

May 5, 2002 by Steve Brandon



The Teaching of Jesus Christ - The Role of the Law

Matthew 5:17-19

Approach #1: Moses still applies to us today.

Approach #2: Moses no longer applies to us today, because of the cross.

Approach #3: Moses still applies to us today, but only through the lens of the cross.

Let me warn you right from the beginning that the verses we will look at this morning are some of the most important in all the Bible. They have literally been the discussion of books. In fact, this week, I am confident that I have read more material on these verses we will look at this morning than on any passage of Scripture I have preached upon in the last year. Furthermore, they are very difficult verses to understand. Down through church history, they have been discussed and disputed and debated. (If they were easy, there would never have been this volume of discussion and debate in the church).

From the outset, then, let me warn you. Like you were told when you were children, you need to put on your thinking caps this morning. My sermon this morning, will be more of a theological discourse, than a practical exhortation. Last week, things were very practical. Several of you told me so after the service. Being salt and light to the world is a very practical thing. I tried to be practical, because the text was. I gave perhaps thirty direct applications for you to ponder for your life of outreach to the world.

This week, things will be very theological. This is because the text before us is very theological. Yet, realize on thing: though this week will be very theological, it will have great practical ramifications on how you read your Bible every time you read it. So, perhaps you won't go away from this morning's message thinking, "Wow, here are some things that I can do this week!" However, my message this morning will impact how you understand your Bible, each time you read it, which I hope happens every day. You can read your Bible and understand it in a wrong way. Or, you can read your Bible and understand it correctly, as Jesus told us to.

Do you have your thinking caps on? I have worked very hard to make this as simple as possible. I feel like everything that I am going to say is simply like the tip of the iceberg, with lots of supporting thought, that I simply won't have time to bring up this morning.

Let's begin by realizing first, that the verses we are looking at this morning are essentially a transition from the first section of the Sermon on the Mount to the second section. In recent weeks, we looked at verses 3-16, which describe the citizens of the kingdom. Beginning in verse 17 through the end of the chapter (verse 48), Jesus will describe for us the righteousness which is needed to enter into the kingdom. He will do this through a series of six statements, which are often called "antitheses." On the one hand, Jesus will state the thesis (or statement) of what the Jews of His day were taught. Then Jesus will then present His own thesis (or statement) and will expand upon what He means. For instance, you see in verse 21, "**You have heard** that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'" Then, in verse 22, "**But I say** to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court" Or, take verse 27, "**You have heard** that it was said," Then, verse 28, "**but I say** to you ..." You find this formula six times in Jesus' sermon. He gives the thesis of the teachers of the day. He gives His own anti-thesis, based upon His own authority. Thus, the terminology, "antitheses."

If you remember, when we overviewed the entire Sermon on the Mount (a month and a half ago), our first point was ...

1. Jesus describes kingdom citizens (5:3-16)

This morning, we begin the new section, ...

2. Jesus requires perfect righteousness (5:17-48)

The key thought is contained in verse 48, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Jesus requires perfect righteousness to enter the kingdom of heaven. This is also the thrust of verse 20, "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." We will see in weeks to come how Jesus will press us to a complete righteousness -- not simply an external obeying of some rules, which the Pharisees taught -- but a thorough righteousness, which transcends mere external behavior and descends deep into your heart. Jesus will call us to a righteousness that doesn't simply stop at external actions, like murder or adultery or divorce, but extends into your heart's attitude, like anger and lust. Jesus will direct us to be truth tellers in the heart, not simply when we are under oath.

He will do this based upon His own authority. "But I say unto you. But I say unto you. But I say unto you." This was noticed by those who heard His sermon. "The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (7:28-29).

Jesus knew that His teaching in this sermon will be difficult for some of His hearers, particularly the scribes and the Pharisees. Not only did Jesus pronounce condemnation on them in 5:20, but also, Jesus' teaching will be opposed to their teaching. Jesus knew that His teaching in this sermon will be difficult for some of His hearers, so, He gives a disclaimer, of sorts, if you will, to His teaching, so that His statements might be understood correctly. Jesus will anticipate some of the objections of the scribes and Pharisees to His teaching. Particularly, in

verses 17-19, Jesus is going to address the issue of His teaching as it relates to the law of God, which was given through Moses.

