

Matthew 5:17-18 *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.*

THE TRANSITION OF THOUGHT

At this point in our “Kingdom Constitution” study of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, we have moved past the Beatitudes and the verses on our being salt and light in our world. To say it another way, we have just finished what I call the “Preamble” to the Constitution of the Kingdom. These have been the “who we are” as kingdom citizens – the “we the people” of the Sermon on the Mount.

Now with verse 17 of chapter 5 we transition to a new section. This is evident as Jesus begins “do not think ...” He is no longer speaking of who we are. Rather He is now speaking about Himself and His relation to the Old Testament Scriptures. Verses 17 to 20 are essentially an introduction to the main body of the sermon that will teach about our relationship to the Law as Kingdom citizens.

As he begins “do not think...” He is referring to the preamble that has preceded it. So, “do not think that what I have been saying about what makes you blessed and about being salt and light is contradicting the Old Testament Scriptures.” These teachings may be a new way of looking at the Old Testament, and a refreshing take on how Jesus sees you as His kingdom citizens, but it is not in any way abolishing what has come before through Moses or the prophets. Rather, it is a fulfillment of what God has always wanted His children to be.

This transitional section before us, verses 17-20, is so very critical. It lays out two foundational principles about the Old Testament:

1. It must be **FULFILLED**. This means that it is unfulfilled in itself. It is not in error, nor misleading, nor superfluous – these are all misinterpretations of what unfulfilled means. In fact, we will discover anew that the Old Testament is perfect, holy and God-breathed, simply waiting to be completed or **FULFILLED**.
2. IT is **PERPETUAL**. This is particularly taught in verse 18 where we are told that nothing will pass away from this Law until it is fulfilled (not superseded). Jesus said He did not come to abolish it. By its own character of truth as God’s Word, it is everlasting. And the last words of the Bible, in Revelation 22:18-19, we have warning not to add to or take away anything from God’s holy Book.

So our thoughts today will be on what it means to **FULFILL** the Old Testament and what it means to keep **PERPETUAL** its teachings as Jesus moves into the gospel teaching of the New Testament. And of course, the practical question is: “what does the Old Testament now mean to me? Am I bound to follow it? – all of it?”

I think the best way to proceed is to share some key verses of the New Testament regarding the Old Testament – particularly those that inform Jesus’ words given in Matthew 5:17-18. I will comment only briefly on a few if them, but most speak for themselves quite clearly.

RELEVANT NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE

Matthew 7:12 *In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

This is the final word from Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount about how the Old Testament relates to me. We call it “The Golden Rule.” It is Jesus’ practical summary of the Law.

Matthew 22:40 *On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.*

The two commandments are (1) to love God with all your heart and (2) to love your neighbor as yourself. This summarizes the OT into the key principles of the NT.

Luke 16:16-17 *The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.*

Here is another clear statement on the perpetual nature of the OT Law. The OT baton was passed, as it were, to John the Baptizer, who preached the gospel – the fulfillment of the Law.

Luke 24:27 *Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He [Jesus] explained to them [Cleopas and friend] the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.*

Jesus explaining the OT Scriptures as relating to Himself shows how He fulfilled them. The gospel was not opposed to the Law – it “explained” them as teaching of Jesus all along.

Luke 24:44 *Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”*

John 1:17 *For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.*

Acts 13:39 *And through Him [Jesus] everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.*

Acts 24:14 [Paul:] *But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets.*

Paul believed in the perfection of the Law, but that Christ was the embodiment of that perfect Law - “the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Rom. 10:4)

Romans 3:20-21 *Because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.*

The Law brought awareness of sin. The gospel brought the righteousness of God, which the OT had predicted would come.

Romans 5:20 *The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.*

Romans 7:6 *But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.*

Romans 7:12 *So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.*

Romans 8:2-4 *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

Romans 13:8,10 *Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

Galatians 3:23-24 *But 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, so that we may be justified by faith.*

Here we have the important thought that the Law was our “tutor” to lead us to Christ. Faith in the OT was exhibited but unfulfilled, until the coming of Jesus.

Colossians 2:9-10 *For in Him [Christ] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete.*

A wonderful way of explaining the “fulfillment” of the OT is to say that Christ “completed” it. Thus, in Him you have been made complete. Without the coming of Jesus the OT is incomplete. With His coming and His ministry, the OT is complete, or fulfilled.

