

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Christ and the Law, Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 5:17

Code: 2209

Turn in your Bible to Matthew 5:17-20, and tonight I want us to share an opening message on one of the most marvelous passages of Scripture that we could ever study. Let me read it to you so that your thoughts will be set, and tonight, we'll discuss the first verse.

Our Lord says, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy them but to fulfill them. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men to do so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

Let's pray before we study. Father, help us tonight to be able to comprehend this deep, profound message from the Lord Jesus Christ. Open up the eyes of our understanding, enlighten our minds and hearts that we might truly rejoice in the truth of this great word. We give You the praise, in Christ's name, Amen.

In a recent book entitled The Interaction of Law and Religion, Harold J. Berman, who is a professor of law at Harvard University, and one of the most outstanding professors there, has developed a very significant thesis. His thesis in the book is that Western culture has had a massive loss of confidence in law and a massive loss of confidence in religion. He sees that one of the causes is the radical separation of one from the other, and his conclusion is that you cannot have law, or rules for behavior, without religion, because it is religion that provides the absolute base for morality and law.

The man is not a Christian, but certainly, we would have to agree with his thesis. He fears that Western culture is doomed to relativism in law because of the loss of an absolute. We have broken away from religion, from the concept of God, from absolute truth, and therefore we are stuck with existential relativism when it comes to making laws. He says that law and religion will stand together or law and religion will fall together. Religion-less law could never command authority; there must be a transcendent value, a super-rational absolute.

In his book, he quotes professor Thomas Frank of NYU. Frank says, "Law has become undisguisedly a pragmatic human process. It is made by men, and it lays no claim to divine origin or eternal

validity." This leads professor Frank to the view that a judge in a court reaching a decision is not propounding a truth but is rather experimenting in the solution of a problem. If his decision is reversed by a higher court, or if it is subsequently overruled, that doesn't mean it was wrong, only that it was, or became in the course of time, unsatisfactory.

"Having broken away from religion," Frank states, "Law is now characterized by existential relativism. Indeed, it is now generally recognized that no judicial decision is ever final, that the law follows the event, is not eternal or certain, is made by man and is not divine or true."

Berman goes on to say, "If law is merely an experiment, and if judicial decisions are merely hunches, why should individuals or groups of people observe those legal rules or commands if they do not conform to their own interests?" He's right. Why am I quoting all of that? To tell you this: we are endeavoring, in our society, to have rules without an absolute. Court after court after court overturns some other ruling. When you abandon God and theology, you abandon truth. Trying to make laws without truth or an ultimate value is impossible. You cannot build a consistent legal system on philosophical humanism, a fluctuating, changing principle of what is right and what is wrong.

In the latest issue of *Esquire Magazine*, there is an article by a man named Peter Steinfelds. The article is entitled "The Reasonable Right." He says this, "How can moral principles be grounded and social institutions ultimately legitimated in the absence of a religiously-based culture?" The answer is that they cannot. So some people are hinting at the issue, secular people like Steinfelds and Berman and others. They are hinting at this issue: if there is no absolute truth, and no absolute word, and no God who sets the standard, then there can be no real law. You'll never get people to keep laws that are only judicial guesses.

So we ask ourselves, "What is the absolute source of truth? What is the absolute standard of morality? What is the absolute rule of justice? Where does this evil society, floating on a sea of relativism, find its anchor?" That's the question. Is there a standard to live by? Is there an absolute authority? Is there an unchanging authority, and inviolable law?

In the verses I just read to you from Matthew 5:17-20, we find that, indeed, there is. That law is none other than the law of God. Jesus said that not one jot or tittle will pass from that law until everything is fulfilled. He did not come in any whit to set it aside but to fulfill it. Anyone who teaches another to break the least of those commandments is the least in the Kingdom. In other words, God has laid down an absolute, eternal, abiding law. In fact, in John 17:17, Jesus said to the Father, "Thy word is truth."

Recently, people have been questioning this in terms of Christianity, and more particularly, in my own case. A lady called the other day from a magazine which will be printing another article on whether the Bible ought to be believed in terms of the home. She said to me, "It seems to me that you don't

realize times have changed. The Bible doesn't fit today anymore." I said, "That isn't the way it is; the way it is is that today doesn't fit the Bible anymore. It's today that's wrong, not the Bible."

Someone else said to me, on a radio program, "That's your interpretation. Everyone has their own interpretation, and that's the way you interpret it." The point is this: if the Bible confronts you where you don't want to be confronted, then say, "The Bible is out-of-date," or, "The Bible needs to be reinterpreted." Don't face the reality that maybe you are out-of-date and need to be reinterpreted. That's the perspective.

People today want to reinterpret the Bible, to deny its authority. Chapters we once believed to be written by God are now said to be written by some rabbi who added it in. Portions of the Scripture that we don't agree with or abide by, we just shuffle off, out of the picture. We reinterpret the verses to say what we want them to say; we say, "That's cultural and doesn't relate to today." Anything at all to evade allowing the Bible to confront us in our time and place in the history of the world. Jesus is saying that not one jot or tittle will pass from it, every bit of it will be fulfilled. He did not abrogate or annul one whit of it, and anyone who teaches anyone else to disobey the smallest command in the Bible will be the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. Nothing ever changes in the Bible, nothing!

We will see in our study that this is Jesus' view of God's law. By the way, whatever Jesus thinks of the Bible is what I want to think of it. Frankly, I get weary of the fact that people are constantly overturning historical interpretations, things that the church has believed for centuries, throwing them out if they conflict with the evil of today. They want to deny that the Bible is inerrant, they want to say, "There are errors in the Bible and that's one of them," or, "The Bible isn't really all inspired, or it certainly isn't authoritative. It's just a cultural thing. You can't take everything it says," so we redefine Scripture to fit our sin.