To the scribes and Pharisees, the law of Moses was everything. When they taught, they sat "in the chair of Moses" (Matt. 23:2). When they taught, they used phrases like, "Moses commanded ..." (Matt. 8:4; 19:7), or "Moses said ..." (Matt. 22:24). They considered themselves to be "disciples of Moses" (John 9:28).

I want to show you how dependent upon Moses and the law these religious leaders were. In John 5, Jesus was condemning the Jews for their lack of faith. Yet, He claimed that Moses would be the one who accuses them, "Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope" (John 5:45). The picture here is that the religious leaders of the day had placed their hope completely upon Moses and His teaching. Yet, it is this very teaching that will condemn them. Why? "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me" (John 5:46).

Though they placed their hope in Moses, they failed to believe Moses, because Moses spoke of Jesus. They didn't understand Moses and the law. They thought that the law was simply a moral code of conduct that would earn you merit before God. They failed to realize that it spoke of Jesus, as does all of Scripture. Verse 39 makes this clear, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me."

Jesus took the Scriptures of His day, (what we know as the Old Testament), and said that they bear witness of Himself. The Old Testament Scriptures point to Jesus. The Scriptures weren't an end in and of themselves. It isn't the Scriptures that impart life (i.e. "you think that in them you have eternal life.") Rather the Scriptures testified of one to come, in whom will be life. They testify of Jesus, who would come and fulfill them. In Him is life. Life is not found in the Scriptures. Life is found in the person of Jesus. This is what Moses taught as well.

I remember talking recently with Steve Belonger recently about the persecuted church. He told me about Richard Wurmbrand, who was a prisoner in Romania for 14 years where he was tortured for his faith in Jesus Christ. (Richard Wurmbrand founded Voice of the Martyrs. He went to be with the Lord last year). Richard Wurmbrand wrote,

"I have told in the West how Christians were tied to crosses for four days and four nights. The crosses were put on the floor and other prisoners were tortured and made to fulfill their bodily necessities upon the faces and the bodies of the crucified ones. I have since been asked, 'Which Bible verse helped and strengthened you in those circumstances?' My answer is, '**No Bible verse was of any help.**' It is sheer cant and religious hypocrisy to say, 'This Bible verse strengthens me, or that Bible verse helps me.' Bible verses alone are not meant to help. We knew Psalm 23: 'The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want ... though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death ...'

"When you pass through suffering you realize that it was never meant by God that Psalm 23 should strengthen you. **It is the Lord who can strengthen you, not the psalm that speaks of Him doing so.** It is not enough to have the psalm. You must have the One about whom the psalm speaks. We also knew the verse, 'My grace is sufficient for you' (2 Corinthians 12:9). But the verse is not sufficient. It is the grace that is sufficient and not the verse.

"Pastors and zealous witnesses who are handling the Word as a calling from God are in danger of giving holy words more value than they really have. Holy words are only the means to arrive at the reality expressed by them. If you are united with the Reality, the Lord Almighty, evil loses its power over you; it cannot break the Lord Almighty. If you have only the words of the Lord Almighty, you can be very easily broken" (The Triumphant Church, p. 14).

Is this not the truth of John 5:39? "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me!" ... because Jesus was the fulfillment of the Scriptures. Enough of the background to the situation. Please turn back to Matthew 5:17-20.

As I said before we will find Jesus addressing the issue of His teaching as it relates to the law of God, which was given through Moses. Let's read our text this morning.

Matthew 5:17-19

17. "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.

18 "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.

19 "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.

In my study this week, I found that there were several ways that people looked at Jesus' words here in this context. I think that the best way to approach these verses is to see the various perspectives of people to these verses and realize the difficulties that they have in understanding them in their particular way. So, this morning, I would like to give to you several approaches to this passage.

Approach #1: Moses still applies to us today.

There are some, who look at the law of God given through Moses, and say that the teachings of Moses are directly applicable to us today. Moses' words are our moral code of conduct. We need to obey.

