

The Sermon on the Mount: The Big Picture

There is a big picture. What is it?

We don't have to speculate. Christ himself tells us:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them (Matt. 5:17).

Can you imagine a more dramatic statement? How it must have rocked the hearers that day! It *must* set the tone for whatever interpretation we make of the passage. It must!

The key word, the key point

The all-important word is 'fulfil'. So much so, it became a key word for Matthew. He used it eighteen times in his Gospel, twice, quoting Christ in this passage in the Sermon on the Mount. What is more, the word 'fulfil' feeds into the rest of the New Testament, and is fundamental to the vital discontinuity between the old (Mosaic) covenant and the new covenant; our understanding of Scripture, no less. As a consequence, it must play a key role for us.

Christ came to 'fulfil' the entire law – and the prophets; that is what Christ declared.¹ Matthew got the point, and he made sure his readers didn't miss it (Matt. 1:22; 2:15,17,23; 4:14, and so on). In other words, in the Sermon on the Mount Christ was claiming to be the Messiah, bringing in the promised kingdom, the kingdom

¹ Christ has fulfilled the prophets with respect to his first coming; the prophecies concerning his second coming await that day, of course.

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which John the Baptist, the last prophet of the old covenant (Luke 16:16), Messiah's promised forerunner (Isa. 40:1-5; Mal. 3:1-3; 4:5-6; Matt. 3:1-3; 11:10; Luke 1:13-17,76-79; 3:3-6; John 1:19-23), had recently announced:

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matt. 3:1-2).

John the Baptist! What a key figure – the one standing at the watershed of the ages. As Jesus, pressing all the key points – 'law and prophets' and 'kingdom' – would later declare:

The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it [or, everyone is forcefully urged into it] (Luke 16:16).

The kingdom! 'Fulfil' is the key word; 'kingdom' is the key point. The Suffering Servant, promised by the prophets (Isa. 42 – 53), would, in fulfilling the law, by his sufferings bring in the kingdom. And John the Baptist, declaring that the time of long-expected fulfilment had come, left his hearers in no doubt as to who this Suffering Servant was, the one who would bring in this kingdom and how he would do it:

I baptise you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:11-12).

[John] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said: 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said: "After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me"... And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God' (John 1:29-34).

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Christ overcame John's reticence over baptising him by concentrating on 'fulfil':

Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness (Matt. 3:15).

And, after his announcement as King and baptism by John, thus 'fulfilling all righteousness', Christ was immediately led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan in the wilderness:

When Jesus was baptised, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said: 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'. Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matt. 3:16-17; 4:1).

A major part of that temptation was over his role as King (Matt. 4:1-11).

As Matthew recorded, Christ then opened his preaching ministry, confirming John's announcement, with a pregnant claim of his own:

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt. 4:17).

And, in the synagogue at Nazareth, where he had been brought up, how dramatically he announced who he was and what he had come to do! Isaiah 61:1-2, a messianic passage, had been read. Christ made the amazing (they all marvelled at him) statement:

Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing (Luke 4:16-22).

Here he was – the Messiah, the King! In Nazareth; of all places, in Nazareth! Not in king's palaces, not in Jerusalem, not in Rome, but in a manager in Bethlehem, and now in a synagogue in Nazareth! The atmosphere must have been electric!

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The kingdom. While this is a major study in itself – the kingdom is *the* theme of Christ’s ministry² – all I want to do here is show how Christ’s Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 – 7 fits into this dramatic prophetic fulfilment: Christ was and is the promised King; he has a kingdom; he rules; he issues his law for his subjects to obey – his own law; he does not re-hash or reinforce somebody else’s law.³ As God announced when Christ was transfigured:

This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased;
listen to him (Matt. 17:5).

Yes, indeed! ‘Listen to him’!

Anticipating, for a moment, what is to come, the writer of Hebrews spelled it out:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets [supremely, of course, by Moses at Sinai – DG], but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (Heb. 1:1-2).

