

## Matthew 5:17-20 (NKJV)

**17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.**

**18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.**

**19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**

**20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.**

Moral relativism. What is it?

This is from the free dictionary online.

**Moral Relativism is The notion that right and wrong are not absolute values, but are personalized according to the individual and his or her circumstances or cultural orientation.**

Moral relativism is a method of deciding what is right or wrong but having nothing solid to base it on. It is like pulling out a Monopoly board and trying to play the game but no one knows the rules. What would we expect? Well if one rule is as good as the other, we will have a continually changing game. The rules will change depending who is playing. Confidence in the rules may exist, but that confidence is based on pure idealism. And no one can really know if they won or lost, or even if they played correctly. Everything is up for a popular vote. Fair and unfair are moving targets.

That is the world we live in. It is at the heart of all of our society's new and changing rules that are simply arbitrary. They make little sense because there is no sense to appeal to.

Here is a quote from Peter Steinfelds:

**If there is no religious absolute there can be no basis for real law. People will not respect or long obey laws that are only judicial guesses. An evil, godless society, floating about on a sea of relativism, realizes that it has no foundation, no anchor, no unmoving point of reference. Law becomes a matter of preference and order a matter of power. A democracy where power is ultimately vested in the people is particularly vulnerable to chaos.**

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). Matthew (Vol. 1, p. 250). Chicago: Moody Press.

Moral relativism is when human beings say, **I do not want to know, or I do not care**, about what God says about my behavior. I want to do this behavior. So I will **do it** and will **justify it** by some arbitrary mental gymnastics. Non believers are not the only people who exhibit Moral Relativism. Believers can be guilty of it too.

So what is the antidote to moral relativism? It is the **recognition** and **surrender** to the fact that **God is our master**. Essentially it **begins** in knowledge, knowledge is necessary, but knowledge by itself is not enough. What is required is repentance. What is required is a change of mind that says that my way of living is not right. I will trust God to know how to live. Moral relativism dies in our lives when we submit to absolute authority.

Why is that important?

Because if there is no **law**, if there are no statements of **absolute right and wrong**, we are destined to live in moral relativity. There is no other option. And where are we to find absolute statements of right and wrong? **The law**. We have lived in an era when the old testament law has gone out of vogue in Christian circles. There are some that dismiss the Old Testament law altogether. And we find more and more segments of so called Christianity that can no longer discern right and wrong. We have growing seeds of moral relativity within the Christian camp. So we see right off the bat that this topic of law is **hugely important**. When Jesus says, <sup>17</sup> **"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets**. He is saying something that is highly relevant to us.

We need to be able to answer these questions-

How does **Jesus** think about the law?

How should **we** think about the law?

What **has changed** between the old testament and the new testament?

What does it mean that we are **not under the law**?

When I came here 41 years ago I had a very flippant view of the law. I doubted that there was much to learn from the law about how I was to live the Christian life. Discussions with Mike did a lot to change my mind about it. It is **the law**, when seen through the **eyes of faith in God**, that allows us to live a **faithful** life rather than a **moral relativistic life**. Right is right and wrong is wrong, no matter what personal feelings I have. And this is so because there is a Creator of the universe and that Creator **has spoken**. Jesus will tell us how He regards the absolute basis of right and wrong.

Now, we need to remember the audience that Jesus was speaking to. These people had a high regard for the law of God. They were not, for the most part,

moral relativists. They **revered** the law, even if they were not consistent with the application of it. And every self respecting Jew listening to Jesus would want to know **what stance** he would take on the law. They probably all wanted Him to say what He said about the Law.

Now again we want to see this in light of the context.

The beatitudes teach us **what Christians really are** down deep. They are profoundly changed people who have gone through, and ARE going through this process.

Then we learn the **function** of these people in the world, their **purpose** in the world, This purpose is to influence the world with a **taste** of Jesus and the **light** of Jesus. Now we find out what everything we learned about so far is based upon.

Everything, so far, is based upon the **foundation of the absolute truth** of the scriptures. Everything is based upon the words that God has spoken.

Jesus says "**Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets.**

When He says, **the law or the prophets**, he is talking about their canon of scripture. That is **what they called** the written scripture they had at the time. We are finding out here just **what Christ thinks** of the old testament. Be careful when you hear someone speaking badly of the old testament, as if God has somehow progressed from that.

I had a room mate in college that became somewhat famous and popular with some skeptical people. I saw his name pop up in a blog so I looked him up. He calls himself a believer, but he talks about how ridiculous it is to really believe the old testament. His punch line is that God destroys nearly every living person by the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of his book. His audience laughs.

Jesus said, don't think that somehow I am the kind of person that **will mock** that narrative. Don't think that I have somehow **moved beyond all that.**

Don't think that I am **skeptical of its origin or its content.** No. **Not at all and not in any way.** And those people who **say they follow me** are **not** following me when they take a different stance to My Word than I do.