Those who take this approach read **verse 17**, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill." And then they conclude that Jesus came to fill up the law, in the sense that he expanded upon it and completed it and present it now in its final form. I quote John Murray, the great Princeton theologian of last century. He said,

"[Jesus] came to realize the full measure of the intent and purpose of the law and the prophets. He came to complete, to consummate, to bring to full fruition and perfect fulfilment [sic.] the law and the prophets. Jesus refers to the function of validating and confirming the law and the prophets and includes much more than the fulfilment of the predictions of the Old Testament regarding himself. He means that **the whole process of revelation deposited in the Old Testament finds in him its completion, its fulfilment, its confirmation, its validation**" (Principles of Conduct, p. 150).

In other words, the law and the prophets only went so far, but Jesus came as the fulfillment of the law, in the sense that Jesus completed it. Jesus validated it. He confirmed it. He put it in final form. Now, the law is complete. Before Jesus came, there was some of it still empty. But Jesus filled up the whole thing for us to follow. The picture given by these people is that the Law and the Prophets represent the first three legs in a relay race. Jesus took the baton and finished the race. The picture is one of a cup, which the Law and Prophets could only fill two-thirds. Jesus filled the rest of the cup. The picture is of a cake, with all the ingredients ready to go (i.e. the Law and the Prophets). Jesus then bakes the cake and presents it in final form.

Those who take this approach read **verse 18**, "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." Then they conclude that nothing in the law will ever be removed (not even the smallest letter or stroke of law). All of it still applies directly to us today. We are to obey all of the law of Moses today.

They then read **verse 19**, "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." And then they conclude that the law of Moses continues to be directly applicable to us today. I quote again from Professor Murray,

"There can be no escape from the conclusion that **the law is directly relevant** to membership in and station within the kingdom of God. ... The criterion of our standing in the kingdom of God and of reward in the age to come is nothing else than meticulous observance of the commandments of God in the minutiae details of their prescription and the earnest inculcation of such observance on the part of others" (Principles of Conduct, p. 153).

For those of you who are theologically minded, I am addressing here the "covenantal" approach to Scripture. God gave His "covenant" to Moses and the people of God. His covenant with the people of God is not abolished in any sense. The commands given through Moses are still applicable today.

There are obvious strengths to this view. This seems to be a simple and straightforward reading of the passage. I appreciate how this approach deals with verses 18-19, which indicate the continuity of the law of Moses. You simply read verses 18 and 19 and are unashamed at your interpretation of them.

However, there are two main difficulties with this view.

First of all, it proves too much.

Those who believe this balk when you begin pressing them upon certain commands. You ask them, "so, you cannot annul any of the commands, right?" They say, "Right. That's what verses 18 and 19 say." You then ask them, "Well, how about this command, from Leviticus 4:27-31? 'Now if anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and becomes guilty, if his sin, which he has committed is made known to him, then he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without defect, for his sin which he has committed. And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and slay the sin offering at the place of the burnt offering. And the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering; and all [the rest of] its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar. Then he shall remove all its fat, just as the fat was removed from the sacrifice of peace offerings; and the priest shall offer it up in smoke on the altar for a soothing aroma to the LORD. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven.'"

They say, "Well, Ummm, "

So, you ask them, well, how about this one from Deuteronomy 22:23-24? "If there is a girl who is a virgin engaged to a man, and [another] man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death; the girl, because she did not cry out in the city, and the man, because he has violated his neighbor's wife. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you."

They say, "Well, ... Ummmm, This doesn't apply to us today." You say, "Why not? Does not the force of your argument in verses 18-19 require that you keep everything in the law? Doesn't Jesus say (and don't you argue) that 'not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law?' (verse 18). Doesn't Jesus say that you need to practice and teach everything according to verse 19?" They often respond by saying, "Well, the law had three parts to it. The ceremonial, the civil, and the moral. Jesus fulfilled the ceremonial law (that's why we no longer need to sacrifice today). Jesus fulfilled the civil law (that's why we no longer have the law governing us today). But the moral law is wrapped up in the character of God, which never changes. This can never be abrogated."

