

"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 from the Law until all is accomplished. "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, 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. "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-20, NAS95).

As we continue in our study of the Sermon on the Mount we come to a passage that is not only critical to our understanding of the Law of Christ in the New Covenant but it is vital to our understanding of all of Scripture and what the real purpose of the Old Testament Scriptures are and were.

The first 16 verses of Mt.5 introduced and anticipate all the main themes of the entire Sermon on the Mount Mt.5-7. And as we have said before, this is the heart of the New Testament Scriptures and every New Testament author is expanding on these themes in one way or another.

Between the introduction Mt. 5:1-16 and the conclusion Mt. 7: 13-27, is the body of the sermon Mt 5:17-7:12. The body is bracketed or is contained in what is called an inclusio between the idea of the Law and the prophets Mt. 5:17; Mt. 7:12. The Law and Prophets is a typical way of speaking of all the Old Testament scriptures.

So what we have as we enter the body of the Sermon of the Mount is Jesus being very precise in relating his teaching to the Old Testament.

He is showing the relationship between His kingdom preaching and the Old Testament. He is teaching as a first century Jew to first century Jews and we should expect his teaching to be framed in a context that is understandable by them and seeing that He is in part correcting some misunderstandings and beliefs among those Jews.

When Jesus speaks of the smallest letter or stroke, the title as the KJV has it, he is talking about a small mark that is used in Hebrew to differentiate between several pairs of letters. By saying this He is upholding the reliability and the truth of the Scriptures.

So, this can lead us to a difficulty. If Jesus says He did not come to abolish or disannul the Law, but to fulfill it, why did He abolish some parts of the Law?

18 And He *said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him,19 because it

Other New Testament writers insist that after Christ's resurrection there is no need for a sacrificial system.

When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. (Hebrews 8:13, NAS95). And Heb. 10:1-18 which I suggest you read.

Why don't New Covenant Christians try to follow all the Old covenant Laws? Well, there are many explanations throughout the history of the church. The most common since the Reformation is that the Law was divided into three parts, ceremonial, civil and moral. This reasoning leads to the conclusion that only the "moral law" of God remains for the New Covenant believer.

But this presents a difficulty. Jesus says not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. This is not exclusive but inclusive language.

More importantly, no where in Scripture is this threefold distinction used.

That there are laws that address ceremonies, civil matters and morals for the Jews in the Old Covenant Scriptures cannot be denied but they are never distinctively and separately called the ceremonial, civil or moral law of God.

So if the moral Law is what survives into the New Covenant, this poses a problem. What does moral mean?

If moral Law has to do with whatever God says is fundamentally right or fundamentally wrong or what He approves or disapproves even regarding certain ceremonial obligations under the Old Covenant, then we must conclude that the people are morally obligated to perform those ceremonies. If God gave the people laws concerning civil matters it would be immoral not to practice them. So then, what is moral law apart from ceremony and civil obedience? The three categories are not mutually exclusive concerning what is moral. A threefold division of law does not help us understand what Jesus means but we will solve the mystery.

For a moment let us consider the idea of fulfilling the law.

Does Jesus mean that He came to confirm the Law, to confirm that it was good? Well

Jesus does that and other Scripture says that but that is not what His intention is here in the context of this passage.

Listen to Jesus in Mt. 11:12:

"From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.¹³ "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

As the kingdom advances it knows violence and violent men come against the kingdom.

All the prophets and the Law prophesied until the end of the Old Covenant era.

We understand how prophets prophesy. For example:

Micah 5:2 "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity." (Micah 5:2, NAS95).

This is fulfilled in Mt. 2:5 Herod wanted to know about Christ's birth, They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: (Matthew 2:5, NAS95).

How does the Law prophesy? The Law prophesies in that all the Law points forward to Messiah, Christ. The New Testament interprets the Old testament. For example, the sacrificial system pointed to Christ,

8* ¶ The Holy Spirit *is* signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing,

9 which *is* a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience,¹⁰ since they *relate* only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation. 11 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;

12 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.¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh,¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

So what we must see is that Jesus fulfills the entire Old Testament- the Law and the Prophets in many ways. Every item of the Law or the Prophets concerning Christ will be fulfilled, the Law and the Prophets shall not pass or in other words no longer be needed until everything is accomplished.

So Jesus' life and ministry are not in opposition to the Old Testament but He is the fulfillment of everything in it that points to Him. He is the realization of all the Old Testament speaks about concerning the Messiah, the Christ and therefore the Law and the prophets have a continuity in Him,

And Jesus said to them, "Therefore every scribe (teacher) who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old." (Matthew 13:52, NAS95).

