

## **The Fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets**

Matthew 5:17-18

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*<sup>17</sup> “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. <sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Have you ever taken a test and received one hundred percent score every single time for every single subject without preparation?

Jesus tells his disciples the standard you ought to have.

*“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* Matthew 5:48

Notice, Jesus does not say, prepare to be perfect one time or a few times.

Jesus simply says “be perfect”.

And what would being perfect look like?

Well, you could look at Adam before the Fall. He was made in the image and likeness of God without sin. But, now, having inherited a sin nature, we look at the law of commandments to see how we could measure up. Here are a few questions to consider.

Do you give glory to God one hundred percent?

Do you esteem God above created things one hundred percent?

Is Jesus Christ your supreme value and worth over all that you see and are swayed by in this life?

How about scoring one hundred percent in not taking God’s name in vain?

I wonder many times you have said OMG because you were frustrated or angry.

How about honoring father and mother one hundred percent?

How about not having a single thought of anger or lust or cheating or lying or coveting ever?

So the standard of God for you is to be perfect.

God is perfect in love. Perfect in patience. Perfect in forgiveness. Perfect in goodness.

At a very human level, we must be about pursuing excellence and perfection.

This is basic. If you go to a music recital and you hear someone miss a key or a note, you know there is something off. If you are employed to work for forty hours a week, you are expected to work those hours.

And Christians ought to be known for excelling in Christian graces. As we have seen the Beatitudes, the disciples of Jesus are to be characterized by humility, meekness, being sorry for sin, righteousness, purity, peacemaking and rejoicing when suffering for Christ.

However, when we see a passage like this in the Sermon on the Mount, it can be somewhat confusing to understand what Jesus is teaching.

Is Jesus saying that keeping the commandments gets you into heaven?

In Judaism, there were six hundred thirteen laws to keep.

Surely, if you keep reading in verse twenty, Jesus tells his disciples that “*unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven*”.

And the emphasis is on the word *never* because in the author’s language it is a double negative.

Jesus says forget heaven if you think you can do a minimum.

The scribes and Pharisees were sticklers to the letter of the law. They were devoted to the Law of God. Jesus does not criticize them for that. He criticizes them for not doing enough and ignoring parts of the Law.

So, one side, Jesus sets the highest standard.

On the other hand, others thought Jesus was ignoring the Law. Otherwise, he would not say “*Do not think I have come to abolish the law*”. At least, that is what Jesus knows the religious leaders will say of him when he does things, for example like healing on the Sabbath day. Jesus knows every heart and mind. In the following chapters, Jesus and his disciples were accused of breaking the Law. His disciples ate grains on the Sabbath day and were accused of violating the Sabbath.

*How are we to understand Jesus’ statement that he did come to abolish the law?*

I’ll attempt to answer this question today and next Sunday, Lord willing, we will look at verses nineteen and twenty.

Let’s look at the *first* part of verse *seventeen*.

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them ..*

I have at least *three* major observations in light of verse seventeen.

First observation:

1. Jesus opposes all forms of lawlessness.

Jesus tells his disciples to be a thinking people. Do not *think* I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. One of the most compelling questions Jesus asks his disciples is “*Who do people say that I am?*” (Matthew 16:13, Mark 8:27, Luke 9:18). And what do the disciples say in response? Some thought Jesus was John the Baptist. Others thought Jesus was the prophet Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. So people had their opinions about the identity of Jesus.

Similarly, some in the religious circles particularly the scribes and the Pharisees, leaders of the temple in that day thought Jesus broke the Law of God. Jesus teaches his disciples not to think that he had come to abolish the “the Law and the Prophets”. What does it mean?

Well, the Law corresponds to the moral law of God. Why does Jesus say, “Do not think or do not presume or do not assume?” Jesus came and ministered to all kinds of people – the sick, the lame, the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the rich and the poor. And as Jesus ministered to them, his disciples could come to a conclusion and say, “just be compassionate like Jesus and the maybe Law is not that important as Jewish authorities were making it to be”. And you know who was very upset with Jesus. The religious elites. They would think Jesus was ignoring the Law of God to help the poor. That was hardly the case. The religious elites emphasized certain parts of the Law for their own benefit. This is one reason why Jesus says “do not assume”. And there are those who received benefit from Jesus who could think they could do continue in their sin. There was a man who had been crippled for thirty-eight years and Jesus healed him. And Jesus met him again and told him these words “*Sin no more*” John 5:14. Jesus could have let him go but Jesus interested in his spiritual life than mere bodily healing. Jesus knows that sin is breaking the law of God. In a sense the religious leaders honored the Law of God but they also made additional laws and traditions to protect the Law to the extent they became unmerciful and ungracious. Case in point, when the disabled man was healed, the temple leaders were giving the man such a hard by telling him that it was unlawful to pick up his bed on a Sabbath day. In Jesus’ words, the religious leaders were “*straining a gnat and swallowing a camel*”. Meaning, they lacked the right emphasis of the Law of God. The Sabbath was a big deal to them. And they would make a hue and cry if they saw what appeared to be the slightest deviation from the Law. Jesus’ point is this: trying to make much of one part of the Law at the expense of others could amount to lawlessness. Also, we have people who say today, “Well, Jesus accepts just the way I am. I don’t need to change anything. Who are you to tell me what I need to do?”. Lawlessness remains without repentance. Jesus accepts you just the way you are to change you into his image.

