

The Six Antitheses: Attaining the Purpose of the Law through the Teachings of Jesus

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With six powerful examples in Matthew 5:21–47, Jesus compared the demands of the law of the gospel with the requirements of the Mosaic law. In each, the Master cited an earlier proposition of the law, a thesis, and made an authoritative counterproposition, or antithesis, that called disciples to a higher standard of belief, motivation, and observance. In some cases, Mosaic prohibitions, each from the Ten Commandments, were strengthened—showing that keeping the spirit of the law frequently required more than keeping the letter of the law. In other instances, Mosaic dispensations or permissions that allowed certain behaviors in specific situations were effectively suspended, teaching that those living a higher law would not regularly find themselves in circumstances that required such practices.

These six antitheses do not appear in isolation; rather, they are integral parts of the other arguments of the first section of the Sermon on the Mount, now found in Matthew chapter 5. Accordingly, they first stand as vivid illustrations of what it meant for Jesus to fulfill the law (5:17–20),

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with the antitheses neither nullifying nor replacing the law, but rather intensifying it and helping the believer better fulfill its intent. They are thus connected with both the Beatitudes (5:3–12) and a section that can be called Marks of a Disciple (5:13–16), all of which lead to a disciple’s being “perfect” (5:48). By studying the antitheses and associated material, believers today can better fulfill the law of the gospel—transforming their hearts and becoming more like Jesus not only in action but also in thought and motivation.

Fulfilling the Law

The passage immediately preceding the antitheses begins, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: *I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill*” (5:17, emphasis added). Because the antitheses that follow are meant as illustrations of how Jesus fulfilled the law of his day, understanding what he meant by fulfillment is crucial to living the higher law that Christ taught. Because “fulfill” can mean several different things, and because Jesus fulfilled the law of Moses in different ways at different times, a careful, sometimes technical discussion of how he—and by extension all believers—fulfill whatever law we are given is necessary before proceeding to an examination of the antitheses themselves.

Because the outward, ceremonial aspects of the law of Moses were fulfilled with the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, Christians—and especially Latter-day Saints—are sometimes predisposed to seeing the term “fulfill” here as meaning “bring to an end.” While pivotal passages in the Book of Mormon indicate that “old things were done away” in Christ (see 3 Nephi 9:19, 12:46, 15:4), the context of Jesus’ appearance in the New World and his delivery of the Sermon at the Temple there *after* his death and Resurrection is significantly different than that of the Sermon on the Mount early in his mortal ministry *before* his completion of the Atonement.¹

The fact that “fulfill” here means something other than “bring to an end, finish, or complete” is further indicated by the use of the Greek term *plērōsai*, the primary meaning of which means “to fill or make full.”² As such, it is in direct contrast with the idea of “destroy,” the Greek for which, *katalysai*, means something like “annul” in a legal context.³ Therefore, while it is true that the ceremonial aspects of the law would soon be finished or brought to an end, and likewise that the symbolic types and shadows

of Christ and his sacrifice would be realized,⁴ in the original context of the Sermon on the Mount it is most likely that “fulfill” means to make complete, fill the requirements of, comply with the conditions of, or even “bring out its true meaning” or “bring to full expression.”⁵

As a result, in the sermon Jesus fulfills the law primarily with his *teachings*. Indeed, the purpose of these particular teachings “is to enable God’s people to live out the law more effectively.”⁶ Whereas the symbolic and ceremonial aspects of the law were brought to an end by his sacrificial death, the ethical precepts of that same law—which principles existed before the law and would continue even after it—were reaffirmed, and even strengthened, by the Lord during his mortal ministry. The principles he taught thus fulfilled the intent of the law by establishing a higher standard, which deepened but did not abrogate the original law.⁷ As noted by Sim, “This messianic exegesis goes beyond the letter of the law to reveal an even deeper meaning, and in doing so reveals God’s true intentions in giving the Torah.”⁸

