

Christ and the Old Testament

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Matthew 5:17-18

THE BELIEVER'S AUTHORITY

Jesus described the character of the believer in the beatitudes.

Jesus described the influence or function of the believer in this world as salt and light.

In Matthew 5:17-20 Jesus describes the authority for the believer as God's revealed Word.

It's interesting to note that these three sections of the Sermon are increasingly personal. In the Beatitudes, Jesus speaks in the third person saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, and blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." When teaching about the believers influence in the world, Jesus switches to the second person saying, "Blessed are you when others revile and persecute you, for you are the salt of the earth and you are the light of the world." Now in the applications that follow, Jesus teaches in the first person saying, "For I say to you," and "For I tell you." You might ask what is significant about Jesus' language here? Most teachers of the Law spoke in second or third person, but Jesus addressed the people concerning righteousness saying, "For I tell you." Jesus was radically personal and radically authoritative.

How does Jesus' teaching in verses 17-18 fit into the overall context of what he has been teaching in the Beatitudes? It's probable that after His presentation of the Beatitudes and the two metaphors of salt and light that some of Jesus' listeners thought that He was in some way advocating and overthrow of the Old Testament Law. John MacArthur says:

Jesus' warning, do not think, indicates that most, if not all, of His hearers had a wrong conception about His teaching. Most traditionalistic Jews considered the rabbinic instructions to be the proper interpretations of the law of Moses, and they concluded that, because Jesus did not scrupulously follow those traditions, He obviously was doing away with the law or relegating it to minor importance. Because Jesus swept away the traditions of washings, special tithes, extreme Sabbath observance, and such things, the people thought He was thereby overthrowing God's law. From the outset, therefore, Jesus wanted to disabuse His hearers of any misconceptions about His view of Scripture.

Jesus responds to their misunderstanding with an unforgettable disclaimer. He said, "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." Matthew 5:17.

There has been no shortage of heretics throughout church history who have taught that Jesus came to do away with the Law. One example that some of you may be familiar with is Marcion. Marcion was a second century heretic who rejected both the Hebrew Bible and the God of Israel. He and his followers were dualists - they held a position of opposing gods: one higher, spiritual, and "good", and the other lower, material, and "evil". They believed that the wrathful Hebrew God was a tyrant and thus a separate and lower entity than the all-forgiving God of the New Testament. In light of Marcion's theology, he rewrote the New Testament (10 rewritten sections Luke's gospel and 10 of Paul's epistles) and, in doing so, eliminated all Old Testament references including the passage that we are studying this morning.

Far from annulling the Law, Jesus came to fulfill it. He was correcting the perversions that the scribes and Pharisees had made of the Law. Think about this...If Jesus came to set aside the Law, what does that say about God's righteous standards? Furthermore, what kind of predicament are we in apart from Jesus' perfect keeping of the Law on our behalf? How did Jesus fulfill the Law and the Prophets?

1. He fulfilled the Law's messianic predictions.

The Law and the Prophets (The Old Testament) pointed to Jesus.

Jesus fulfilled every Old Testament messianic prediction.

His birth place - Micah 5:2. His crucifixion - Psalm 22:16

2. He fulfilled the curse of the Law by satisfying its demands against those who would believe in Him.

The cross is the greatest testimony that God never abolished the law.

3. Jesus fulfilled the Law by perfectly keeping all its commands.

Jesus is our perfect Law keeper!

He was born under the law. Galatians 4:4

At His baptism Jesus told John, "It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Matthew 3:15

4. Jesus fulfills the Law in believers by means of the Holy Spirit.

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Romans 8:2-4

LAW OF MOSES OR LAW OF CHRIST

How are believers in the church age to think about the Old Testament, the Mosaic Law, and particularly the Ten Commandments? There are godly believers who believe that the church is still under various regulations of the Mosaic Law. On the other hand there are godly believers who believe the entire Mosaic Law was fulfilled in Christ, and we are now under the law of Christ. Paul mentions the Law of Christ twice. In Galatians 6:2 he says, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Also in 1 Corinthians 9:20-21 he says, "To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law." What is the Law of Christ? Most teachers would say that the law of Christ is Jesus' command in Mark 12:28-31.

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

While we believe that we are no longer under the law of Moses, but under the law of Christ, it is important to note that all godly standards announced under Moses are repeated in the church epistles with the exception of the ceremonial laws, dietary restrictions, and the Sabbath. We believe the Sabbath was fulfilled in Christ. He is our Sabbath. In Colossians 2:16-17 Paul said, "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Likewise in Romans 14:5-6 he says, "One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God." This, like every area of our study of the Scriptures, calls for careful hermeneutics. We need to, "Be diligent to present [ourselves] approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" 2 Timothy 2:15.

In verse 17 Jesus warns us not to be mistaken about why He had come. But he also in one statement declares the absolute authority, inerrancy, and infallibility of the entire Old Testament.

EVERY WORD FULFILLED

In verse 18 Jesus assures us every detail in the Old Testament will be accomplished. How does He do this? He says, "For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota (smallest letter), not a dot (or stroke), will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" Matthew 5:18. How much of the Old Testament is Jesus talking about here – Every word of it!

יהוה

בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ

What does this teach us about Jesus' view of the Bible's details? Proverbs 30:5-6 says, "Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words Lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar." How much of the Old Testament will God fulfill? Isaiah says, "So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" Isaiah 55:11.

What is Jesus teaching us here? He is teaching us the inspiration, immutability of Scripture. The Old Testament doesn't just contain truth - it is the truth. John reminds us in John 10:35 that, "Scripture cannot be broken." Over and over again in the New Testament Jesus quotes the Old Testament by saying, "It is written." The Greek here has the idea that it is written and it will always be written! The Scriptures are more enduring than the created universe. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" Matthew 24:35.