What did Roberts say about this epoch-shattering series of events leading up to the Sermon, and to Christ’s amazing announcement that he had come to fulfil the law and the prophets? Nothing! Nothing at all! He did not even offer an interpretation of ‘fulfil’, but having quoted Matthew 5:18, simply launched into a passage packed with Reformed, covenant-theology speak, telling his

² It is important to remember that the point about Christ’s kingdom is not place but time, age, period; the time, the age, of Christ’s rule, law. Christ was bringing in a new covenant in a new age for new men and women walking in the Spirit under a new law. The word is ‘eschatological’, speaking of the way God deals with men through changing history; supremely, the end of the old covenant, the inauguration of the new leading to the eternal kingdom. See my *Redemption*.

³ See Matt. 2:2; 3:2; 4:8,23; 5:3,10,19,20,35; 6:10,13,33; 7:21 for Matthew’s emphasis on ‘kingdom’ in this stage in his Gospel.

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readers that they have to ‘fulfil’ or keep the law, which he limited to the ten commandments. What a way to exegete Scripture! Roberts did not even keep to his own rubric. Having told his readers: ‘There is a crucially important point to be learned here’, he went on to say: ‘We must not overlook what Christ is here teaching us’. But that is precisely what he himself did! He glossed Christ’s talk of ‘the law’ into ‘the moral law’, ‘the ten commandments, and did not even mention the supreme – ‘crucially important’ – point! Instead of pointing his readers to Christ the King, the one who had come to ‘fulfil’ the law and the prophets and thus bring in the kingdom, issuing his own law for his people, he presented a Christ who acted as a lesser Moses! Instead of Moses being a shadow of Christ, Christ is little more than a poor copy of Moses! In Roberts’ scheme, Christ ends up with repeating a tiny law, a minuscule part of Moses’ law! If so, John 1:17 will need to be re-written to read something like: ‘The law was given by Moses; Jesus Christ came, but was left with only a tiny part of Moses’ law as the rule his people have to obey’! Some king! Some watershed of the ages!⁴

The Sermon itself

And so to Christ in his Sermon. He was explicit: don’t run away with the idea that ‘I have come to abolish the law or the prophets’, he said; ‘I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them’. Now ‘the law and the prophets’, or its equivalent, is a common biblical phrase. What does it mean – in Scripture? What did Christ mean by it? It

⁴ It might be argued that I am being unfair and Roberts did address the issue by way of inference. But that doesn’t stand scrutiny. Christ was not implying anything, leaving us to infer what he was talking about. He spelled it out. Moreover, Roberts’ remarks (by way of implication) concerned what he called ‘the ceremonial law’, whereas Christ was speaking, throughout, of ‘the law’ – ‘the law’, full stop! Christ fulfilled the law and the prophets!

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surely refers to the entire revelation of the Old Testament (Matt. 5:17; 7:12; 22:40; Luke 16:16; 24:27,44; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; 24:14; Rom. 3:21). Christ did not come to abolish that revelation but to ‘fulfil’ it. That is what he said. His teaching in Matthew 5 – 7 cannot be confined to some arbitrary, tiny (less than 1%) part of the Mosaic law, but must embrace God’s entire revelation – the entire revelation, please note – to Israel from Genesis to Malachi, both law and prophets.⁵

The first new-covenant preachers certainly saw it that way, and made sure their hearers got the message. For instance, how did Peter justify what was happening on the day of Pentecost? Like this:

This is what was uttered through the prophet Joel... For David says concerning [Christ]... Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, [David] foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ... The promise is... (Acts 2:14-41).

Prophet, prophet, prophet. How did Peter address the Jews on a later occasion? Like this:

What God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled (Acts 3:18).