Indeed, Jesus’ authority to do so is made even more clear in the Book of Mormon, where the resurrected Lord taught that the Jehovah who gave the law in the first instance was the same as the man who taught its deeper meaning in Galilee: “Behold, I say unto you that the law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses. Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel” (3 Nephi 15:4–5). This authority is stressed in the text of Matthew by the formulaic phrase *amēn gar legō hymín*, rendered traditionally as “Verily I say unto you.” Beginning with *amēn* (KJV “verily”) marks Jesus’ authoritative teachings elsewhere in the Gospels.⁹ A liturgical particle transliterated from the Hebrew term *’āmēn*, it is derived from the stem *’mn*, meaning “reliable, confirmed, or faithful” and hence connoting something that was true.¹⁰ Most often *’āmēn* is translated in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) with *genoito*, meaning “may it be so!” Usually occurring at the end of a prayer or liturgical formula, Jesus’ use of the term at the *beginning* of a statement seems to have been unique,¹¹ the implication being that everything he said following it was true. The rest of the formula, “I say unto you,” also seems to have been unusual for the period, because Jesus does not cite other authority but simply taught “as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (7:29).

Finally, that Jesus’ authoritative strengthening of the ethical precepts of the law was meant to endure can be seen in the eschatological tone of

the rest of verse 18: his interpretation of the law was to last until the end of the earth's temporal existence.¹² Referring to the smallest Hebrew or Greek letters (*yod* or *iota*) and the decorative seraphs on such letters (the *keratá*),¹³ Jesus taught, “Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (although here Matthew uses *genētai*, “come about” or “happen,” not a form of *plērō*, “to fulfill”) (5:18; emphasis added). Believers were not to break the commandments but to “do and teach them” (5:19). And whereby the scribes and Pharisees had sought to protect the Mosaic code by hedging it about with additional rules and practices, Jesus, through the antitheses, taught another, better way to accomplish the intent of the law.

The Nature and Structure of the Antitheses

In Classical dialectic, or philosophical reasoning, absolute truth was established in a transitory, uncertain world through stepwise approximation. A thesis, or proposition, was met with an antithesis, or counterproposition. Through reasoned discussion, the goal was to arrive at a synthesis, or compromise, that ideally was closer to the actual truth. While neither Jesus in delivering the sermon nor Matthew in his writing of it had necessarily been exposed to such dialectic, the traditional use of the first two of these terms, thesis and antithesis, by biblical scholarship in relation to the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5:21–47 is appropriate because of what it indicates about the authority of Jesus himself. While the Mosaic precepts are stated as initial theses, the antitheses presented by Jesus are absolute. His pronouncements *are* truth, and no synthesis is needed.

Of course God himself—or Jesus, as the premortal Jehovah present at Mount Sinai—also established the original propositions, a fact suggested by a nuance of the Greek grammar of a phrase beginning each antithesis. Each starts with a variation of the formula “Ye have heard that it was said (*errethē*) by them of old time (*tois archaiois*).” As it stands in English, the impression may be that “they of old time” were the ones speaking, but *tois archaiois* more properly means “It was said *to* them of old times.”¹⁴ In this case, the subject of the passive verb *errethē* is probably what is called the “Divine passive.”¹⁵ As a result, *God* said to them of old time *x*, and *Jesus* is now saying that *x* really means *x + y*.

As a result, each antithesis begins with a form of the “It has been said” formula (5:21, 27, 31, 33, 34, 38, 43), followed by a legal point found in the Mosaic code. Jesus then continues with “But I say unto you,” which introduces his clarification and intensification of the principle that lay behind the legal proposition. The fact that his antithesis picks the “I say unto you” formula of 5:18 and verse 20 strengthens the connection between each of these passages and the idea that Jesus was fulfilling—that is, accomplishing the intent and deepening the meaning—of the original commandments with his teaching.

How Jesus “fulfilled” these antitheses seems to have differed according to the nature of the theses they address. First of all, the prohibitions in the Ten Commandments all represent ethical precepts that existed before the Mosaic code and continue in full force today, even since the law was fulfilled. Second, Jesus’ expansion of the prohibitions from the Decalogue deepened and expanded them by calling upon the believer to control the feelings and motivations that could lead to breaking the commandments. On the other hand, in regard to other regulations from the Mosaic code, Jesus called on the believer to set aside practices that the law permitted. While some feel that Jesus abrogated aspects of the law even before the full higher law was in place, one can argue that he did not actually annul them during his ministry. Rather, he called upon believers to change their hearts so they could act with greater restraint, removing the conditions that made such permissions as divorce and retaliation necessary.