PRINCIPLES OF DISTINCTION

- ✓ THE LAW CONDEMNS; THE GOSPEL JUSTIFIES
- ✓ THE LAW IS GOD’S HOLY STANDARD; THE GOSPEL IS GOD’S HOLY PROVISION
- ✓ THE LAW IS OUR TUTOR TOWARD CHRIST; THE GOSPEL IS CHRIST IN RELATIONSHIP

UNLOCKING MATTHEW 5:17 – “FULFILLED”

1. “Do not think...”
 - ✓ We are not to think that we have no responsibility to the Old Testament and that it has been completely superseded by the New Testament. Rather, it has a perpetual function.
2. “the Law or the Prophets”
 - ✓ The Law = the 5 books of Moses, especially Leviticus through Numbers
 - ✓ The Prophets = the rest of the OT, especially Psalms and the prophetic books
 - ✓ There is (1) moral law and (2) ceremonial law. We will speak on these shortly.
3. “to fulfill”
 - ✓ defn: to bring to completion or reality; achieve or realize, something desired, promised or predicted
 - ✓ from the English word: to “fill full”, implying a previous partial emptiness or incompleteness
 - ✓ from common usage: to make promises or dreams “come true.” God wanted to make His dream and our dream of relationship come true – and it has in Jesus

The Old Testament was God’s perfect standard of moral and ceremonial law. God’s challenge to His people was to follow it completely, showing the impossibility of doing so without His divine intervention. The law was mankind’s tutor to drive us to the promised Messiah, Jesus, as the provision for our keeping of the perfect standard.

UNLOCKING MATTHEW 5:18 – “PERPETUAL”

1. Jesus did not come to abolish or even replace the Old Testament
2. Truth, Righteousness & Purity is absolute and therefore never “out of style”
3. To alter or avoid this perfect standard is to change and ignore God’s Holy Word
 - ✓ Moral law – Jesus lived a perfect life of example and gave his followers the means to live a perfect life by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The moral Law is to be followed today and always. It is restated and reinforced in the New Testament. We are still to acknowledge the great I AM as the only God and not make idols nor take His name in vain. We are still to remember the Sabbath rest of laying aside meaningful time of personal and corporate worship. We are still to honor our parents, not murder, not commit adultery, not steal, not lie and not covet. These truths are perpetual and unchanging. And there are many other moral truths in the Law to which we are also bound, such as not engaging in sexual contact outside of marriage.

- √ Ceremonial law - This had two major elements – (1) the law of the building and keeping of the tabernacle, and (2) the law of the animal sacrifices to be made through annual festivals. Jesus has fulfilled or completed both of these in Himself. The book of Hebrews teaches how the tabernacle was a living metaphor of our relationship with God through Jesus the Christ and our High Priest. We now keep the ceremonial law of the tabernacle as we commune with God through Jesus. And Jesus also fulfilled the requirement of the animal sacrifices by being our Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Now our offer of sacrifice is a living sacrifice of self to God forever. The price for relationship has been paid, but we ever owe God a debt of love and self.

In these ways the Law and Prophets are perpetual. And our responsibility to the Law is perpetual. We keep the moral law by the power of the Spirit within. We keep the ceremonial law by maintaining an intimate relationship with our God through the provision of Jesus. Has the Law been cast aside and replaced? – Never! It has been completed and fulfilled in Jesus Himself – now living in us and relating to us as Lord and friend. Amazing!

This great truth is critical to our understanding of the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount. For the rest of chapter 5, and into chapters 6 and 7, Jesus is going to teach His kingdom citizens how we are to obey the moral and ceremonial law. Or to say it another way, He will teach us how we are to relate to the Old Testament as New Testament kingdom citizens.

But before we launch into that teaching, beginning in 5:21, Jesus has an additional word to say about the importance of our “righteousness surpassing that of the scribes and Pharisees.”

Next week!

OUR KEEPING OF THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS (Summary)

1. Rejoice that the moral law of absolute truth is unchanged
2. Rejoice that the provision for keeping the moral law is living in all believers
3. Rejoice that we no longer have to keep the ceremonial laws of the tabernacle nor of animal sacrifices
4. Rejoice that we now are called to continue keeping the ceremonial law through an intimate relationship with our Savior-King and High Priest, Jesus
5. Commit anew to the faithful keeping of the Law and the Prophets