That's what's happening in our society today. The sad thing is, if you think it's tough on a society like ours, a secular society, to find an anchor, it's even tougher on so-called Christianity because so-called Christianity is busy about denying the Bible. Without an absolute base, there will be no standard of behavior, and we will drift along like the world - without an anchor.

This Scripture is so very important because here, our Lord tells us that we have an absolute, we have an inviolable authority. "Let it speak," He's saying. "Let it speak and shatter you, and crush your evil ways. Let it overturn your disobedient lives, let it make you face God nose-to-nose and either accept or reject His will and take the consequences." He said, "The Bible is an absolute." That was His view, and it has to be our view. To remove the absolute character of the Bible, to say it has errors in it, to say it isn't authoritative, to say it needs to be reinterpreted is simply to drift with the world away from any standard of righteousness.

In this passage, Jesus presents what He thinks of God's Word. Of course, for Him, at this time, God's Word really was comprised of the Old Testament. So this is Jesus' perspective on the Old Testament. We want to ask some interesting questions. Jesus said that not one jot or tittle will pass away but that He had come to fulfill it.

Immediately, we say, "Is the Old Testament binding on the Christian? How much of it is binding for the Christian? Is the Old Testament totally commanded of us? Do we have to fulfill all those things? How important are all those things?" These are vital questions, and Bible students and scholars have wrestled with these questions for years and years, and I think that here, Jesus gives us a wonderful answer. You can understand it, and you'll see it as we move along.

Let me set the scene for you. Christ had appeared in Israel; He appeared rather suddenly, startlingly, in a dramatic way. For 30 years, He had been there, but no one really knew about it. He was in obscurity in Nazareth, but all of a sudden, at His baptism, He hit the scene. The first 30 years of His life on earth had been lived in privacy outside his own little circle; He had done little traveling and attracted very little attention. But as soon as He appeared in public and was baptized, the eyes of everyone were fixed on Him. Even the leaders of Israel had to focus in on Him and look at Him and hear Him and watch Him.

Of course, His meekness and beautiful humility made Him easily distinguishable from the rest of the leaders in Israel who were proud, boastful, hypocritical, always looking for some way to lift themselves up, some way to aggrandize themselves. His call to repentance and His proclamation of the Gospel and His announcement of a Kingdom made people listen, and made them wonder, "What kind of a ruler is this? What kind of a prophet is this?" Was He a revolutionary? He was so different. What was His attitude toward the Mosaic Law?

You see, the issue is that Jesus didn't sound like the Pharisees, and He didn't sound like the scribes. He didn't sound like anyone they were hearing in their day, and their natural reaction was to wonder whether He was really an Old Testament prophet or not. He didn't echo the prevailing theology of His day; He refused to identify Himself with any of the sects of His time. His preaching was so different from that of the Pharisees and scribes that people were inclined to think that He intended to subvert the authority of the Word of God and substitute His own. He threw over all the traditions of men; all the extraneous, legalistic rules, He disregarded. He kept putting an emphasis on inward morality. He was a friend of publicans and sinners and all the worst riffraff in the society.

He proclaimed grace and dispensed mercy, and their natural reaction was, "Is this a revolutionary new thing? I mean, He doesn't sound like the rest of the people we hear, like the scribes and Pharisees," so they were wondering, "Is He tearing down the Old Testament? Is He destroying all the absolutes of the Mosaic Law? Is He removing the foundations for some new thing?" After all, it is the way of most revolutionary leaders to sever all ties with the past and do everything they can to

completely repudiate the traditions that have gone before.

By the way, for a long time in Israel, there were certain people who believed the Messiah would do just that. There were some who believed the Messiah would radically overturn the Old Testament. These were sort of the anti-Pharisees. They were somewhat sickened by the Pharisees, and they were looking for a time when Messiah came and threw out all that law stuff. They were thinking, "Maybe this is the one. Maybe He'll come in with radical changes, overthrow the ancient order of legalistic religion." So they were wondering, and rightly so - we can understand that. "Does this teacher believe in the Holy Writings? Does He believe in Moses? Does He believe in the prophets and the law in all of its fullness?"

After all, where all the scribes and Pharisees were always expounding the law, Jesus wouldn't do that. He was busy talking about grace and mercy. Where the Pharisees and Scribes were binding the law on people, He was busy forgiving people. Where they were always talking about the outside, He was always talking about the inside. He even blasted away at some of the most sacred of their traditions. Is this a new theology?

Right here, Jesus puts it all into perspective. What He says, in effect, is this, "This is nothing new at all. I am going to reiterate to you and I'm going to fulfill the whole Old Testament law. I will not set aside one jot or one tittle of that law until all of it is fulfilled." So the amazing manifesto of the King is in direct confrontation to their thinking. He wouldn't lower the standard, He would raise it where it belonged.

What had happened was this: their thinking was that the standard was so high, someone would have to lower it. His thinking was that it had been dragged down so low, someone had to raise it again. Why? They had turned an internal law into an external thing. He was going to drive it back inside where it belonged. In fact, He had a greater commitment to the law of God than the most scrupulous scribe or Pharisee. So He proceeds in this passage to support the authority of the whole Old Testament.

It bothers me when people don't read, study, or know the Old Testament. It is the foundation of the New Testament. It is very important, and Jesus is supporting that Old Testament. In fact, He says, "I am not the one denying the Old Testament, the Jewish leaders are." That's the historical scene. First of all, I gave you a theme to look for in this, the establishing of an absolute law. Then I gave you some historical setting, now let me put you into the context of Matthew 5.

In a sense, these verses flow out of what has gone before. In verses 3-12, we have the Beatitudes. You'll remember that is a list of the characteristics of a son of God, characteristics of one who lives in the Kingdom, characteristics of a believer. So in verses 3-12, we have what we are as Kingdom sons; this is what we are. In verses 13-16, we are told how we are to live; this is who we are, this is

how we live. In other words, in one sense, we have a very doctrinal definition, in another one, a very practical issue of how we live.