Scholars debate the structure of the six antitheses, but most divide them into two groups of three. In favor of this ordering is the fact that in the first three antitheses Jesus’ response after his authoritative “But I say unto you” begins with the construction “each one who” (Greek, *pas* + a participle; KJV, “whosoever”). In the last three, “But I say unto you” is followed by a simple imperative expression, such as “swear not.”¹⁶ Furthermore, the fourth begins with “again (*palin*),” emphatic in Greek, seeming to mark a new beginning.¹⁷ This ordering divides the antitheses into almost equal divisions in the Greek text of 258 and 244 words, and, more equivalently, of 1,131 and 1,130 letters respectively,¹⁸ suggesting care was taken, either by Matthew or Jesus himself, to balance the two sections.

In the oldest, most reliable Greek texts, the first and fourth antitheses—the first in the two set—are the only ones with the full formula

“Ye have heard that it was said *by them of old time.*” While the full form appears at the start of the second antithesis in verse 27 as well, only later Byzantine manuscripts contain the phrase “by them of old time.”¹⁹ The others begin with a reduced formula, either “Ye have heard that it had been said” or simply “It hath been said.” The fact that later manuscripts, such as the ones used by the King James translators, added “by them of old time” to verse 27 in the second antithesis suggests that another pattern was seen by later copyists: the first, second, and fourth antitheses treat principles enshrined in the Ten Commandments. Because “those of old time” appeared in the first and fourth antitheses and appears to refer to those of the Exodus generation who received the Decalogue,²⁰ it seems to apply to the second as well.²¹

The Content of the Antitheses

The reason for this division of the antitheses into two equal parts is not immediately clear, but the two sections reveal a certain balance and symmetry. The first division includes two Mosaic prohibitions—on murder and adultery—that are extended by Jesus and one permission—of divorce—that believers are to accept. The second section, on the other hand, contains one prohibition—on forswearing—that is extended and two permissions—legal compensation misunderstood as retaliation and not loving one’s enemies—that are denied. Likewise, the first half consists of two theses taken from the Decalogue and one from elsewhere in the Mosaic Code, while the second half includes only one reference that directly arises from the Ten Commandments and two from other parts of the law. But perhaps more significant than this balance is the symmetry found in the first and last antitheses. Dealing with the most fundamental of human emotions—anger and hate on one hand and love on the other—they illustrate the central focus of Jesus’ message of love.

Murder and anger (5:21–26). In verse 21 Jesus begins by addressing the most serious crime one can commit against another person. The thesis that one should not commit murder comes from Exodus 20:13 and 20:21 and again in Deuteronomy 5:17. The antithesis that follows then shifts the discussion from the action to the emotion or motivation leading to the action. However, this focus on the damaging effects of anger was not, in fact, novel in Jewish ethics of the Second Temple Period. Texts

from the Qumran community set punishments for displays of wrath; the wisdom literature of the period address the dangers of anger; and Jesus' near contemporary Hillel, an important Pharisaic rabbi at the end of the Second Temple Period, was a gentle, patient, and even-tempered sage.²²

Instead, the significance of the antithesis lies in the comprehensiveness of Jesus' admonition that one not be angry *to any degree* with another person. The phrase "without a cause," translated from the Greek adverb *eikē*, does not appear in any of the oldest and most trustworthy manuscripts. Instead, later copyists seem to have inserted it in later manuscripts to soften the injunction to justify anger in some occasions.²³ Significantly, both JST Matthew 5:22 and 3 Nephi 12:22 omit the qualification "without a cause," making clear that uncontrolled anger for any cause can lead to sin and subsequent judgment.²⁴

The three examples that follow represent situations involving varying degrees of anger, some of them involving very little intensity. First, the Lord warned against merely insulting one's brother, presumably out of anger or frustration. For instance, disparaging someone with the epithet "Raca," coming from the Aramaic *rêqā* meaning "empty," actually did not seem to constitute a particularly disparaging insult. In fact, it was a rather mild, if condescending, expression used with servants or members of one's household.²⁵ Likewise, the word translated "fool," *mōros*, was disrespectful but not particularly intense.²⁶ Second, the example of someone remembering that a brother had anything at all (Greek *echei ti*; KJV "hath ought") against him at the moment he was about to sacrifice illustrates that any problem in a relationship was damaging enough that it could impede worship of God. Significantly, the problem is no longer one's own anger but the anger of another. Only in the third example of two men so at odds that they are taking each other to court has the anger progressed beyond the degree that one could conceivably feel toward anyone on any day.