Essentially, they read verse 19 as talking about the moral law. They read it like this, "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments (of the **moral law**), and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches [them, i.e. the **moral law**] he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." But, verses 18 and 19 don't make any distinction like this. Verses 18 and 19 appear to be an all or nothing proposition. Isn't that the point

of "the smallest letter or stroke"? Every letter! Every stroke! Every command?

This view that Moses still applies to us today has the first difficulty in that it proves too much. Furthermore, the Bible nowhere divides the OT law up into three categories, ceremonial, civil, and moral. Not that these categories aren't valid. They are. But the Bible never uses them. It's all or nothing with reference to the law. "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10). The law was never meant to be a cafeteria from which you pick and choose which commands you want to obey.

Second this view misunderstands the meaning of "fulfill" in verse 17.

Professor Murray has indicated that this word simply implies a "filling up, or completing." However, when you look at how Matthew uses this word, you will find he is pressed to come to this meaning. For instance, look at Matt. 1:22, "Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be **fulfilled**, saying, ..." Matthew then quotes Isaiah 7:14. Matt. 2:15 describes how Jesus was in Egypt, "until the death of Herod, that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be **fulfilled**, saying, ..." Matthew then quotes Hosea 11:1. Another case is in Matt. 2:17, "Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, ..." Matthew then quotes Jer. 31:15. Nine more times, this verb (or its related words) is used like this in Matthew (2:23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54, 56; 27:9, 35).

Here's the point. Just as the prophets prophesied about Jesus, who would come. When Jesus satisfied the requirements of the prophecy, Jesus is said to "fulfill the prophecy." So also, the law prophesied about Jesus, who would come. When Jesus satisfied the requirements of the law, Jesus is said to "fulfill the law."

At this point, you might be saying, "wait a minute, Steve." Is the law predicting anything future? Is the law really prophesying? How can a command to do something prophesy? Does it really? I say, "Yes, it does." Listen to Matthew 11:13, "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John." We don't have time to dig into the context of this passage. I simply point out that the Law is said here to "prophesy." Note that it doesn't say that the "prophets prophesied and the law legislated until John." Note that the law "prophesies." And if the law "prophesies," the prophesies of the law may also be "fulfilled" (as in Matthew 5:17).

At this point, you say, "OK, I understand that the Law prophesies. But how does this work? How does the law prophesy? How does a command given in the law prophesy?"

- The commands given in the law to sacrifice for sins picture the coming sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:1-4).
- The commands given in the law to celebrate certain feasts picture the coming celebration of Jesus Christ (i.e. He is our Passover - 2 Cor. 5:7)
- The commands to build the temple picture the body of Jesus, who declared himself the temple (John 2:19).

So, you say, "OK, you picked the easy ones, Steve, what about commands in the law like, 'honor your father and mother' prophesy?" Consider that Romans 3:20 says, "Through the law comes a knowledge of sin." Consider also that in Gal. 3:24, Paul says that "the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith." **Just as the sacrifices, the feasts, and the temple all were pictures of Jesus in anticipation of Him. So also were all of the moral commands a picture of the perfect Man. These commands also picture our failure to keep the law. I believe that the law prophesies in the sense that it teaches us what sin is our need of a Savior, who will come to keep the law, which we cannot do.** When Jesus came, He kept the law for us.

Not only was He the fulfillment of many of the pictures given in the law in the sacrificial system or the civil system, but He also fulfilled every last moral command given. In this way, the law was fulfilled -- every bit of it. Jesus accomplished the law. In Romans 10:4, Paul wrote, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness." Christ is the one to whom the entire law pointed. Jesus fulfilled the law in every way.

This is the sense of the meaning of the word, "fulfill." It isn't that Jesus validated or finished the law. It is that Jesus was the anticipation to which every bit of the law focussed its attention.

We not direct our attention to ...

Approach #2: Moses no longer applies to us today, because of the cross.

