

## The Law Fulfilled

**“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” – Matthew 5:17-19**

Renowned for his deep spiritual teaching, F.B. Meyer once wrote, “As the noon fulfills the dawn, as summer fulfills the spring, as manhood fulfills childhood, as a great artist fulfills the struggling ideal of the generality of people in a poem, statue, or sonata, so does Jesus Christ gather up the highest ideals inspired by God's Spirit in people's hearts or engraven by His hand on tablets of stone. Wherever there is suggestion of eternal truth He realizes it, and shows people the steps by which they may climb to its lofty level.”

These verses mark the beginning of a new section in the Sermon. In essence, Christ begins by describing what the Christian is; now he reminds us to remember who we are and gives very practical examples of how we are to manifest our lives in the world.

**“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.”** Matthew presents Christ as the fulfiller of the promises made to Israel. Interestingly, the word “fulfilled” is found fifteen times in Matthew, and there are more quotations in Matthew from the Old Testament than any of the other Gospels. One has stated that the Sermon on the Mount “may justly be called the key of the whole Bible, for here Christ opens the sum of the Old and New Testaments.” This part of the verse by implication suggests that there may have been many, particularly the Scribes and Pharisees, who thought Christ was taking an antagonistic position to the Mosaic Law because of the **“Do not think”** which introduces this section. Perhaps they were thinking of Jeremiah 31:31, **“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. . .”** Many times He utters “Truly I say unto you” or “Ye have heard . . . But I say.” Christ was definitely a problem to His contemporaries, but here states conclusively that He was aligning Himself with God's former utterances and previous messengers, representing Himself as carrying on the sequence of Divine revelation. However, the Pharisees had falsely misrepresented Christ's mission and made Him out to be a revolutionary. One man of God says, “Christ came not to bring any new way of righteousness and salvation to the world, but to fulfill it in deed which was shadowed by figures of the Law: by delivering men through grace from the curse of the Law; and moreover to teach the true use of obedience which the Law appointed, and to grave in our hearts the force of obedience.”

The word “fulfill” translates literally “to fill” or “fill up”. A better rendering in this context would be “to bring to full realization”. Chrysostom expressed it like this: “Christ's sayings were no repeal of the former, but a drawing out and filling up of them.” Jesus fulfilled the law in two essential ways: by completely obeying it and by His words and living example. He intensifies the meaning of the Law, changing it from a letter which could only regulate the actions, to a spirit which changes and moves the inward man: **“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”** (Jer. 31:33) Jesus came to “bring to realization” the intent that God desired the Law to produce; He came to clarify God's original meaning; He fulfilled the Law by being perfect righteousness.

Jesus fulfilled the Law morally. Observing the Sabbath was one aspect of keeping the moral law. However, the essence of the Sabbath observance was always holiness, not resting from work. The Sabbath was the symbol; the intent was to produce true heart worship. He fulfilled the Law ceremonially. **“We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”** (Heb. 10:10) Ceremony and animal sacrifice no longer have any significance. Symbols and pictures have no more purpose. **“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”** (Heb. 9:11-12)

**“Not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.”** Simply stated, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will be erased until all is fulfilled. Arthur Pink comments, “Everything in the Law must be fulfilled (or accomplished): not only its prefigurations and prophecies, but its precepts and penalty: fulfilled, first, personally and vicariously, by and upon the Surety; fulfilled, second and evangelically, in and by His people; and fulfilled, third, in the doom of the wicked, who shall experience its awful curse forever and ever. Instead of Christ's being opposed to the law of God, He came here to magnify it and render it honorable . . . . And rather than His teachings being subversive thereof, they confirmed and enforced it.”

From a practical point of view, it is interesting to note that Jesus quoted authoritatively from the Old Testament no less than sixty-four times. Let us receive the Word for what it is, **“the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.”** (Ja. 1:21) Honor God's Word, **“How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”** (Ps. 119:103) Study God's Word diligently, **“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.”** (2Tim. 2:15) Be prepared to defend God's Word, **“contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”** (Ju. 1:3) This strongly includes being saturated in the Word, **“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.”** (Col. 3:16)

**“Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments.”** The literal warning here is to one who modifies, weakens or minimizes God's standards. Also included would be making God's commands less demanding than they are. Although some commands are greater than others, none are to be disregarded. We cannot ‘pick and choose’ what we teach as the Apostle Paul stated, **“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.”** (Acts 20:27) In our day and age especially, we should be wary of the potential for some to slight the commands of Scripture, **“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”** (Acts 20:28-30)

In a sense, the Law was given to show mankind that they could never justify themselves before God - or as Paul wrote, **“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.”** (Gal. 3:24) In conclusion, consider the words of J.C. Ryle: “The Old Testament is the Gospel in the bud, the New Testament is the Gospel in the full flower. The Old Testament is the Gospel in the blade; the New Testament is the Gospel in full ear.”

–Article submitted by Chuck Wetzel  
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