Obviously, Jesus' antithesis fulfills the intent of the commandment against murder, for controlling anger so completely would not allow one to get to the point of intentional murder. But the comprehensiveness of his prohibition raises the standard beyond what most disciples could easily attain. In this, as in so much of the sermon, Jesus' teachings require a change of heart beyond one's own ability to effect.

Adultery and lust (5:27–30). The commandment addressed here completely forbade sexual relations with someone married to another person (see Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18). Jesus’ counterproposition, however, is that a man should not even lust (*epithymēsai*) in his heart for another woman, married or not.²⁷ While Jesus’ antithesis addressed the root cause of adultery, the word *epithymēsai* distinguishes between an initial, perhaps involuntary, sexual feeling and the subsequent sinful response to it. First, rather than being a specific term for sexual desire, *epithymeō* is specifically an eager longing for anything.²⁸ Hence it can also be translated as “covet” and is thus connected with the prohibition of the Ten Commandments against coveting either a neighbor’s possessions or his wife (see Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21, both of which use *epithymēseis*).²⁹ Second, the Greek construction indicates that lust for (or, better, desire to have) another person is, at its root, the *purpose* of the looking rather than simply the *result*; the former suggests deliberate imagination or sexual fantasy.³⁰ In other words, Jesus’ antithesis that one should not lust—here including the idea of coveting as well—does not necessarily refer to a passing attraction but rather the sin of continuing to look in order to arouse further lust.

The antithesis itself is followed by a discussion in verses 29–30 of the radical steps that should be taken to avoid thoughts or actions that would lead to adultery through the use of the hyperbolic image of cutting off or plucking out a member that leads one to stumble (Greek *skandalízei*; KJV “offend”). The standard form of the hyperbole, or literary exaggeration to prove a point, placed the offending hand first and the eye second (see Mark 9:43–47; Matthew 18:8–9). But here, Jesus mentions the eye first to connect it with the lustful look spoken of in 5:28.³¹ Despite the apparent harshness of the hyperbole, it is important to note that it assumes repentance and forgiveness of the original sin. The serious symbolic steps to avoid further sin help interpret the initial antithesis: what is stressed is the failure to take the sin seriously and to avoid it that can lead one to condemnation.³² In this regard, Elder Dallin H. Oaks wrote regarding sexual impulses of various kinds, “All of us have some feelings we did not choose, but the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us that we still have the power to resist and reform our feelings (as needed) and to assure that they do not lead us to entertain inappropriate thoughts or to engage in sinful behavior.”³³ The Book of Mormon version of this directive directly connects

lusting with the heart: “Behold, I give unto you a commandment, that ye suffer none of these things to enter into your heart” (3 Nephi 12:29). Because actions come out of the heart (see Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21), wrong sexual behavior is a result of not allowing one’s heart to be bridled and transformed by Christ (see Alma 38:12).

Divorce and marriage (5:31–32). The third antithesis, regarding marriage, is the first to address a proposition not found first in the Ten Commandments. Nonetheless, Jesus’ association of remarriage after divorce with adultery connects it both to the Decalogue’s prohibition of adultery and the discussion in the preceding antithesis. The shortest of the antitheses, it is nonetheless demanding. Whereas the first two antitheses broadened the Mosaic injunctions to address the causes of murder and adultery, this counterproposition calls on Christians to disregard a right that the law allowed for a man to divorce his wife if she fell out of favor, particularly for “some indecency,” presumably some sexual deviance (Hebrew *rwt dbr*; KJV “some uncleanness”).³⁴ As a result, in Matthew 5:32, *logou porneias* (KJV “for the cause of fornication”) is probably not limited to adultery but includes a wider range of improper sexual relations.