But, Christ brings a new approach to the Law, it will go beyond the intention of the Old Covenant and He is the New Lawgiver and all Law is now interpreted by Him because He is the New Covenant, the Law and the Prophets are realized in Him, the Old passes the New takes its place.

We begin to see how this works a little further in our study when we hear Jesus say, "you have heard it said – referring to the Old Covenant law, –but I say unto you – meaning what He says is now the Law.

Then in our text Jesus talks about His commands concerning His kingdom which is not Old covenant law.

Vs. 19 "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, 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.

Notice here the kingdom of heaven mentioned three times, not the people of Israel, is the thing related to the commandments. And yet these commandments are rooted in who and what we are. This is the imperative rooted in the indicative.

So what are the commandments He is referring to? His first kingdom commandments are the Beatitudes and then there will be more as the application of this passage begins to unfold in verses 21-47. So, kingdom people listen to the commandments of the kingdom and to do this requires a different kind of righteousness than that of the Pharisees,

"For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Kingdom people's righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees just as Christ's law supercedes the Old Covenant. A different kind of righteousness is needed for a different and a New Covenant as Paul writes in Romans,

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, (Romans 3:21, NAS95).

Let me make a specific comment here. What we are discussing has nothing to do with how a person under the Old Covenant was saved. What we are discussing is the nature of the Old Covenant Law and how different the New Covenant Law is.

The new "Law" is much more demanding and much more rewarding.

Imagine how the hearers of this Sermon might have been reacting. All of what they knew was being challenged. Jesus takes them right back to the heart of the Beatitudes when He speaks of a different kind of righteousness and Jesus lays the foundation for the doctrine of justification by faith alone and sanctification by the Holy Spirit.

Earlier we said we would solve the mystery of the threefold division of the Law. Now we can do it.

The Law of the Old Covenant was a single Law and it included the prophets. None of the Law could be kept without the sacrificial system and the priesthood being in place. Christ took the place of the sacrificial system and the priesthood, He is our high priest and He became the sacrifice. All was fulfilled in Him and now there is a new and better way, as we discussed last week.

In our next message beginning with vs 21 we will see that Jesus quotes Old Covenant Law and then supercedes it - goes beyond it by adding to the commandment and giving it a New Covenant, a kingdom commandment meaning.

So what we need to do as part of our message this morning is understand this very important concept that will help us to apply what Jesus taught us.

He is the fulfillment of all that was in the Old Covenant law and the prophets. All Law is now given and interpreted by Him.

Let me give you a theological phrase and then we will work it out.

We must in view of what Christ has taught about the Law come to the understanding that we must give a logical priority to the New Covenant Scriptures because in them we have the fulfillment of Christ. This means that we must interpret the Old Testament not as a stand alone book of Scriptures but we must understand the Old in light of the New Testament. We must interpret the Old Testament first and whenever possible through what the New Testament tells us about it or how it interprets the Old Testament for us. There is not a natural continuity of everything in the Old Testament coming over into the New.

For example, only nine of the Ten Commandments are brought into the New Covenant and some of them are changed by Jesus. They are added to or are given a different interpretation. The Ten Commandments, which were the heart, which were a summary statement of all the Old Covenant Law are not binding on New Covenant believers.

As the Ten Commandments written by God as a legal document given to Israel they are not binding on us. This does not mean that the nine that are carried over in to the New Covenant are not to be obeyed, but we are to obey them as they are given as New Covenant Law and our study next week will demonstrate that from Jesus own words.

Let's go to another mountain for a moment, the Mount of transfiguration as it is probably titled in your bible. The passage is,

Mt.17:1 ¶ Six days later Jesus *took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and *led them up on a high mountain by themselves.2* And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.3* And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.4* Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah."5* While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"

The importance of this passage and God saying listen to Him or hear Him over and above Moses and Elijah illustrates the truth of our text this morning. Notice that Jesus is seen with Moses and Elijah who represent the Law and the Prophets. This incident is reinforcing what Jesus taught on the Sermon on the Mount for those who are now closest to him and who will have the responsibility of preaching the Gospel and making clear, in light of Christ, what the Old Covenant Scriptures said about Him. His words and commands

supercede the Law and the prophets. When put together with Moses and Elijah two great spokesmen for God the soon to be apostles are told to listen to Jesus.

So we can review from another perspective the importance of Jesus teaching in this Sermon.

Christ is seen as asserting His unique and final authority as the New Lawgiver by giving a new definitive set of principles (New Covenant law) that define New Covenant living under grace and later in the Gospel of Matthew Christ defines this law as the law of love God/love neighbor and who we are as seen in the Beatitudes is a result of doing that.