So Jesus comes on the scene and in His first sermon, He says, "If you're in My Kingdom, this is who you are, this is how you act." Immediately, the question comes up in my mind, "I read the Beatitudes, and isn't easy to be like that. I've read verses 13-16 about being salt and light, and it isn't easy to live like that. How can we be that? How can we live that way?" The answer comes immediately in verse 17, "You must uphold the word of God."

The Word of God, then, becomes the standard of righteousness. The Word of God give the guidelines, the principles, the requirements. How can we really live out a righteous life, how can we live out the Beatitudes, how can we be salt and light? Certainly not by lowering the standard. Certainly not by dropping the law of God and saying that it isn't binding anymore. We can't say that we'll just love each other and waltz along, doing our thing. No, the standard stays where it was.

How can we live as salt and light? How can we be all we have to be? By keeping God's principles of absolute obedience to an absolutely authoritative Word of God. In contrast, by the way, to the theology of the day, which only obeyed what it wanted to obey.

So the Lord introduces that thought here. And it is a powerful thought, that the key to a righteous life is keeping the Word of God. That's why He says in verse 20 that the kind of righteousness the Pharisees have will never cut it, unless your righteousness exceeds theirs. Why? Theirs was external and based on the traditions of men. "Mine," He says, "Is internal, based on the eternal law of God." That's the difference.

So if we're to be salt and light, we must be righteous, truly righteous. The only way to have a true righteousness is to go beyond the phony externalism of the scribes and Pharisees to an inward righteousness that is only wrought in you by the power and authority of the Word of God. So the Word of God is the basis for a righteous standard, and God never changed it. When Jesus came, He didn't abrogate the Old Testament, He just restated its absolute, binding character.

People say, "What about later on in the chapter, where He says, 'You have heard it said, but I say,' isn't He adding to the Old Testament? Isn't He changing the Old Testament?" No. What He is doing is simply restating God's original intention because the rabbis had so perverted the Old Testament that He has to raise the standard back up to where God put it in the first place.

Look at the text; I want you to see here Jesus laying down the law. Jesus is saying, "Here is the absolute, here is the standard for righteousness," and there are four points. We're only going to look at the first one tonight, but I want to give them to you. Jesus says these four things about the law: the preeminence of the law, the permanence of the law, the pertinence of the law, and the purpose of the

law.

As I said this morning, these verses are so loaded that it's like trying to drink out of a fire hose. They are just absolutely loaded with truth, filled with truth. There is no conceivable way that our minds can even handle one one-hundredth of what is in these words, but I want to us to take a leap in the dark and see if we can't land on something exciting.

This is Jesus' view of Scripture, and that settles it for me; whatever Jesus thought of the Bible, that's what I think. Point one will be all for tonight - the preeminence of the law in verse 17. "Think not that I have come to destroy the law and the prophets. I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill." To Jesus, God's law, God's Scripture, the Word of God was absolutely preeminent, first-place, unequaled.

Notice He begins by saying, "Think not," and that's exactly what they were doing. They were thinking, "Oh, well, He's here. He'll set the laws aside and all of those things aside." He's saying, "On the contrary; I will not lower the standard one whit."

We know from some Jewish writings that are available to us that many of the Jews expected the Messiah to annul the law. They misinterpreted Jeremiah 31:31, where it says, "Behold I will make a new covenant," and they thought the new covenant would nullify everything that God had established in the old, but they were wrong.

Jesus came along and said, "I am introducing a new order." He told them even to disregard the Sabbath; He violated many of their traditions, and it was natural for them to think of that. He rather ruthlessly swept away their traditions and tithings of minuscule things; He mocked their constant washings. He disregarded their oral and scribal law; He interpreted the written law in a totally different way than they did. He spoke as one having authority, but in no way was He revolting from the Old Testament; in no way was His gospel a gospel of indulgence.

Let me tell you, if you're a Christian today, God has not set aside His principles. There are still the same. In fact, Jesus lifted up the law and the Old Testament so high that He wound up exposing all the Pharisees and the scribes as hypocrites, didn't He?

In verse 20, He goes right after them. "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into My Kingdom" In chapter 6, He says essentially the same thing in verse 1, "Take heed that you do not do your alms before men to be seen by them." Verse 5, "When you pray, you shouldn't pray as the hypocrites, who love to pray standing in the synagogues and the corner of the street, that they may be seen of men." Verse 16, "When you fast, don't be like the hypocrites, of a sad countenance." In other words, "Whatever your righteousness is, it should be on the inside, and not on the outside. Not the phony hypocrisy of an external religion."

In Matthew 15:1, He essentially says the very same thing; in fact, He goes through the whole book of Matthew saying it. "Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees," and down in verse 7, He talks to them. "You hypocrites, well that Isaiah prophesied of you, saying, 'This people draws near to me with their mouths, honoring me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.' You hypocrites," He said.

Matthew 16:1, "The Pharisees and Sadducees came, testing Him, desiring that He would show them a sign." Verse 3, "You hypocrites," He says again. Matthew 22:18, Jesus fills out Matthew's thought, "Jesus perceived their wickedness and said, 'Why do you test me, you hypocrites?'" Finally, in chapter 23, He goes through the entire chapter, and I can't read it all to you, calling them hypocrites in verses 13, 14, 15, 25, 27, and 29. I mean, He was really after them.

Every once in a while, someone will come along and say, "Brother MacArthur, sometimes you come across negatively." You'd better believe I come across negatively! I'm in good company. Sometimes you have to come across negatively. If you're going to lift the standard of God high, then you're going to expose everything that is phony, right? That's what Jesus did.

So He arrives and opens up His sermon by saying, "Here's my standard of righteousness, and here's how you live in the world, and the base of it all is to be obedient to God's inviolable and unchanging law." Anyone who doesn't live by God's standards, who substitutes a man-made system, is no more than a spiritual phony.