Exactly what reason could justify divorce at the time of Jesus was the subject of debate within two different schools of the Pharisaic movement: the broadly interpretive House of Hillel and the more legalistic House of Shammai.³⁵ Thus the misconception that Judaism somehow allowed spurious divorce does not seem to be accurate, and the radical thrust of Jesus’ antithesis might lie elsewhere. First, the permission to divorce in the Mosaic code culminated in an injunction against a former husband remarrying his divorced wife (see Deuteronomy 24:4), whereas Jesus’ antithesis made marrying *any* man an act of adultery for the divorced wife. The strong teachings of Jesus elsewhere regarding divorce equate divorce and remarriage with adultery (Matthew 19:1–12; Luke 16:18), but here—in the context of the sermon, where intent matters as much as actions—Jesus places unnecessary divorce on a level equal with adultery in seriousness. In the other treatments of divorce in the Gospels, the Mosaic permission in a specific situation was explained in terms of “hardness of hearts” (Matthew 19:8). The implication in this antithesis is that divorce for any reason, other than sexual irregularity, is likewise a result of a hard heart, one that the teachings of Jesus were meant to help the believer overcome.³⁶

Forswearing and truthfulness (5:33–37). Although the fourth antithesis does not always receive as much attention as some of the others, its placement at the beginning of the second set of antitheses—marked by the resumptive “again” and the full formula “ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time”—emphasizes it.³⁷ Forswearing means to either renounce something upon an oath or to swear falsely. Because such oaths were taken in the name of the Lord, it is connected to the prohibition not to take the name of the Lord in vain (see Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 19:12) and to the later directive to perform everything that one vows (see Deuteronomy 23:21–22). The first of these precepts, not taking the Lord’s name in vain—meaning not just irreverently but in an unproductive, empty, or frivolous way—helps explain the prominence that this antithesis holds among the six. It, more than the other five antitheses, centers on our interaction with God rather than those with other people.

Indeed, the extended teaching of Jesus is essentially that God and everything connected with him (his creation, his city, even his ability to make hair “white or black”) are so holy that one should hesitate to ever use them in a way that will not be reverential, honest, or productive.³⁸ This respect for and deference to God anticipates Jesus’ interpretation of the Mosaic directive to love God with all of one’s heart (see Deuteronomy 6:5) as being the great and first commandment (see Matthew 22:36–38; Mark 12:28–30; Luke 10:27) upon which so much of the law depended.

It is the practice of swearing to establish truth that leads the antithesis in verse 37, which directs believers to keep language short, simple, and, above all, true. In that sense, the antithesis is also connected with the Decalogue’s commandment against false witness (see Exodus 20:16). Anciently, a witness would often be sworn in the name of the Lord, so swearing falsely broke both commandments. Jesus’ response was that truthfulness should so characterize the believer that his simple affirmation or denial should suffice without needing to swear at all.³⁹ Like the other antitheses, this one requires a transformation of the heart and will of each follower of Jesus.

Retaliation and submissiveness (5:38–42). With the fifth antithesis, Jesus returns to commandments that deal with man’s relationships and interactions with other people. The thesis that Jesus expands here is the law of retribution (*lex talionis*): if someone damages one body part, retribution can be

taken against him to the same degree (see Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21). While a modern quip suggests that if followed this would make “the whole world blind and toothless,” the limitations that Mosaic code imposed on retribution were often progressive for the time. Like those found in the Code of Hammurabi and a few other ancient law codes, they were meant to limit excessive retribution for damage.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, such retribution could easily be seen not as legal compensation but as retaliation, satisfying one’s anger at being hurt or offended. Perhaps with this attitude in view, Jesus’ antithesis counters the impulse for retaliation by requiring submissiveness of the believer, teaching him or her to endure unfair treatment with four different examples of conduct. Followers of Christ should not resist evil in the form of physical abuse but rather “turn the other cheek.” Legal action to take one’s property, in the example represented by one’s tunic (an inner garment but translated by the KJV as “coat”), should be met with a willingness to give up even more, in this case the more expensive cloak.⁴¹ Less costly but inconvenient was the example of forced service in verse 41, which reflected not so much unique Roman practice but rather the ability of any superior to coerce or demand favors.⁴² Rather than resist such impositions, the believer should be willing to do more than asked.