Those who take this approach read **verse 17**, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill." Then they conclude that Jesus came to satisfy every requirement of the law. He didn't abolish the Law or the Prophets in the sense of destroying them. Rather, he fulfilled them, like a prophesy. I quote from Charles Ryrie,

"Christ brought an end to the Mosaic law (Rom 10:4) ... **The Mosaic law has been done away in its entirety as a code.** God is no longer guiding the life of man by this particular code. In its place He has introduced the law of Christ. Many of the individual commands within that law are new, but some are not. Some of the ones which are old were also found in the Mosaic law and they are now incorporated into the law of Christ. As a part of the Mosaic law they are completely and forever done away. As part of the law of Christ they are binding on the believer today" ("The End of the Law," Bibliotheca

Those who take this approach read **verse 18**, "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." Then, they say, "Amen! The Law stands. It stands confirmed and completed in Christ Jesus. These words haven't passed away. These words have been fulfilled."

They then read **verse 19**, "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." Then they say, "Ummmm... Well.... Ummmm.... Ah, this is for Israel, and not for the church age." This time, I quote Lewis Sperry Chafer, former president of Dallas Theological Seminary,

"The Sermon on the Mount both by its setting in the context and by its doctrinal character ... belongs for its primary application to the future kingdom age. It was addressed to the people before Him, and concerned the requisite preparation on their part for admission into the kingdom of heaven then being published as "at hand." It likewise declared the manner of life that would be demanded within the kingdom when once it is entered. ... lessons and principles may be drawn from it, but that, as a rule of life, **it is addressed to the Jew before the cross and to the Jew in the coming kingdom, and therefore not now in effect** (Lewis Sperry Chafer, "The Teachings of Christ Incarnate - Part 1: The Sermon on the Mount," Bibliotheca Sacra, 1951, Vol. 108, pp. 395, 393).

For those of you who are theologically minded, I am addressing here the "dispensational" approach to Scripture. The main thought of this system is that God has dealt differently with people in different periods of times, called "dispensations." The applicability of any portion of scripture must be understood in terms of your dispensation and the dispensation in which the scripture was originally addressed.

There are obvious strengths to this view. I believe that this approach deals appropriately with a proper understanding of verse 17 and Jesus "fulfilling" the law, especially in light of the many other verses in the Bible that tell us that Jesus fulfilled the law and that Christians are no longer under the jurisdiction of the Mosaic law. Consider the following Pauline statements, ...

Romans 6:14-15, "Sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!"

Galatians 3:23-25, "Before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come we are no longer under a tutor."

Romans 10:4, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

However, **the main difficulty with this approach is that it cannot appropriately deal with verse 19**, where Jesus states categorically that one's place in the kingdom of heaven is dependent upon the degree to which he/she "keeps and teaches" the law. In fact, it is precisely this difficulty which pushes those who believe that the law of Moses no longer applies to put the application of these verse into another "dispensation." They correctly understand the force of the emphasis upon every word, every stroke, and every command!

A few months ago, as I was thinking about this passage, I had a conversation with someone. He asked what I thought of this passage (verses 17-19). Basically, I presented this view here. That everything of the law was fulfilled in Christ and that we are no longer under obligation to the Mosaic law. He replied, well then, how do you understand verse 19? I read, "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." I finished reading the verse and noticed how my understanding of this passage was not sufficient. I knew of the difficulties of the first approach. I was coming to know the difficulties of the second approach.

I have come to believe a third approach...

Approach #3: Moses still applies to us today, but only through the lens of the cross.

You can obviously tell that this approach combines the best of the other approaches, but avoids their pitfalls. It keeps the clear thrust of verse 19, and the continuing effects of the law of Moses for us today. Yet, it fully comprehends verse 17, and the fulfillment of the entire law by Jesus Christ, Himself.

Let me attempt to explain this approach, by expositing through these verses and explain them. **Verse 17** reads, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill." By referring to "the Law or the Prophets," Jesus is simply referring to the Jewish Scriptures, the entire Old Testament. While technically, "The Law" refers to the Mosaic law, which was given in the first 5 books of the Bible (often called, "The Pentateuch") and "The Prophets" refer to the prophetic books (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, ...), Jesus uses these two phrases together to speak about all of the Old Testament. For instance, ...