2. Jesus reveals our need for grace.

With the exception of a few, for about fifteen hundred years since the first century AD, the Sermon on the Mount was interpreted as something you must *do* enter the kingdom of heaven. Your righteousness must *exceed* the most religious and you must *be* perfect. However, this is an impossible standard to achieve. In the sixteen century Martin Luther, the leader of the Protestant reformation gave us much insight into understanding the Sermon on the Mount. Luther considered the Sermon on the Mount to be an extension of the ten commandments. The Law and the Sermon on the Mount function as a mirror that reveals your sin. So, as you try and obey this kind of law you realize you simply cannot and as a result you learn how sinful you are and turn to God's grace. The Law simply reveals your *inadequacy*, your *lack* and your *insufficiency* in perfectly keeping the Law of God. The Sermon on the Mount is not a *requirement* for becoming a Christian or a disciple of Jesus Christ but an *ethic* for people who are already disciples. The Law simply cannot save you but only shows the *impossibility* of keeping it perfectly. John Calvin is very helpful in understanding this particular subject. Calvin says, "*To our weakness...everything in the law is arduous and difficult. In the Lord we have strength...That Christians are under grace means not that they are to wander unrestrained without law but that they are engrafted into Christ, by whose grace they have the Law written on their hearts*". Calvin says we have "empowering grace". Meaning you just don't have forgiveness but an empowering transformation that takes place in the heart so that we can obey. So, the Law reveals our need for grace.

Now notice, in verse seventeen, Jesus uses the words "I have not come" twice. Jesus did not come to abolish the Law but why did he come? Jesus tells us. Look at the last part of verse seventeen.

*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.*

This is the main point of the passage. Third observation.

3. Jesus is fulfilment of the Law and Prophets.

Before we look at how Jesus fulfilled the Law the Prophets, Jesus explains to us how important is the law. How important is the Law?

Let's look at verse *eighteen*.

*For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*

An iota is half a letter in the Hebrew alphabet. A dot is a small mark in a Hebrew letter. Jesus says everything written in the Law and Prophets will be accomplished. Every word is important. This is how much Jesus values the word of God.

And how did Jesus fulfill the Law and Prophets?

A few observations:

- a. Jesus fulfilled the Law and Prophets by being the final and full revelation of God.
  - i. You don't need a Joseph Smith to come after a few hundred years and say I have a new revelation from God. It ends with Jesus. Here are two book ends to consider in the Gospel of Matthew – the birth and death of Jesus. Here is the beginning – *“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”*<sup>22</sup> *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”* Matthew 1:21-23. God has spoken through his prophets for long but now in these last days he has spoken through his Son Jesus Christ.
- b. Jesus fulfilled the Law and Prophets by being perfectly obedient in its moral and legal obligations.
  - i. Jesus was obedient as human son of Mary and Joseph.
- c. Jesus fulfilled the Law and Prophets by being perfectly obedient to earn righteousness for others.
  - i. This is perhaps the most glorious truth about Jesus. He was obedient even to the point of death. And in his death, he obtained righteousness on your behalf. And how did he accomplish this? By being treated like a lawbreaker. Treated as a common criminal, Jesus was given the most excruciating horrifying treatment on the cross. Though innocent and sinless, Jesus endured all this suffering so that those *repent* and find meaning in his death find that they have full *forgiveness* and therefore are treated as if they are perfect in God's sight because of the perfect obedience of Jesus. The law demanded sin be punished. Jesus paid the price. This is not some grace. Marvelous Grace. So if one book end was his birth. Here is the other book end: *“But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?”*<sup>55</sup> *At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me.”*<sup>56</sup> *But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.”* Matthew 26:54-56
    - ii. *“Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”*<sup>45</sup> *Then he opened their minds to*

*understand the Scriptures,* <sup>46</sup> and said to them, “*Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,* <sup>47</sup> and *that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem*” Luke 24: 44-47

- iii. We have a proclaiming mission. Any lawbreaker can receive forgiveness when they repent and trust in this death for the remission of their sins.
- d. Last observation. In verse eighteen, Jesus says “until all is accomplished”. Jesus accomplished a perfect righteousness on your behalf and one day he will create the new heavens and a new earth.

Lastly, two implications in light of Jesus fulfilling the Law and the Prophets.

- In Jesus Christ, you are fulfilled. “*you have been filled in him*” Colossians 2:10
- Secondly, you have obligation to love God and neighbor with the grace that God gives. Not to earn perfect obedience but because Jesus was perfectly obedient. And in him, you love. Paul writes these words in Romans 13. “*Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.*<sup>9</sup>*For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*<sup>10</sup>*Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*”

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **The Fulfillment of The Law and the Prophets.** Matthew 5:17-18

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. In what way Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets? Go around and share.  
Matthew 1:22, 2:15, 17, 23, 3:15, 4:14, 8:17, 12:17, 13:35, 21:4, 27:9, 35

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Do you believe you are *fulfilled* in Jesus Christ? That Jesus's perfect obedience has been credited to you when you repented and trusted in his death as payment for your sin. Why or why not?  
Colossians 2:10, 13-14, Romans 8:1-4, 13:8.
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

1. For personal reflection: Being fulfilled in Christ, how then are you to live? Are there areas that keep you from loving God and loving others?