These first three examples are presented in order of decreasing severity: one is physically abused in the first, loses property in the second, and loses only time in the third. But the attitude of submissiveness and the habit of selflessness come to fruition in the final example, in which one is willing to lend, presumably with the expectation of receiving the item back, whenever asked. By the end of this string of examples, Jesus’ antithesis of not resisting evil results in a changed, generous heart.

Hate and love (5:43–47). The sixth antithesis begins with the Mosaic injunction to love one’s neighbor (see Leviticus 19:18). The contrasting assumption was that people were permitted to hate one’s enemies. No actual passage in the law directed Israelites to hate their enemies, although some passages, such as Deuteronomy 23:3–6, were far from generous in how enemies should be treated.⁴³ Clearly, it was possible to interpret the directive to love one’s neighbor narrowly to one’s own group, thus excluding Israel’s enemies and associating them with the “enemies of God,” thereby justifying hatred.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, Jesus' counterproposition, beginning for the last time with the authoritative "I say unto you," is to love *all* enemies.⁴⁵ This all-encompassing application of Jesus' love anticipated his teaching that we are to love all men (see Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27), a point vividly illustrated by the parable of the good Samaritan (see Luke 10:29–37). The examples of how believers must love their enemies that follow are striking: they must "bless them that curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those that despitefully use you, and persecute you." As is so often the case, Jesus' teachings here, as elsewhere in the sermon, call for a standard of behavior difficult even for experienced Christians. Jesus' explanation that God cares for all his children, causing the sun and rain to benefit the good and bad alike, provides the key. Loving and doing good to enemies may be difficult, even impossible on one's own. But if one's heart can be changed to become like Christ, the impossible becomes possible.

The Antitheses in the Context of Matthew 5

References to persecution and becoming children of our Father in Heaven in the sixth antithesis connect it, and all of the antitheses, to the Beatitudes. The eighth and ninth beatitudes mention persecution (5:10–12). Likewise, the antithesis concerning retaliation and submissiveness echo the pronouncement "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" of the third beatitude (5:5) because the Greek term for meek, *praeis*, connotes humbleness and gentleness.⁴⁶ But because all the antitheses require different motivations and feelings—effectively a new heart—the sixth beatitude's proclamation, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (5:8), perhaps best represents the result of living the principles in the antitheses.

Significantly, living according to the antitheses and developing the characteristics enjoined in the Beatitudes makes the believer more like the Master. The Beatitudes "are, in effect, Jesus' character in words. The Beatitudes are both characteristics of and conditions enjoyed by the exalted—those who are or will be recipients of eternal life."⁴⁷ Believers thus become "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (see Matthew 5:13–16). But the admonition to "let your light so shine before men" takes on added significance in view of Jesus' teachings in the Book of Mormon,

where he added, “Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up” (3 Nephi 18:24). When one acts as the Savior does, one can better become like him. Nevertheless, the change of heart makes allowance for grace, because few, if any, are able to live fully the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount on their own.

Following the conclusion of the antitheses, Matthew 5 ends with what is sometimes known as the great injunction: “Be ye therefore *perfect*, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (5:48; emphasis added). The word translated as “be” is *esesthe*, a future form usually taken to be an imperatival future.⁴⁸ There is precedent for this just a few verses before, when Jesus enjoined, “Love your enemies” (5:44), also an imperatival future. But this form could also be a predicative future,⁴⁹ meaning that if we live according to the antitheses, we will, in due course, become perfect.

To be perfect here, however, does not necessarily connote being morally flawless, at least not in this life. As discussed elsewhere in this volume, the word translated “perfect” is *teleíos*, meaning complete, full grown, or mature,⁵⁰ suggesting that disciples are to become mature spiritually in their walk with Christ. In Aristotelian philosophy, the *telos* was the model, end, or purpose of something it was struggling to become. Therefore, something is *teleíos* when it attains its end or purpose. This concept applies nicely to both antitheses and the great injunction. By fulfilling the law with his teachings, Jesus addresses the change of heart necessary to achieve our purpose and become what God intends: a complete, spiritually mature being such as he is.