- Matt. 22:40 - "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

- John 1:45 - Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets wrote.'

- Rom. 3:21 - "Now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets."

At the outset, Jesus is boldly stating that He is not seeking to set them aside. Perhaps there were those who thought that this is what Jesus

was doing. This is what Mohammed did with his Koran. He essentially took the Jewish and Christian scriptures out of the way and replaced them with his Koran. But Jesus isn't claiming to remove any part of the Scriptures. Rather, He is claiming that He, Himself, is the fulfillment of them.

In other words, you take the line of human history. God created a perfect world with no sin. But Adam and Eve dis-obeyed God and ate from the tree of life. Immediately after the fall of Adam, God promised to raise up from the seed of the woman, One who would crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). God revealed Himself to Abraham, and promised to bless all the families of the earth, through His offspring (Gen. 12:1-3). You see that God remained faithful to His promises to Israel, despite their disobedience (Judges), to show that it was God's faithfulness to His people, not their great faithfulness to Him. God gave them a king, but hinted of a greater King to come. Though Israel is destroyed and wiped out, God is still faithful to Judah, from whom Jesus will be born, a son of David. Jesus comes in accordance with God's working in history to be the Messiah, who would "save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). **Jesus was in total continuity with all of the Bible.** You pick up your Bible and read. Somehow, it is bringing us to and pointing us toward Jesus of Nazareth.

The point Jesus is making here in verse 17 is that He hasn't come to destroy them and set them aside and start something entirely new (like Mohammed did). Rather, Jesus is the fulfillment of everything to which the OT was anticipating. He is the end to which it points (Romans 10:4). Jesus was totally in line with the Scriptures. You might picture the Old Testament as a train, which was headed in one direction. Jesus didn't derail the train. Rather, He jumped on board the train!

Verse 18 picks up on the same theme, "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." Jesus isn't denying the law. Jesus isn't taking away from the law. In verse 18, Jesus goes to great extent to affirm His commitment to every detail of the law. The smallest letter is a yodh, which looks like an apostrophe mark. The smallest stroke is a seraph, the little squiggle on some letters. The difference between the Hebrew letter, *kaph* (our letter, "k"), and the Hebrew letter, *beth* (our letter, "b") is only a little squiggle. Similarly, the difference between a *daleth* (our letter, "d") and a *resh* (our letter, "r") is a similar squiggle (see the notes in your Bible at Gen. 10:3-4 to see this difference).

Jesus said that not one of these will pass away "until heaven and earth pass away ... until all is accomplished." Jesus is simply echoing the Psalmist, "Forever, O LORD, Thy word is settled in heaven" (Ps. 119:89). Jesus is simply affirming Isaiah, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" (Is. 40:8). Jesus isn't taking the Bible away. He is fulfilling it! He is the end to which it points.

To fulfill a prophecy doesn't take the prophecy away does it? When Jesus fulfilled Isaiah 7:14, "the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," does this take the prophecy away? No. The prophecy continues on. It continues to point to Jesus. It still has validity. This is similar to the law. When Jesus fulfilled the law, this doesn't remove the law. It doesn't take away the law. The law is still there. It continues to testify of Jesus.

Finally, let's look at **verse 19**, "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." We don't abandon the law, according to verse 19. Rather, we see the law as it relates to God's redemptive history. The law anticipated a coming Redeemer. Now that the Redeemer has come, we keep and teach the law in light of its fulfillment in Christ (verse 17).

We need to keep in mind that Jesus said that He fulfilled the law. As such, as we think about history, we are living after the cross. Thus, when you interpret and teach the law, you must take into account the historical work of Christ. In other words, when you look at the law of Moses today, you must interpret it in light of the cross of Christ. We are Christians. We need to approach our Bibles historically. God first gave the Law. Then, Jesus died on the cross. We live after the cross. As a result, the cross of Jesus becomes our lens through which we interpret and apply the law today.