Let's go back to verse 17. "Think not that I have come to destroy the law." He says, "I didn't come to destroy it." The word is kataluo and it means 'abrogate, destroy, nullify.' In a physical sense, the word is used of pulling down a wall or smashing a house to the ground. He didn't come to smash down the Old Testament or pull it to pieces. By the way, that word is applied to the temple, and it is applied, in II Corinthians 5, to the body. It is used in a physical sense of the breaking down, or destruction, of a building or a body. Here, in the spiritual sense, He didn't come to destroy the law.

Figuratively, the word kataluo is used in Romans 14:20 and again in Acts 5:38 to mean 'come to naught, to render useless, to nullify, to annul, to disallow.' Jesus said, "I didn't come to do that, but I came to fulfill the law." People, if you can just get a little bit of what I'm going to say now, I think it will crack open a whole comprehension of the Old Testament that you may never have had in your life. To our Lord Jesus Christ, the new covenant did not throw away the old covenant; it did not annul everything. It was fulfilled, and that's different. He didn't come to tear it down, He came to fulfill it. That's very different, and what our Lord is saying is that the law is preeminent; nothing surpasses it or takes its place, and He gives three reasons in this verse.

Reason number one is that it is authored by God. "Think not that I have come to destroy the law," and He uses the definite article 'the.' They knew which law He meant, He meant the law of God. It

goes without saying, and they knew what He was talking about. He was talking about the law of God, the law which was authored by God. In Exodus, where God first laid down the Decalogue, The 10 Commandments, listen to how it begins. "And God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.'" That's the way He begins, "I am the author of law, and I am the Lord your God." The law is inviolable, the law is binding because God is the author of that law.

In fact, in verse 3, He says, "You will have no other gods before me," in other words, "This law will be the only law because I am the only God." Listen, beloved, He said of Himself, "I am the Lord, I change not." So the law of God is not some kind of changing mode of human opinion, designed to fit the whims of every society. The law of God is not something you just adjust and adapt to whatever sin is going on in your day.

The law of God never changes. They are God's standards, and the first commandment is this: I am the Lord your God, and you will have no other gods before me. This is an uncompromising standard based on the fact that He is the absolute sovereign and only God. This is not an obscure idol or remote deity, this is the holy, only God of the universe. He has created all things and all laws to govern them, so they are binding. By the way, God is still alive, right? His rules are still the same; His nature is unchanged and His laws remain.

Let's be specific about the law. To what does Jesus refer? Lots of people have discussed this. Well, Jesus uses the term 'law' in a rather comprehensive way. When the Jews used it in Jesus' time, and this is helpful, they had four things in mind, four possibilities.

First of all, sometimes they used the term to speak of the Ten Commandments. Secondly, sometimes they used the word to speak of the Pentateuch, or the five books of Moses. Thirdly, sometimes they used the word to speak of the whole Old Testament, but most usually, when they used the word 'law,' they weren't speaking of the Ten Commandments, the Pentateuch, or the whole Old Testament, but they were talking about the oral, scribal traditions that they had been receiving from these various rabbis. In other words, Jesus put it right in Matthew 15, "You have substituted the traditions of men for the law of God."

You say, "How could they do that?" The most common use of law among the Jews of Jesus' time was that it referred to these thousands of minuscule principles, external stuff that had replaced the internal law of God. Here's the reason. Let's say you believe you're only going to be in Heaven because you keep the law. But the law is inward, and the law demands righteousness, and the law demands a certain kind of character, and you're a rotten person and really don't want to give it up. Then, what you do is invent a whole bunch of laws that you can keep and just invent a bunch of little rules and say, "If I just keep all these little rules, then I'll be alright." If you could just get a bunch of rabbis to make a bunch of rules, and keep piling up the rules, and keep all the rules, you can

convince yourself you're alright.

This is something of their reasoning. They said, "We'll just make up a lot of rules. After all, the law covers every part of man's life, so we should be able to deduce from the law a rule for every possible person in every possible situation. So the scribes came along, and they dug around in the Old Testament, and they picked out every possible point and made thousands and thousands of funny little laws. So the people busied themselves, people by the name of 'Pharisee,' by trying to keep them and then patting themselves on the back as if they were godly because they endeavored to keep all these little rules.

Let me give you an illustration. For example, the Old Testament law had said that you couldn't work on the Sabbath. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, and rest from your labors," and so forth. Don't work on the Sabbath. But they said, "Alright, if we can't work on the Sabbath, what is work?" They had to determine what work is, so they decided to have a study on what work is.

They decided, first of all, that work was to carry a burden. So, you couldn't carry a burden on the Sabbath day. Then they said, "What is a burden? Let's decide what a burden is." The scribal law put down, "A burden is food equal to the weight of a dried fig, enough wine for mixing in a goblet, milk enough for one swallow, honey enough to put on a wound, oil enough to anoint a small member, water enough to moisten an eye salve, paper enough to write a customs-house notice, ink enough to write two letters of the alphabet, reed enough to make the pen," and so on and so on and so on. All that stuff was the limit; anything beyond that is a burden.

Can you imagine trying to handle all that stuff? They spent endless hours arguing whether or not a man could lift a lamp from one place to another on the Sabbath. They spent time arguing whether a tailor committed a sin if he went out with a needle stuck in his robe. They had a big discussion of whether or not a woman could wear a brooch; if it was too heavy, it was a burden. Or whether she could put false hair on; if it was too heavy, it was a burden, if it weighed more than a fig. They also had a big argument about whether a man could go out on the Sabbath with artificial teeth or, get this, an artificial limb, because that constituted a weight. They also discussed if a man could lift his child on the Sabbath day. These things were the essence of religion to them.