The implications are weighty. Just as Jesus challenged his original audience to look beyond the letter of the law to understand its purpose and intent, the concept of fulfilling the law encourages us to stretch our understanding of what it means to fulfill the law of Christ. The fact that Jesus maintained and indeed deepened the ethical precepts of the Mosaic code, especially as found in the Ten Commandments, means that ethical considerations remain mandatory for Christians. Since ethics essentially revolve around doing the right thing for the right reason, believers, now as well as then, must carefully determine not only *what* they should do and not do, but also *why* and *how* they live. Here the commandment to love all men provides the ultimate guide (see Matthew 22:36–39; Mark 12:28–31; Luke 10:27).

Today the six antitheses remain important templates for our discipleship. First, they are as binding now as they were then in Galilee. Second, they model the kind of thinking believers should pursue as they strive to live any commandment or follow any practice of the law of the gospel. Seeking the spirit of the law rarely results in less observance than the letter of the law. Just as modern Apostles have raised the bar in qualifications for missionary service,⁵¹ Jesus elevated the expectations for discipleship, challenging his followers to deeper spirituality and observance. In this regard, living according to the Sermon on the Mount, especially as illustrated in the antitheses, should be a challenge even for experienced Christians. Jesus' call for a transformation of the heart and a higher standard of living is not a static one: wherever one is in his or her spiritual walk with Christ, one should be stirred to seek for more spiritual maturity, to becoming truly *teleios*, full grown and mature in stature, even as God our Father.

Notes

1. Indeed JST, Matthew 5:21 confirms that Jesus taught that the law was to be taught and lived until it was fulfilled, although the Prophet seems to have been using the term *fulfill* here in the sense of “finish” or “bring to an end.”

2. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “plēroō,” 827–29; Gerhard Friedrich, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), s.v. “plēroō,” 6.286–298, n.b. 292–94. Admittedly, we do not know exactly what Aramaic or perhaps even Hebrew words Jesus might have used, but we can assume that when translating the words of Jesus, Matthew employed Greek terms that best represented the meanings of the Master's words.

3. Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “katalyō,” 521–22; Gerhard Friedrich and Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (1973), s.v. “lyō, katalyō,” 4.338, where it is taken in 5:17 to mean “invalidate.” “[Matt 5:17] portrays Jesus as one who does not *annul* the law through partial modification, but rather fulfills (*plērōsai*) it” (H. Hübner, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), s.v. “katalyō,” 264.

4. A prime example of this can be seen in 3 Nephi 12:23–24, where the man's bringing a gift to the altar in Matthew 5:23–24 is replaced by his coming to Jesus.

5. For the last two, see Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 260. For discussions of the fulfillment of the law in this sense, see William D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 27–32, and John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 2005, 217–19.

6. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 219.

7. The mundane example of modern speed limits can be used to illustrate this. The original law may set the limit at 75 mph. When a new law changes to 55 mph, one still keeps the old law by observing the new.

8. David C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 130.

9. At the first occurrence of the formula *amēn legō hymin*, Mark 3:28, R.T. France notes that this formula “occurs regularly in all four gospels (though less frequently in Luke, and with a doubled *amēn* in John) and is generally agreed to be a hallmark of Jesus’ distinctive style of teaching. This bold assumption of authority (Jesus speaks in his own name, and his words, like the words of Yahweh in the OT, are ‘truth’) is unparalleled in Jewish literature” (*The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002], 174–75).

10. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Boston: Hendrickson, 2008), entries based in ‘*mn*, 52–53; G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, trans. John T. Willis, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), s.v. “*āman*,” 292–94, 320–23. Note also the connection with ‘*emeth* for “truth.”

11. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 219.

12. Sim, *Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 124–26.

13. Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina 1 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 81 n. 18.

14. Rather than being a genitive of personal agent, as one would expect from the translation “by them of old times,” the construction is actually a dative indirect object.

15. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 437–38.

16. See Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 228.

17. See Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 274.

18. Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 274 n. 1.

19. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 235.

20. Harrington, *Gospel of Matthew*, 86; Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 229.

21. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 235.

22. Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 284.

23. “Although the reading with *eikē* is widespread from the second century onwards, it is much more likely that the word was added by copyists in order to soften the rigor of the precept, than omitted as unnecessary” (Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [New York: United Bible Societies, 1975], 13). See also Daniel K Judd and Allen W. Stoddard, “Adding and Taking Away ‘Without a Cause’ in Matthew 5:22,” in *How the New Testament Came to Be* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 160–68.

