

## Matthew 5:17-18

## “The Christian and the Law”

**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 from the Law until all is accomplished.**

### Introduction

The relationship of the Christian to the Law is an area of great misunderstanding. I hope that it will be clearer after our study of these verses from Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount. This relationship is an area of extremes. On one hand, there are some Christians who work to live out the Law of God in every detail in order to gain salvation from God. They believe that their justification cannot be known until they have died. The Roman Catholic Church, among others, teach this view of salvation. This is not the Biblical view of salvation, justification, or the Law. The other extreme to which some Christians go is to say that the Christian is dead to the Law and that none of the Law applies to us today. So, they can live however loose that they wish. Everything is permissible. Neither of these extremes are what God wants from our lives. Let's dig into this passage and have Jesus explain to us what the proper relationship between Christians and the Law is to be.

Charles Spurgeon said, "I do not believe that any man can preach the gospel who does not preach the law." Walter Chantry said, "Hosts of Christians have a dreadful fear of God's law, as if it were the useless relic of a past age, the use of which in our day would keep sinners from the grace of God. Our Saviour used the law as a primary tool of evangelism. He knew that preaching the Ten Commandments was the only way to teach a sinner his guilt and thereby stir within him a desire for God's grace."

### What is the Law? (v. 18)

Before we begin exploring our relationship to the Law of God, we must first talk about what we mean, or better yet, what Jesus meant by the Law of God. The Law that God gave the Jewish people can be explained by three different categories of laws: moral, ceremonial, and judicial.

#### *Moral Laws*

There were moral laws that God gave to the Jewish people. These include, but are not limited to, the ten commandments. In the ten commandments, God gave some moral principles that will always be true. For instance, it will never be right to lie because God is truth. Lying is wrong because it goes against the character of God.

#### *Ceremonial Laws*

The ceremonial laws governed how various Jewish ceremonies were to be carried out. This included the Jewish feasts and festivals. For instance, God commanded that the Jewish people were to set aside the fiftieth day after passover as Pentecost.

### *Judicial Laws*

The judicial laws are sometimes called legalese. This is where God described the penalties for planting two crops in the same field. This described that people were not to wear two different types of material in their clothes. It described what adultery was and the penalty that God required for adulterers. It was the laws that governed Jewish society.

### *The Law and the Prophets*

Notice that Jesus said that the Law and the Prophets would never pass away. He said that all the Law of God would be fulfilled. Jesus is speaking of the Law and the Prophets. That is a euphemism for the entire Old Testament. Jesus says that the Word of God will not pass away until it is completely fulfilled.

### **Jesus' Relationship to the Law (v. 17)**

Before we can see what our relationship to the Law is, we must look and see what Jesus' relationship to the Law was. The Bible says that He did not come to abolish or to destroy the Law, but instead He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.

### *Abolish*

What did Jesus mean when He said that He did not come to abolish or to destroy the Law and the Prophets? Jesus meant that He was not making the entire Old Testament of no use. He was not making it null and void. What His life and death would accomplish would not make the Old Testament meaningless. It was still going to play an important role.

### *Fulfill*

He said that He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. The concept behind fulfill is not to complete or deepen. He was going to live them out fully. He was going to deepen their understanding of the Old Testament teaching but He was not augmenting the Old Testament at all. He was going to fulfill what it taught.

### **Our Relationship to the Law**

Now that we know how Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets, then we can dig into how we are to think about the Law of God. The ceremonial and judicial laws were for the nation of Israel and are no longer in force. The moral law of God is based on His character and He never changes, so therefore, the moral law cannot be done away with or removed. It is permanent.

### *The Old Testament*

In the life of a Christian, we should realize that the Old Testament is useful for teaching, for correction, for doctrine, and for instruction in righteousness. The Old Testament is all about Jesus. He did not make it useless. Some Christians ignore the Old Testament and this is a big mistake. In Hebrews, the author quotes Jesus when Jesus said that the volume of the Bible is about Jesus. When you are reading about Abraham, you are reading a type, or a picture of

Jesus Christ. The story of Jericho is about Jesus. Daniel in the lion's den and Ezekiel's wheel in a wheel are all about Him. He is the star of Scripture. To ignore the Old Testament would be foolish indeed. Jesus often quoted the Old Testament scriptures.

#### *Do We Have to Obey the Law?*

How about the Law? Are we bound to obey the Law? What a silly question this is. It is like when the people asked Jesus what allowed them to get a divorce. The men want to know how to get out of a marriage and God wants to tell people how to stay in a marriage. Similarly, when we ask if we have to obey the Law, we reveal evil intentions. A better question would be, if I were to keep the ten commandments and all the moral laws of God, would I be more like Jesus Christ? Of course you would. So, does the Law need to be ignored to Believers? Of course not. We are becoming more and more conformed to the Law of God everyday as Christians. God is making us more and more like Jesus (**Rom. 8:29**). The Law, the Bible says, is like a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (**Galatians 3:24**).

#### *Our Schoolmaster*

A schoolmaster was a person who conducted the children to school. He was not the teacher, but took them to the teacher. He showed them to their true destination. That is what the Law of God does. It shows us our need of Jesus and points us to Him. He is the destination. Without the Law, we would not know sin (**Rom. 7:7**). The Law shows us how sinful we are and points us to Jesus when we are lost. As believers, the Law still shows us the perfect standard to which we are called and points us to the cross and to grace. The Law is good. The Law points me to Jesus.

Charles Spurgeon said about the Law of God, "Though nowadays we hear of persons being brought into a certainty of their salvation without ever having lamented their condemnation for their sins, we are very dubious as to the value of such salvations. This style of things is not according to the truth. God never clothes men until He has first stripped them, nor does He arouse them by the gospel until they are first slain by the law of God." Yes, God uses the Law to kill our self-righteousness, our self-sufficiency, and our self-dependence.