They decided also that to write was work on the Sabbath, but writing had to be defined. So they decided that, "He who writes two letters of the alphabet with his right or left hand, whether of one kind or of two kinds, if they are written with different inks or in different languages, is guilty. Even if he should write two letters from forgetfulness, he is guilty, whether he has written them with ink or with paint, red chalk, vitriol, or anything that makes a permanent mark. Also, he that writes on two walls that form an angle, or two tablets of his account book so they can be read together, is guilty. But if anyone writes with dark fluid, fruit juice, or the dust of the road, or in sand or anything which doesn't make a permanent mark, he is not guilty. If he writes one letter on the ground and one on the wall, or

two on the pages of a book so they cannot be read together, he is not guilty," as long as they were separated. That is a passage from the scribal law, believe it or not.

They also said that healing was work, so obviously this had to be defined. Healing was allowed when there was danger to life, and especially in the area of the ear, the nose, and the throat. But even then, you could only take steps to keep the patient from getting worse; no steps could be taken to make him get any better. It was a pretty hard balance. So you could put a plain bandage on a wound, but no ointment. You could put plain wadding in a sore ear, but not medicated wadding.

The scribes, you see, were the people who wrote out all this stuff, and the Pharisees were the ones who tried to keep it. To the strict Orthodox Jew of Jesus' time, the law was a matter of thousands of legalistic rules and regulations. So when Jesus came along and said, "I haven't come to destroy the law," that's not the law He was talking about. If there was one law He wanted to wipe out from the start, that was it. He was after that phony kind of stuff. He condemned it, and Paul condemned it in his epistles. Jesus was not talking about the traditions of men, He was talking about the law of God. He came to fulfill the law of God, the absolutely inviolable law, a law that never changed.

Let me help you to see what Jesus means by 'the law' here. It could be that Jesus means the Ten Commandments, or it could be that Jesus means more than that, the Pentateuch. It could mean the whole Old Testament. How do we know? Watch. "Think not that I have come to destroy the law or the prophets." That settles it. When you see the term 'the law and the prophets' together, that is a reference to the whole Old Testament. It is used that way 12 times in the New Testament. Twelve times, the New Testament refers to the Old Testament as the law and the prophets.

Let me give you some synonyms. Whenever, in the New Testament, you see the terms 'law, law of God, law and prophets, Scriptures,' or, 'Word of God,' they are synonyms for the Old Testament, in most cases. Unless the context gives you a narrower definition, those terms refer to the whole Old Testament.

What is Jesus saying, then? "I have not come to destroy the whole Old Testament, I have come to fulfill it." It's a great statement. Man, if those Jews had been tuned in that day, they would have known that they were staring face to face with the theme of the whole Old Testament. They were looking right into the eyes of the one who was the consummation of the entire Old Testament, the one spoken of in the law, the one spoken of in the prophets; this was He standing in front of them. He was the one who came to fulfill the whole thing.

I'll show you three passages in Luke. In Luke 16:16, He says, "The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it." In other words, He says, "The law and the prophets continued until John, but when John came, he preached the Kingdom." Of course, He himself fulfilled that Kingdom.

Further on, Luke gives us more insight in a more direct statement in Luke 24:27. This is a great statement. "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets," here we are with the law and the prophets again. "He expounded to them in all the Scriptures," and notice this: the law of Moses and the prophets equal the Scriptures. Do you see it in that verse? "Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Who is the theme of the prophets? He is. Who is the theme of Moses? He is. Who is the theme of the Scriptures? He is.

Later on, in Luke 24:44, He says, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." He is the fulfillment of it all; that's what He's saying in Matthew 5:17.

It's a tremendous concept if you can just grasp this. Every single thing in the Old Testament points to Christ. So Jesus is saying, "I know what you're thinking. I know you're thinking I'm going to set this law aside, but I'm not. I'm going to lift it up higher than it is today. I'm going to reveal the hypocrites. You're thinking that I'm going to put it all away, and you won't have this hassle anymore, you can just be free and easy and it will all be wonderful. I'm telling you that God's standard hasn't changed. No part of the sacred Scripture will ever be destroyed or annulled - it will be fulfilled and I Myself will fulfill it."

It's a tremendous statement; what a shattering claim, that He alone would fulfill the whole Old Testament! It's shocking. Here was the one for whom it was written, here is the object of the whole Old Testament. It all points to Jesus Christ. In its God-ordained origin, it can't be annulled; it must be fulfilled.

Let me share this with you. You can divide the Old Testament law into three parts. Let me give you an insight; look at Deuteronomy 4:13. This is Moses speaking to the people. "He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone." That's the first thing: God gave the Ten Commandments. Then verse 14, "And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess."

I'll tell you what that means. God laid down, first of all, the Ten Commandments. Then he said to Moses and all the other prophets, of those basic Ten Commandments, "You had the statutes and the ordinances," that's what He said to Moses. So Moses went from the Ten Commandments and, under God's inspiration, developed the ceremonial and judicial systems, and the whole outworking of the law in the life of the people.

When the prophets came along, their job was to remind the people that the law was still incumbent and binding. It all goes back to the Ten Commandments. They were, then, basically God's law and expanded in the ordinances and statutes that Moses gave in the Pentateuch, and the rest of the Old Testament, the writings of the prophets, was to call on the people to be obedient to these standards.

We can divide the law of God into three parts: the moral law, the judicial law, and the ceremonial law. The moral law was for all men, the judicial law was just for Israel, and the ceremonial law was for Israel's worship of God. So the moral law encompasses all men, it is narrowed down to Israel in the judicial law, and to the worship of Israel toward God in the ceremonial law.

Stay with me; the moral law is based in the Ten Commandments, the great moral principles laid down once and forever. The rest of the moral law is built upon that. The judicial law was the legislative law given for the functioning of Israel as a nation, and that's very important. In other words, God said to Israel, "I want to set you apart from the rest of the world to be different and unique, so you'll have judicial laws. That means you will live with each other and the nations around you in a different way." This law was to govern their behavior. Thirdly, the ceremonial law dealt with the temple ritual and the worship of God.