24. Judd, “Adding and Taking Away ‘Without a Cause’ in Matthew 5:22,” 168–70.

25. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 231; Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 282, esp. n. 14.
26. Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “mōros,” esp. definition c, 663.
27. Although some commentators point out that the Greek *gynē* here often refers to “a married woman” and should be taken so here (see, for example, Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 237), the base meaning of the term means “any adult female” and can include even virgins (Bauer, “gynē,” 208–209). In support of this, Luz notes that the Vulgate translated *gynē* not with *uxor* (wife) but with *mulier* (a woman in general) (*Matthew 1–7*, 292).
28. Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “epithymēō,” 371–72.
29. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 237.
30. The preposition *pros* + infinitive, as in *pros to epithymēsai* here, indicates purpose and not result (Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 591); see also Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 236; Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 293.
31. Harrington, *Gospel of Matthew*, 87; Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 238.
32. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 240.
33. Dallin H. Oaks, “Same-Gender Attraction,” *Ensign*, October 1995, 7.
34. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 244–46; Harrington, *Gospel of Matthew*, 87–88.
35. Harrington, *Gospel of Matthew*, 92.
36. “But some marriages do not progress toward that ideal. Because ‘of the hardness of [our] hearts,’ the Lord does not currently enforce the consequences of the celestial standard” (Dallin H. Oaks, “Divorce,” *Ensign*, May 2007, 70).
37. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 248.
38. Luz notes here that Jesus, “just as Judaism on the whole, is concerned about the sanctification of God’s name and about God’s majesty” (*Matthew 1–7*, 316).
39. Some have noted that in later rabbinic writings a double affirmative or negative, like the “yea, yea; nay, nay” here can be construed as an implied oath, but that cannot be the intent here since Jesus has just forbidden all oaths (see Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 88).
40. Harrington, *Gospel of Matthew*, 88. However, see also Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 256.
41. Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 325–26.
42. Little is known about actual Roman practices in the holy land or elsewhere in this period, most characterizations of which are derived from this very verse and from the later example of Simon of Cyrene and not from contemporary Roman documents. The practice of pressing people and animals into temporary service is first documented much earlier for the Persian postal service (Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 259–60). The Greek term used here for “compel,” *aggareusei*, is in fact a Persian loan word (see Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 326). The fact that such demands were not seen as specific to the Roman occupation is Jesus’ use of the same example in a New World context in 3 Nephi 12:41.
43. R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 192.
44. Harrington, *Gospel of Matthew*, 89 n. 43, notes as an example the Qumran directive to “hate all the sons of darkness” (1QS 1:10); see also the discussion of D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner in *The Four Gospels* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 201–2.

45. Some attempt has been made to interpret the Greek of Matthew, which uses *echthros* for enemy, to distinguish between a personal enemy (the Classical use of *echthros*) and a national enemy (*polemios*) in this passage, but the Jewish use of *echthros* in the Septuagint is comprehensive, encompassing all types of enemies (see Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 342, especially n. 27).

46. Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “*praüs*,” 861.

47. Ogden and Skinner, *Four Gospels*, 173.

48. The future indicative being used for a command involves two specific uses, the imperativ future (Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 569–70) and the cohortitive indicative. BDF §362 terms it “the future indicative for volitive expressions in main clauses (instead of the imperative and subjunctive)” and notes that it “is employed to render the categorical injunctions and prohibitions . . . in the legal language of the OT (not entirely so in classical).”

49. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 568.

50. Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “*teleios*,” 995–96; see Frank F. Judd Jr., “‘Be Ye Therefore Perfect’: The Elusive Quest for Perfect,” in this volume. The Aramaic word presumably used by Christ is not known, but there seems to be clear resonance with the Hebrew words *tam* and *tamim* translated as “perfect” in reference to figures such as Noah, Abraham, and Job (see Genesis 6:9; 17:1; Job 1:1; Ogden and Skinner, *Four Gospels*, 203).

51. See M. Russell Ballard, “The Greatest Generation of Missionaries,” *Ensign*, November 2002, 46–49; see also L. Tom Perry, “Raising the Bar,” *Ensign*, November 2007, 46–49.