He is most assuredly correcting the perversions of the Pharisees, but He is also clearly giving new and higher truth that Moses never taught. Christ sometimes applies the same truth that Moses taught but does so in a manner that Moses could never have done. At other times Christ is making new and more spiritual demands on His disciples because of their being "under grace." Neither Moses nor the law covenant could ever have made these demands.

So now let's summarize our teaching for this morning.

And let me note that this discussion has so much more to it to be studied on its own which is beyond our purpose in our present context.

The Sermon on the Mount is an integral part of the Christian's life today because it is revealing to us who we are and therefore this is how we are to live. It is about who we are because of our union in Christ. The words "Blessed are" cannot be misconstrued. It does not say blessed may be those etc.

Christ never contradicts Moses in the sense that Moses was in any way wrong. We believe in the unity of the Scriptures. Christ does, however, give the Church new and higher standards, than Moses ever gave, or could have given, under a covenant of law, but this in no way means or implies that Moses was wrong.

It means that Christ is literally a new and superior Lawgiver than Moses because He administers a new and *"better covenant based on better promises..."* (Heb 8:6). It means that grace can make higher demands than law can make simply because of the nature and

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power of grace. Grace can not only appeal to a higher motive and make higher demands, it can also *empower the fulfillment of those demands, because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the ongoing transformation that occurs in us and therefore the whole approach to living as believers is being who we are, by His grace* and not attempting to be pleasing to God with a performance based mindset. (a proper study of Gospel sanctification is another extension of the basics we are discussing here).

Christ alone is our standard of righteousness and therefore He is our law and our ethic. We are to be who Christ has made us to be. (of course we can go much further in study as to how this is accomplished by the work of Christ's Spirit in His people.)

God is concerned about "actions", but not in the way it tends to be presented by those who claim that God is as concerned about the external as he is about the internal. The overwhelming majority of "actions" as they are presented in the New Covenant text have as their grounds a direct correlation with our union in Christ by faith because that's where the emphasis is.

Under a system of covenant law, we cannot legislate and punish the thoughts of the heart. God has both the right and power to condemn a person for immoral day dreaming in his tent, but neither Moses nor the law covenant that he gave could have someone stoned to death for wicked thoughts. It is clear, that Israel was punished by God for the sin of covetousness (Isa 57:17; Jer 6:13-15); However, this was a direct sovereign act of the God Who sees into the heart and not punishment at the hands of a magistrate administering the law. Under the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit is the personal teacher of every believer and He can deal with the heart in a way that the magistrate could not under the Old Covenant given through Moses.

It is quite evident that Christ is actually saying far more in the Sermon on the Mount than just "This is what Moses **really** meant." Christ is saying, "I am in no way destroying or criticizing Moses but I am giving My disciples a standard of righteousness and an ethic that makes demands that are based entirely on grace instead of the Old Covenant of law."

Christ never says or implies that anything in the Old Testament Scriptures was wrong in and of itself. Remember that the God of Moses Who spoke the Law at Sinai is the same God Who spoke His grace at Calvary in our Lord Jesus Christ. John says, "*The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*" (John 1:17), but in both cases it was the same God speaking and working toward the same goal even if the rule of law and the rule of grace contain different ways of conduct during a given period.

In the Old there are pictures pointing to what will be fulfilled in Christ. There are shadows in the Old that become substance in the New.

Christ in John 1 is presented as THE Torah, the New Law come to fulfillment - the law of Moses, characterized by Grace and Truth. The Law *is* Christ. 1 John 1:5, shows the Light is the standard by which all holiness is measured. It is the Spirit who unites us to the reality.

So, in our zeal to be sure that Christ does not contradict Moses, we cannot have Christ merely "rubber stamping" Moses as an equal teacher of God's truth. Any system of theology that leaves Moses as "the big man on Campus" in the conscience of a believer today has not heard "My beloved Son" speaking clearly. The "but I say unto you" contrasts in the Sermon on the Mount can have some new truth that Moses never gave without demeaning Moses in any way.

We must see that Moses is *finished*. He has been replaced with Someone greater and better. The covenant of Moses was done away simply because it was obsolete (Heb 8:6-13). Moses did his job and he did it most faithfully. Both he and the covenant he administered were good and glorious (Rom 7:12; II Cor 3:7-11). Moses was faithful in God's house (Heb 4:2,5) as the *dogmatic teacher* (Gal 3:24), but his ministry or service in the house is finished. A greater than Moses is here and He has built the new and true house of God that was promised to David (I Chron 17:12). Our Lord, the *Son* IN Whom God has fully spoken **FINAL** truth (Heb 1:1-3), has replaced Moses, the *servant* **THROUGH** whom God spoke **PARTIAL** and **PREPARATORY** truth. Christ supercedes and

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replaces Moses as the true and final Lawgiver in the same way that He supercedes and
replaces Aaron as the true and final High Priest.