You say, "Which law was Jesus speaking of?" He was speaking of all three. Some say He was just talking about the moral law, but He wasn't. He came to fulfill the whole thing, whether it was the moral law, the outgrowth of the moral law in Israel, the judicial law, or the ceremonial law, the law of worship. He came to fulfill every bit of it. It was all authored by God, it is all preeminent. All the principles, patterns, prophecies, types, symbols, and pictures - everything in the Old Testament is authored by God and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

So we see, first of all, that the law is preeminent because it is authored by God. Secondly, the law is preeminent because it is affirmed by the prophets. Look at verse 17. "Think not that I have come to destroy the law or the prophets." You know, the term 'prophets' just cracks this thought open to us. The prophets simply reiterated, reinforced the law. They would say to the people of Israel, for example, "You had better keep God's law. You're breaking His law and falling away from it." Sometimes they talked about Israel's failure to keep the moral law, sometimes they failed to keep the judicial law. How many times did He say to Israel, "There are unjust judges?" Sometimes they failed to keep the ceremonial law. Sometimes, He said they had not done their sacrifices but rather had sacrificed unto false gods. So the prophets constantly rang the chimes on the same thing: keep the moral law, and the judicial law which sets you apart as a unique nation, and keep the ceremonial law which is God's definition of the pattern and standard for your worship.

I can hear Isaiah saying, "'Come, now, let us reason together,' says the Lord. 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat of the good of the land. If you refuse and rebel, you will be

devoured with the sword." In other words, Isaiah is saying, "If you keep God's law, you'll be blessed; if you don't, you'll be cursed." In the whole book of Malachi, he calls out and says, "You have violated God's laws of marriage and taxation and morality and justice and God is going to judge you." So the prophets were God's mouthpieces to reaffirm the moral law.

I am saying, then, that the law is first of all preeminent because it is authored by God. Secondly, throughout the whole Old Testament, it is reaffirmed by the prophets. In fact, the best definition of a prophet that I know of is in Exodus 4:16. In an excellent way, God, by the analogy of Moses and Aaron, gives us the definition of a prophet. This is what God says to Moses about Aaron, "And he shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God." That's what a prophet is - a mouth for God. Jeremiah 1 talks about the same thing: Jeremiah being a mouth for God. God says, "For you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak." So prophets just reiterated the law of God, spoke out the law of God.

Now we come to the third point. This is literally overwhelming. We're going to develop this in weeks to come as we go through the Sermon on the Mount, so just take as much as you can get tonight. First of all, the law of God is binding because it is authored by God. Secondly, it is affirmed by the prophets, and thirdly, it is accomplished by Christ. This is the heart of the matter. It is accomplished by Christ.

People, if I could just share a small part of what is in my heart about this particular truth, I'd be satisfied. When Jesus said, "But to fulfill," at the end of verse 17, He was saying, "The whole law I will fulfill." Either in His first coming, His return in the Spirit, or in His Second Coming, Jesus will fulfill the whole Old Testament ceremonially, judicially, and morally. It's a tremendous truth! Scripture finds its fullest meaning in Him. Some people say the Old Testament is not complete, but it is complete. It is all that God wanted it to be, an absolutely wondrous, perfect, complete picture of the coming King and His Kingdom. The King came to fulfill it all.

Five times in the New Testament, Jesus claimed to be the theme of the whole Old Testament. Did you know that? Five times. Hebrews 10:7, John 5:39, Matthew 5:17, Luke 24:27, and Luke 24:44. Five times He said, "I am the theme of the whole thing." In II Corinthians 1:20, the Apostle Paul said, "All the promises of God, in Him, are yes and amen." He is the one who fulfills it all.

Listen to this. In Genesis, He is the seed of the woman. In Exodus, He is the passover lamb. In Leviticus, He is the high priest. In Numbers, He is the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. In Deuteronomy, He is the prophet like unto Moses. In Joshua, He is the captain of our salvation. In Judges, He is the judge and lawgiver. In Ruth, He is the kinsman redeemer. In I & II Samuel, He is the trusted prophet. In Kings and Chronicles, He is the reigning king. In Ezra, He is the faithful scribe. In Nehemiah, He is the builder of the broken wall. In Esther, He is the Mordecai. In Job, He is the ever-living redeemer. In Psalms, He is the Lord our shepherd. In Proverbs & Ecclesiastes,

He is true wisdom. In Song of Solomon, He is the true lover and bridegroom. In Isaiah, He is the prince of peace. In Jeremiah and Lamentations, He is the weeping prophet. In Ezekiel, He is the wonderful four-faced man. In Daniel, He is the fourth man in the fiery furnace. In Hosea, He is the eternal husband, forever married to the backslider. In Joel, He is the baptizer with the Holy Spirit. In Amos, He is the burden-bearer. In Obadiah, He is the Savior. In Jonah, He is the great foreign missionary. In Micah, He is the messenger with beautiful feet. In Nahum, He is the avenger. In Habakkuk, He is God's evangelist pleading for revival. In Zephaniah, He is the Lord mighty to save. In Haggai, He is the restorer of the lost heritage. In Zechariah, He is the fountain opened in the house of David for sin and for cleansing. In Malachi, He is the sun of righteousness arising with healing in His wings. He is the theme of the Old Testament; every bit of it is His story.

The question is this: in what sense does Jesus fulfill the law? I'm going to make theologians out of all of you right now! Some say He fulfilled it by His teaching, that He fulfilled it by teaching. The idea is that He filled it out; the law was a sketch and He colored it all in. He said, "The law says this, but I want to add this." Some say that He filled it out with His teaching, that there was a basically incomplete code in the Old Testament and it needed added and new dimensions, so He added to it. In a sense, He did expand and elucidate the law of God. When He sent the Spirit, the Spirit, through the writers of the epistles, elucidated even more of the law of God. But that can't be the real reason or the real meaning of 'fulfill.'