⁵ The proper way to read the Testaments is to grasp their unity in their discontinuity. Christ is that unity. The Old pointed to him, revealing him in prophecies and shadows. The New reveals him as the fulfiller of those prophecies, the reality of the shadows (Luke 24:27; John 5:46; Acts 10:43; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; *etc.*). As a consequence, when we read the Bible, we should be looking for Christ, and reading everything through Christ, whose person and work is the unifying factor of Scripture. Granting that, the debate, therefore, really hinges on where the *emphasis* should fall. Should it be on the continuity or the discontinuity? There is no doubt – or shouldn’t be! Discontinuity! If any doubt remains, read the letter to the Hebrews.

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How did James justify the advance of the gospel among the Gentiles? Like this:

With this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written... (Acts 15:1-21).

How did Paul address the Jewish leaders in Rome? Like this:

When they had appointed a day for [Paul], they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet... (Acts 28:23-25).

In short:

All the promises of God find their Yes [this surely includes their fulfilment – DG] in [Christ] (2 Cor. 1:20).

And so on. Just put 'prophets' into a Bible search-engine and see!

Yet, while Christ said that he came to fulfil the entire revelation of the Old Testament, 'law and prophets', Roberts told his readers that they have to do the fulfilling, they have to keep – not the law, but a fraction of the Mosaic covenant, the ten commandments!

Moses superseded by Christ

Let's get down to brass tacks. It was in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 – 7), coupled with his final extended discourse and great, mediatorial prayer (John 13 – 17), that Christ showed that he had come to supersede Moses on Sinai. Moses was the instrument God used to deliver his (Mosaic) covenant and its law to Israel; Christ, as King, was delivering his own law to his people, the Israel

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of God. Clearly, he was doing far more than Moses. For a start, Moses was simply a messenger, the intermediary God used to convey God's law to Israel; Christ was God incarnate, himself delivering his own law directly to his people. The point is, Moses received God's law (hence, the Mosaic law) for Israel, and passed on that law to Israel (and, incidentally, only to Israel) (Deut 4:8,13-14,19,32-36,40,44-45; 5:26; 7:6-14; 33:1-4; Judges 5:5; Ps. 103:7; 105:44-45; 147:19-20; Mal. 4:4; Acts 2:23; Rom. 2:14; 3:1-2; 9:4-5; 1 Cor. 9:19-21); Christ, however, delivered his own law, the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:19-21), directly to his people, the Israel of God, the *ekklesia*, believers (Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 6:16; Phil. 3:3; 1 Pet. 2: 9-10). And this was as God had promised – supremely, and most appositely, by Moses – yes, by Moses:

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – it is to him you shall listen – just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said: 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die'. And the LORD said to me: 'They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die'. And if you say in your heart: 'How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?' – when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him (Deut. 18:15-22).

And look at the way Christ concluded his Sermon on the Mount:

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Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it (Matt. 7:24-27).

That extract must not be relegated to the level of a pretty story for children or a chorus for them to prance to. Matthew made sure that his readers realised Christ was bringing his discourse to an end on a high note, a clear note of authority; this is the climax of the Sermon, and stamps the proper interpretation on it. In short, it captures the big picture. Christ the King, in his own name was issuing his own law, to which he was demanding obedience.

While some teachers today, it seems, fail to see this, the crowd who heard Christ that day did not:

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes (Matt. 7:28-29).

Of course they were astonished! Christ had just delivered the first instalment of his law! And he had done it in a way which could not be more different to that of the rabbis – and, we might say, different to Moses. Think how startling it must have sounded to those who heard it – so radically different in form and content to what they were used to!

It was not only the crowd that day that experienced this. The Samaritan woman at the well did, and, by her testimony, many of her fellow-Samaritans also came to believe. The woman, addressing Christ, had raised the vital point:

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I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things. Jesus said to her: ‘I who speak to you am he’... The woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people: ‘Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?’... Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony: ‘He told me all that I ever did’... And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman: ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world’ (John 4:25-42).