That is implied in what He says. Those people who say they love Jesus but do not respect the Law might as well say they worship what Jesus **did** but did not worship who He **was**. Both are equally absurd statements.

Now Jesus starts by saying **Do not think that I came to destroy**

That looks like he is confronting something they may have thought. We need to keep in mind that most common Jews would have regarded two sources of authority. There was the Law and the Prophets, and then there was the Rabbi's books of instructions about the Law and the Prophets. It would be like

us regarding a commentary as having the same Biblical authority as the Bible itself. That would be a grave error.

Now Jesus seemed to give little regard to the traditions of the Rabbi's. He treated them as being **irrelevant**. So it is quite likely that those looking on would think that Christ **might not have any regard** for **true scripture**. They may have viewed him as a **renegade**. He did not go by the popular understanding of spiritual things. So that made Him **suspect**.

I'd like to make an application here.

This error is far easier to do than we might think. It is far easier to **write off someone** when they hold a view of something from scripture that is not at all **popular**.

I have immense respect for Dan Porter. He believes some things that are fighting words to Christians in some circles. Yet if you ask him about those beliefs, he can take you to the scriptures and show you why he believes what he believes. He can often make a better case for what he believes than those who might argue against him. But because some of what he believes is not popular in Christian circles, some simply assume he is wrong. Just because a lot of people believe something never makes it true. Just because an understanding may not be popular, that does not make it untrue.

It is very dangerous thinking to measure a person's beliefs by how well they stand up to the popular understanding. In our text, that kind of thinking could have caused people to **reject God in the flesh** while thinking they were acting spiritually. We say it often. It often needs said. God's word is the final authority. Nothing else.

Now where Jesus uses the word, "**Destroy**", it means to utterly overthrow or destroy. It is the same word used for the destruction of the temple. It means, pretty much, to obliterate something. It would mean to render something useless.

So we see that Jesus had no intent to **belittle** or **undo** what God had spoken to Moses or the prophets. It is very clear that there will be **changes** based on the people of God no longer being joined to a **political kingdom**, being joined to a specific **people group**. But no destruction, no making it useless, no obliteration, no damage.

Notice too that He says "**I have come.**" First that tells us He was elsewhere before He came. This shows the He **pre-existed** prior to coming to the earth. I am not sure that would have stood out dramatically to His listeners at the time. But based on all that we know to be true about Christ, what He says here is very consistent with His incarnation. I was elsewhere. And now I have come here to do this thing.

And notice the second thing. Christ came with **this mission**. He came **to do** something. And He knew what it is. And He could describe it clearly. Christ came to **fulfill the law**.

Have you ever used this phrase to describe someone doing something, **“He is a man on a mission”**?

What does that describe? What is different about a man on a mission? Aren't they normally very **purposeful**? They have one thing to do and they will not allow anything to distract them from what they are trying to accomplish. That mission is in the forefront of their awareness.

My kids used to work at a bank. And I knew that many of the people there had a tendency to assume that no one else at the bank was really working but them. They would criticize anyone that did not appear to be working. So I gave my kids some advice. I told them to carry an empty box if what they were doing would not look like it was work. No one carrying a box is purposeless.

Well Jesus did not need to carry a box. He was always on a purpose and He knew exactly what it was. He came to fulfill the law.

I have talked to people and have thought this myself sometimes. We say, **I don't know what God wants me to do**. And I don't want to be too hard on that. You know how we are. What we might be saying is I want to know what job I should have, or what big thing in my life that determines my life direction. Maybe we are just asking for God to direct our **specific** path. And that is a good desire.

But think about that. Wouldn't another way of saying that sometimes be, **I don't know what mission I am on?** I want to know what I am supposed to do **that will have value?** If you were God, and you went out of your way to have your word **revealed** in such dramatic ways over thousands of years, and then you had it **preserved** against dramatic odds, and then you laid **multiple varieties of it in a person's lap**, would it not take dramatic **long suffering** to hear that person say, **“God would you please tell me what to do?** Please give me a direction in my life.” If we do not know **our mission**, if we do not know **our purpose**, if we are not actively involved in it every day, it is because we don't read God's word with the heart of faithfully obeying it. Of all people, we should be **a person on a mission**. That is what Christ was. He was a man on the mission of fulfilling God's word.

**I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.**

Now the million dollar question here is, what does it mean to **fulfill**?

The word for fulfill means to fill up. It means to complete something that is present.

What is the focal point of the whole Bible?

The simple answer is **Jesus**.