First of all, that's not what the word means. It doesn't mean 'to fill out,' it means 'to fill up.' It doesn't mean 'to add to,' it means 'to complete something that's already there.' Jesus really didn't add anything new, did you know that? He just clarified God's original meaning. Let me tell you this: Jesus didn't come to give a moral lecture. The law isn't fulfilled by lecturing about it or adding to it; it is fulfilled another way. So some people say He fulfilled it because He met its demands. Some Bible teachers say, "In His life, He kept every part of God's law, the moral, judicial, and ceremonial law. He worshiped in the right way, He was fair and equitable, He never violated a rule God made, He was perfectly righteous, He was the absolutely holy one, the perfect righteousness." And that's true.

In Matthew 3:15, He answered John the Baptist, who didn't want to baptize Him. He said, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it happens to fulfill all righteousness." In other words, "If the Old Testament says you're to be washed in repentance, then I'm going to be washed, if that's what it says." So He filled out every minute detail of God's law, and in that sense, fulfilled it. That's true. He did do that, but that still isn't the heart of what it's saying here. There is truth in all of that. He did add new perception to the Old Testament law; He did sum it up wonderfully. In fact, He took the whole law and reduced it to one thing, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." He summed up the whole law beautifully.

In the epistles, through the Holy Spirit, He clarified and enriched it even more. It is true secondly that He lived it in His own life, He kept the law, there is no question. He was without sin, flawless in His

obedience. He provided the perfect model of absolute righteousness in fulfilling God's holy Word. But those still don't get to the major point. There is still another reason.

Let me give it to you simply. He fulfilled the whole Old Testament law by being its fulfillment. Not by what He said or did, so much, but by what He was. You say, "What does that mean?" What I mean is that He didn't come just to rescue the law from rabbinical perversion or just to be a model of righteousness. He came to bring in everlasting righteousness by being the Messiah the law predicted. In other words, it was what He was as much as what He did and said.

Look at it this way; this is thrilling. Look at the judicial law and all the various rules that governed the behavior of Israel, all their legal codes, all the things they were supposed to do. Leviticus 26:46, "The statutes and ordinances and laws which the LORD made between Himself and the children of Israel." God made special laws with Israel. In Psalm 147:19, "He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel. He has not dealt so with any nation." In other words, God had peculiar laws for Israel; this is His judicial law which set them apart. They had certain dietary laws, certain laws of dress, of agriculture, laws within their relationships with certain things they had to do. These set them apart.

You say, "How did Jesus fulfill that?" When Jesus died on the cross, that was the final, full rejection by Israel of her Messiah, right? That was it. And that was the end of God dealing with that nation as a nation. The judicial law that He gave to Israel passed away when God no longer dealt with them as a nation anymore and Jesus built His church. Praise God, someday He will go back and redeem that nation again and deal with them again as a nation. But for this time, when Jesus died on the cross, the judicial law came to a screeching halt. There was no more national people of God. There would be a new man, cut out of Jews and Gentiles, that would be called the church. The judicial law came to an end. That's why Matthew 21:43 says, "Therefore I say to you, the Kingdom of God will be taken from you."

Keep in mind that the foundations of the judicial law are in the moral law, so that the divine principles behind it still exist. They are still there and are still binding. But the judicial law related to Israel was set aside when Jesus died, because that was the full and final rejection of their Messiah.

What about the moral law, did He fulfill that? Sure He did. In what way? In the way we mentioned earlier; every rule God ever made, He obeyed, right? Every precept God ever laid down, He fulfilled. He never disobeyed anything that God established. He filled up the judicial law in the sense that He brought the whole thing to its ultimate climax. He allowed Israel to go the way they chose, and they ended their identity as His people at that point, until a future time. He summed up the judicial law, and it was over. Jesus, by the living of a perfect life, fulfilled the moral law.

That leaves only one other, the ceremonial law. How did He fulfill that? This is fantastic. He did it by dying on a cross. This is the last point, but I want to make it, and make it good. He died on a cross, and when He died, the whole ceremonial system came to an end. In fact, when He died, the veil of the temple was wrent in two from the top to the bottom, and the Holy of Holies was revealed. God was saying, "The whole Levitical, priestly, judicial system is over." So He fulfilled totally the judicial law, in a negative way, by being the victim of their final rejection. He fulfilled the moral law in the way He lived, and the ceremonial law in the way He died.

We could spend so much time in Hebrews on this last point. In Hebrews 10:19, it says, "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holy of Holies by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way." In other words, Jesus Christ opened a new day. He ended the ceremonial system, and we no longer worship God with the blood of bulls and goats. We no longer go through all the offerings and all that stuff. It was only a few years after He died that He allowed the Romans to come in and absolutely destroy the temple. The whole sacrificial system came crumbling down when He died; it was over. It was all over. The new covenant brought in a new dawn, a new day. The ceremonial system was fulfilled.

The whole judicial system was only good as long as Israel was God's people. When that was over, the system was over. The ceremonial system was only good until the final sacrifice came, and when it came, then the system was done away. That only leaves one element of God's law abiding still, and what is that? The moral law. That's what undergirded everything. That will be with us until we see Him face to face.

In Hebrews 7:18, it says, "For on the one hand, there is an annulling of the former commandment because of the weakness and unprofitableness of it, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God." In other words, what the law couldn't do, Christ did. He brought an end to the picture because He was the reality.

In Hebrews 8:8, it says, "'The days are coming,' says the LORD, 'When I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not the covenant I made with their fathers.'" In other words, it's going to be different in Christ, something new, changed, a new covenant. Hebrews 9:10 says the new covenant, "Will not be with food and drinks and washings and carnal ordinances." No, when the time of the reformation comes (and that's a term for the New Testament), when the New Testament, the new covenant comes, that passes away. What he means by that is not God's moral law but God's ceremonies. The point is, all the ceremonies were were pictures of Christ, and when the reality came, we no longer needed a picture. Think of it this way: in every way, Jesus fulfilled the ceremonial system.