Listen to Christ’s claims on other occasions:

When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me (John 8:28).

The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment – what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me (John 12:48-50).

It could not be clearer. Christ spoke as King. He did not offer advice, drop hints, make suggestions. He spoke with resounding authority. All who heard him were forced to take notice. ‘No man ever spoke like this man!’ (John 7:46), was the verdict of the temple guards. And they should know! Christ alone had – and still has – the words of eternal life (John 6:68). That describes what Christ was doing in Matthew 5 – 7. He was issuing his own law.

Yes, but how did he choose to do it? As we have seen, he was soon laying down a thumping negative, by taking the old-covenant, Mosaic law, so familiar to his hearers, and declaring: ‘Do not think that I came to destroy the [old-

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covenant] law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the [old-covenant] law till all is fulfilled' (Matt. 5:17-18). Christ did not come to destroy the old-covenant law or the prophets; that is, 'to invalidate, to represent as of no authority, or of diminished authority, those former revelations of the divine will'. In addition to not 'invalidating' the old-covenant law, Christ did not destroy it, demolish it, dismantle it, or arbitrarily repeal it. What a negative!

Turning from the negative, Christ immediately pressed on to issue a staggering positive: speaking of the Mosaic law in its entirety, Christ said he had come to 'fulfil' it; that is, he had come expressly in order to obey it to the full, and complete it, 'fulfilling' its purpose. This he would do to the letter, to the jot and to the tittle! We get a sense of this when Christ said that some 'shall be satisfied' (Matt. 5:6) (*chortazō*); he was using a different word to 'fulfil' (*plēroō*) in Matthew 5:17, yes, but he was conveying the sense of 'fulfil'; namely, 'satisfaction'. This is the cardinal point. Christ came in order to 'satisfy' the entire revelation of God in the Old Testament – not just a portion of it. And in keeping the Mosaic covenant and its law in its entirety, he was fulfilling God's purpose in giving the old covenant to Israel, bringing it to its full satisfaction, and thus meriting an everlasting righteousness for all his people in the new covenant.⁶ Hence his categorical: 'I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 5:20). But, anticipating a most important point, one to which I will return, and which I will develop, as the New Testament records make clear, in God's mercy, by the work of Christ applied to them by the Spirit, all believers have a perfect righteousness in their union with Christ:

⁶ See my *Christ's Obedience Imputed*.

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By him everyone who believes is freed [that is, justified] from everything from which you could not be freed [that is, justified] by the law of Moses (Acts 13:39).

By works of the law no human being will be justified in [God's] sight... But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe (Rom. 3:20-22).

[God] made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified... through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness [that is, justification] were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose (Gal. 2:16-21).

No sinner can earn justification by law observance, but Christ, who was without sin, could and did for his people. As Paul would tell the Romans, the end, goal or purpose of the law – ‘the commandment which was to bring life’ (Rom. 7:10) – was accomplished by Christ for his people. ‘Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them’ (Rom. 10:4-5). Christ lived by that law – perfectly, not merely without sin, but in positive obedience to it – and so earned a perfect righteousness for his people. He, by his perfect life of

obedience under the law culminating in his blood sacrifice, has accomplished this.

The old covenant and its law made obsolete

Now for another vital point, which, as immediately above, would be fully set out by the New Testament writers, as Christ promised. Christ fulfilled, satisfied the law, and in so doing, he completed its God-given purpose, fully met all that God intended by it, and so rendered it obsolete. Yes, it is not a misprint. Christ's obedience rendered the old system obsolete. I have not made it up or dredged it from a Confession or systematic theology. As I will show, in due time, in accordance with Christ's promise, the writers of the New Testament went on to make this aspect of Christ's work clearer than noonday. Take that verse just quoted: 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes' (Rom. 10:4). Christ is the *telos* of the law for believers; that is, the goal, terminus, end, finish, the fulfilment of the law. And that is only one verse! But Christ had sown the seed in Matthew 5:17-20.