Let me give you a question for you to ask yourself when you read from the law today. Ask yourself, **"Do my actions show that I believe that Jesus fulfilled the law?" This question forces us to read our Bibles historically.**

We need to realize that in reference to verse 19, that our belief in Jesus actually forbids us from obeying many of the commands in the law (i.e. the sacrificial commands), precisely because He obeyed the law! If we then, were to obey the sacrificial law (in accordance with a misunderstanding of verse 19), we would actually not be believing in Jesus' perfect sacrifice for sins. We don't sacrifice, because Jesus has fulfilled these laws. We don't keep the food laws, because Jesus has broken down the barrier wall between the Jews and the Greeks, "by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances" (Eph. 2:15). We see that the cross of Christ become our hermeneutical control. In other words, the Mosaic law must be interpreted in light of Jesus' work on the earth.

Let's get back to one of our first questions. What about "Honor your father and mother"? Shall we keep this? Let's again use the cross as our hermeneutical control. Is there anything that Jesus did on the cross that would cause us to cease to obey this command? No. In fact, everything in us now, ought to desire to honor your father and mother with great passion, because by our actions, we can express our love towards them, which is one of the two commands upon which the whole Law and Prophets depend (Matt. 22:40).

I would encourage you in your reading of the Pentateuch to take each scripture through this grid of the cross to understand its applicability to you or not. Realize that the law is good! The Psalmist said, "Oh how I love Thy law" (Ps. 119:97). the law is the meditation of the godly man. Paul spoke of the goodness of the law (even in his disobedience to it) when he said, "If I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good (Romans 7:16)." Later, Paul wrote, "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man" (Romans 7:22). In another location, Paul unashamedly applies the law to the children in Ephesus, "Honor your father and mother" (Ephesians 6:2). The law isn't a giant ogre to be hated and despised. It is a good thing and instructs us how to live in a God-honoring way.

One of the best things I read in my study of this passage was written by Douglas Moo. He wrote,

"The 'fulfillment' of Matt 5:17 means that Jesus' new, eschatological demands do not constitute an abandonment of the law

but express that which the law was all along intended to anticipate. The continuity of the law with Jesus' teaching is thereby clearly stressed, but it is a continuity on the plane of a salvation-historical scheme of 'anticipation-realization.' It is in this sense that Matt 5:18-19 is to be understood, where Jesus asserts the enduring validity of the law and recommends that it continue to be taught. ... If ... verse 17 is taken as programmatic, then it is quite legitimate to conclude that verses 18-19 be taken as asserting the enduring validity and usefulness of the law, *when seen in light of its fulfillment in Christ* [emphasis his].

"The implication of this exegesis of Matt 5:17-19 is that the code of conduct applicable to life in the kingdom--and so, I would take it, to the church--is to be found essentially in Jesus' own teaching. The OT law is not to be abandoned. Indeed, it must continue to be taught (Matt 5:19) -- but interpreted and applied in light of its fulfillment by Christ. In other words, it stands no longer as the *ultimate* [emphasis his] standard of conduct for God's people, but must always be viewed through the lenses of Jesus' ministry and teaching" (Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments, chapter 9, "The Law of Moses or the Law of Christ," pp. 205-206).

For this reason, I believe that it is valid for us to ask, "Do my actions show that I believe that Jesus fulfilled the law?"

As Christians, we need not ever deny a commandment of Moses. Many Jews today deny many of the commands of Moses, simply because they no longer sacrifice. Yet, the believer in Jesus Christ never has to deny a commandment of Moses, because Jesus fulfilled the entire law. The Christian today is able to obey verse 19 in its entirety, through faith in Jesus' work, who fulfilled the entire law. He satisfied the demands of the law in every way. Paul wrote that since we have come to Christ, the law is no longer our tutor. We are no longer under bondage to the law, because Jesus fulfilled it. Yet, believe in Jesus is the engine that empowers us to live holy lives. The law applies to us as it teaches us of what our behavior should look like. To say it another way. The law guides us with respect to our sanctification. Though it never grants salvation, for it cannot do so.

This is our point of application this morning: may Rock Valley Bible Church read our Bibles in light of Jesus' fulfillment of the law!

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