Compare Him with Aaron, the High Priest, for example. Aaron entered the earthly tabernacle; Christ entered the Heavenly temple. Aaron entered once a year; Christ entered once for all. Aaron entered

beyond the veil; Christ went the veil. Aaron offered many sacrifices; Christ offered one. Aaron offered for his own sin; Christ offered only for our sin. Aaron offered the blood of bulls; Christ offered His own blood. Aaron was a temporary priest; Christ is an eternal one. Aaron was fallible; Christ is infallible. Aaron was changeable; Christ is unchangeable. Aaron was continual; Christ was final. Aaron's sacrifice was imperfect; Christ's was perfect. Aaron's priesthood was insufficient; Christ's was all-sufficient. Aaron's priesthood was not all-prevailing; Christ's was all-prevailing.

Look at the tabernacle; what was that picturing? The tabernacle had a door. Christ said, "I am the door." It had a brazen altar, He said He was the altar, the ransom for many. It had a laver, He said He would wash and cleanse us. It had lamps, He said He was the light. It had bread, He said He was the bread. It had incense, He said, "My prayers ascend for you." It had a veil, He said, "The veil is my body." It had a mercy seat, He said, "I am the mercy seat." Everything pictured Him.

Look at the Levitical offerings; there was a burnt offering to speak of the perfection of life. He was that perfection of life. A meal offering spoke of dedication; He was that one, dedicated wholly to God. There is a peace offering; He is the peace. There was a sin offering; He became sin for us who knew no sin. There was a trespass offering and He provided for our trespasses.

Think of the feasts in the ceremonies of Israel. He is our Passover. The unleavened bread speaks of a holy walk; He is the one who walked in holiness. The feast of first fruits - He is the one who rose from the dead, the first fruits of them that slept. The feast of Pentecost - He is the one who poured out His Spirit. The feast of trumpets - He is one who, someday, has His angel blow the trumpet and gathers the elect from the four corners of the earth. The feast of atonement - He is the one who paid the price of atonement. The feast of tabernacles which speaks of reunion - He is the one who will gather His people into His house forever.

Do you get the point? The point is that Jesus fulfills every part of the law. When He came and stood there that day on that hillside in Matthew 5:17 and said, "I have come to fulfill the law," He said something that should have knocked those people flat on their backs. Then they should have crawled to be prostrate before Him as King of kings and Lord of lords.

The whole Old Testament is Jesus Christ from front to back. The law itself couldn't make anyone righteous; the New Testament says that over and over again. Jesus had to come and do what the law couldn't do, to grant His righteousness. Galatians 3:24 says the law was, "Our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that by Him, we might be justified by faith. But after faith is come, we no longer need a schoolmaster." What element of the law was he talking about there? The ceremonial law. The ceremonial law pointed to Christ, but once Christ came, he is saying to the Judaizers in Galatians, "We don't need the rituals or rites or circumcision anymore, because the reality is here. He fulfilled it all." He fulfilled it all.

There is one more thought. Because He fulfilled the whole law, so can you and so can I. That's the most amazing part of all. Because He was perfectly righteous, because He fulfilled all righteousness, you and I can too. Listen to Romans 8:4. "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." You too can fulfill God's moral law. That's the only part that is left.

The judicial law was set aside with Israel, and the ceremonial law came to a crashing halt when Christ came. The Lord even said to Peter, "Don't worry about unclean animals or rituals anymore. That whole deal is all finished." But the moral law is left. You say, "Could I ever fulfill the moral law?" The Bible says that if we walk in the Spirit, we will fulfill the righteousness of the law, because Christ in us fulfills it.

What a climax! He fulfilled the law, and He fulfills it in us. It is tremendous to think about how He fulfilled everything the law and prophets ever spoke of. Tonight we didn't even talk about the prophecies that He fulfilled. He fulfilled hundreds of them.

No, they were looking at Jesus and saying, "Is this a revolutionary who is going to overthrow all the old stuff?" He said, "Not on your life; I have come to lift it up and reveal the hypocrites. After I've lifted it up, I'll fulfill it every way it could be fulfilled - judicially, ceremonially, and morally. I'll even make it possible for those who come after me and believe in me to be filled with My Spirit, and they too will fulfill this law."

Let me close with this. This is written by someone unknown. "I find my Lord in the Book, wherever I chance to look. He's the theme of the Bible, the center and heart of the Book. He's the Rose of Sharon, the Lily fair. Wherever I open my Bible, the Lord of the Book is there.

"He, at the Book's beginning, gave to the earth its form. He is the ark of shelter bearing the brunt of the storm. He is the burning bush of the desert, the budding of Aaron's rod. Wherever I look in the Bible, I see the Son of God. The ram upon Mount Moriah, the ladder from earth to sky, the scarlet cord in the window and the serpent lifted high. The smitten rock in the desert, the shepherd with staff and crook, the face of my Lord I discover wherever I open the Book.

"He is the seed of the woman, the Savior virgin-born. He is the Son of David whom men rejected with scorn. His garments of grace and of beauty, the stately Aaron deck, yet He is a priest forever, for He is Melchizedek. Lord of eternal glory whom John the apostle saw, light of the golden city, lamb without spot or flaw. Bridegroom coming at midnight for whom the virgins look; wherever I open my Bible, I find my Lord in the Book."

I want to ask you a question as we close. Have you found the Lord Jesus Christ in the Book and given your life to Him? He alone can give you the absolute standard for your life and cause you to live a righteousness that, of yourself, is impossible. He alone can enable you to fulfill God's law and empower you to have the kind of character that He demands. If you haven't, then where you are sitting, open your heart and let Jesus come into your life. Receive Him as your Savior and Lord, that He might fulfill the law of God through you by His power.

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