Christ gives his own law

Having spoken of his full satisfaction of the law and the prophets (which, as would later be made known, rendered the old covenant obsolete), Christ did not leave his people stranded in a desert, in some kind of no-man's land. No! Having put Moses' law and his covenant in its proper, biblical, perspective, he went on to set out his own law. In the Sermon on the Mount, in issuing his law Christ took the Mosaic law for his springboard or starting point, saying again and again: 'You have heard that it was said... but I say to you' (Matt. 5:18-22,26-28,31-34,38-39,43-44; 6:2,5,16,25,29). 'I say to you', especially when accompanied, as so often, with 'But', 'Verily' or 'Truly', cannot be construed in any other way. This is Christ's own law, issued by himself.

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Four things should be noted: *First*, the link between Moses and Christ. Christ was preaching a new law, but this did not involve any disloyalty to the old law. The Mosaic law is – and always will be – part of ‘all Scripture’, and therefore ‘profitable’ (2 Tim. 3:16-17), but only if used in the scriptural way. The law of Christ knows how to make proper use of the law of Moses. *And that is how we must not use it – not as dreamed up by the men of Westminster, and prescribed by their followers today.*⁷ In other words, our use of the old covenant and its law has to be ‘proper’;⁸ that is, scriptural. We have to be ‘worker[s] who [have] no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth’ (2 Tim. 2:15), including the Mosaic law. *Secondly*, note the contrast between Moses and Christ: ‘It was said... *but I say*’. *Thirdly*, Christ always cut deeper than Moses. Instead of making obedience an external matter, Christ made (his) law-keeping a matter of the heart, which is far more penetrating and searching; anger and lust, for instance (Matt. 5:21-30). *Fourthly*, note Christ’s jaw-dropping conclusion to the discourse: ‘Therefore whoever hears these sayings of mine’ (Matt. 7:24,26). As we have seen, the point was grasped by the crowd, even though they gasped at what the Lord was saying: ‘And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes’ (Matt. 7:28-29).⁹

⁷ How would Roberts say believers should obey Christ’s command: ‘If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift’ (Matt. 5:23-24)?

⁸ See, for instance, my ‘Separation Essential: No Mixture’ on my YouTube and sermonaudio.com pages, and ‘No Mixture! Separation!’ on my sermonaudio.com page.

⁹ Compare Calvin: ‘The intention of our Lord was... to restore the true meaning of the law in its entirety [note that – ‘in its

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There is no doubt about it – the crowd saw that in Matthew 5 – 7 King Jesus was not regurgitating other men’s thoughts; he did not even replicate Moses. *He gave his own law*. And he gave it *in his own name and on his own authority*. Furthermore, he spoke unmistakably as the new lawgiver: ‘I say to you’, giving the people ‘these sayings of mine’. And how frequently it is recorded throughout the Gospels that he did such a thing! I refer to ‘Jesus said’, ‘I say’, ‘my words’, *etc.* These are not always merely explanatory; in context, they repeatedly hammer home Christ’s authority. A glance at a concordance under ‘verily I say’ or ‘verily, verily’ (AV), ‘assuredly’ or ‘most assuredly’ (NKJV), ‘I tell you the truth’ (NIV), ‘truly I say’ or ‘truly, truly’ (NASB), will confirm the point. Christ could not have made the position any clearer. He called for obedience to his words (Matt. 7:24-29; Luke 6:46-49; John 13 – 16). Above all:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

If this is not Christ’s law, the King’s law, what is?

entirety’ – DG], which the rabbis had reversed [clouded over – DG] by their false glosses. Therefore let us hold to this position: that with regard to a faithful man walking in a good conscience and being whole before God in both his vocation and in all his works, there exists a plain and complete guideline for it in the law of Moses, to which we need simply cling if we want to follow the right path’ (John Calvin: *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines: Translation, Introduction, and Notes*, Benjamin Wirt Farley, Editor and Translator, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1982, p78). Like the curate’s egg – good in parts; but overall, how wrong can one be?

