earn for us.