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We must take this further. As for the Mosaic law, Christ dogmatically states that he, and he alone, as he uses it in his own law, has the right to give it its true, spiritual, interpretation. In other words, Matthew 5 – 7 is not a repetition of the Mosaic law spelled out or recast for believers. Far from it! It is Christ's own law. And, it goes without saying, it is a true law. Let me stress once again that in this Sermon, Christ does not offer advice; he issues his law and does so with majestic authority, raising the question of obedience right at the dawn of the new age. Moses was the lawgiver for the old Israel. Christ is the lawgiver for his new Israel. But there is a difference. Whereas the law of Moses was not, strictly speaking, his law, but God's, Christ did publish his *own* law. In this, Christ explicitly demonstrates that he is greater than Moses (Heb. 3:1-6); his law, likewise. It must be noted that Christ's law or yoke is easy (Matt. 11:29-30), not at all the same sort of law as the Mosaic yoke – a yoke of unbearable bondage (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1). Let me stress this: 'law' under Christ is not at all the same as 'law' under Moses. Christ's law is love, the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), worked out by those walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26). Christ delineated all this, in principle, in his Sermon on the Mount, leaving – as I will show – its full exposition to the inspired writers of the New Testament.

It was not only in the Sermon on the Mount where Christ set out his terms for discipleship in the new covenant. He did it again and again (Matt. 10:5 – 11:1; 20:25-28; Luke 14:26-35; John 8:31-32). Above all, at the final supper with his disciples (Luke 22:14-38), which included his last great discourse (John 13 – 16), Christ developed his law for his people, and did so in a most telling way.

Christ's great new-covenant discourse

First, the one overall commandment:

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A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another (John 13:34).

Then a series of commandments:

You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you... If you love me, you will keep my commandments... Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me... Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me... Abide in me... If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you... These things I command you, so that you will love one another (John 13:13-15; 14:15,21,24; 15:4,10-14,17).

Christ's crowning, all-governing promise

And now, within this last great discourse which Christ delivered to his disciples, replete as it is with Christ's commandments gathered under the umbrella of his one 'new commandment', we come to a vital expansion of his earlier key statement and John's explanation of it:

'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said: "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water"'. Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:37-39).

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This, of course, was Christ's far-reaching promise of the gift and ministry of the Spirit to all his people in the new covenant; specifically, to enable the post-Pentecost writers¹⁰ to complete the task of setting out Christ's law for all his people for all time, to the end of the age:

These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you... When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me... I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away... I have said these things to you that... you may remember that I told them to you... I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 14:25-26; 15:26; 16:1,4,12-15).

This is the point of huge significance to which I have been referring, to which I said I would return in order to develop – one which Roberts did not even mention. While he looked back to the Westminster documents, and drew heavily on their (and Calvin's) claims (even though he did not explicitly own it), Roberts paid no regard whatsoever to the writings which Christ himself stated would bring his revelation to its completion. Remarkable! Turn to fallible men, but leave untouched the inspired writers, writers that Christ's people know have set out the

¹⁰ I realise, of course, that the Gospels were written after Pentecost. I use 'post-Pentecost writers' I refer to those who were adding new revelation by the Spirit after Pentecost.

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full revelation on this subject according to the plain promise of their Master? Incredible!

Strange to say, Lloyd-Jones put the point the other way round:

There is no teaching in the Sermon on the Mount which is not also found in the various New Testament [letters]... The Sermon on the Mount is nothing but a grand elaboration of [the new commandment].¹¹

True, of course, but the fact is Christ set out the fundamental principles, leaving the later writers to fill out the details, and the rest of the New Testament is ‘a grand elaboration of’ the new covenant, including the law of Christ.

Let me now turn to those writers.

¹¹ D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*.