There are lots of things we need to know in order to see Jesus in His proper light. The law is a **schoolmaster** to prepare us for Christ. But ultimately even the law is not about the law. The law is a **backdrop** for the **ministry of Christ**. The law and the prophets **tell us about Christ**. We have the **lambs** sacrificed for the sins of the people. We have the **scapegoat** that carried the sins out of the city. There were the **pictures of reconciliation** in the stories of the patriarchs. There were so many **prophecies** given on what Christ would be like. The old testament may contain lots of things, but the purpose is to **point to Christ**.

Look what the New Testament tells us about this.

**Lk 24:27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, Christ expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.**

***Luke 24:44* Then Christ said to them, “These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me.”<sup>45</sup> And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.**

**Jn 5:39 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.**

**Heb 10:7 Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—In the volume of the book it is written of Me—To do Your will, O God.’ ”**

So Christ taught that the law was pointing to Himself. Now how did Jesus **fulfil** the law?

Well it is sure that Christ **taught** the law. Christ gave more clarity to how the old testament should be understood than anyone ever has. That is true. But there is more.

We also know that Christ **met its demands**. Christ lived perfectly righteous. He never sinned. Every **thought** he had and every thing **He did** was right. There was no sin. There was no evil. He was perfect. So He **did** fulfill the law **that way** too. But there is more. None of that would have **done us** any good because we need **more than a good example** in a Savior. We need Him to **do something** that can change **us** from the inside out.

The greatest beauty **to us** about Christ's fulfillment of the law is that Christ **WAS** the fulfillment of all the Old Testament. He **WAS** it. He was the embodiment of man and the embodiment of God. He perfectly obeyed every part of the law and He perfectly displayed all the qualities that the law and the prophets told us about God. Look at His **willingness to forgive**, His **mercy toward the suffering caused by sin**, alongside his perfect righteous anger. He **was** everything that the law spoke of and He **was** everything that the old testament told us about what God is like, except with the limitations of flesh. Christ **fulfilled** what some define as **God's moral law**. Now these are terms that men have come up with to understand the Old Testament law so we have to be careful with this. Scholars often describe those parts of the law that define right and wrong for all people as the moral law. We can't allow ourselves to think that this means there are parts of the law that are **immoral**. I think it might be better to define what scholars often call as the moral law as the universal laws, moral rules that apply to all men at all times.

The ten commandments are likely an example of that. Most would say that not only did Christ perfectly keep the Sabbath but that He changed it by giving us the reality of it rather than the just the symbol of it. Christ is our rest now, so the day of rest was fulfilled by something superior and something it pointed to. And that is the rest Christ has given us. There is plenty of room for debate on that topic. But our point here is to say that the 10 commandments are the encapsulation of the universal moral law. And Christ kept it perfectly. He exuded it. These rules apply to all mankind.

Then there is what scholars call the **Judicial Law**. These are the laws set up for a nation for whom church and state were the same thing. These laws were for the **kingdom of Israel**. These rules set them apart from all other countries, all other people groups. There were rules about house cleaning. There were rules about mold. There were rules about mixed fiber clothing. There were rules about allowed and disallowed foods. Again there is plenty of room for argument on some of the points, but it is clear that we do not live under the same rules and probably do not need to. But Christ did. And He embodied them.

And then the **Ceremonial Law**. And this may be the most evident and the most important. These were the rules of worship. And at their core was worship in the temple where a man would go into the Holy of Holies once per year and be in God's presence. This was their apex of spiritual worship. This was the closest they got to God in their worship system. Yet when Christ died it was very clear that **EVERYTHING** had changed. God ripped that curtain that kept people from seeing into the Holy of Holies from the top to the bottom.

Nothing on earth could have accomplished such a thing. But there it was. **Free access to God through Christ.** The Father was no longer part of this ceremonial practice. Christ was the lamb of God. Christ was the scape goat. Christ was the offering.

Now, today, if someone offers an animal sacrifice, it is an **insult** to Christ. It is as if to say that what Christ did **is not sufficient**. If someone were able to enter the Holy of Holies they would find that God's presence is not dwelling there as it had in the past.

This is probably the place where Christ most visibly and profoundly fulfilled the law. He fulfilled that law in such a way that the **old rules no longer existed** for followers of God. They no longer applied at all. The **symbols of old** found their **fulfillment** in the **reality** of the person of Christ.

Christ was the High Priest

Look at every element of the temple worship and you will find it pointing to the ministry of Christ. Look at every festival and you will find it pointing to the ministry of Christ.

And wonder of all wonders, we know that the law could not make us righteous.

**Ga 3:24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.**

The law was very good for what the law was made for. The law in itself represented God accurately. It is a statement of His righteousness. It is a statement of what He is like. And it is a **demand** for people **to be** that which God has **created us to be**. But since the fall we are **not** what God created us to be. And left to our own devices we **will never be**.

That is why we needed something **more** than the law. We needed the embodiment of the law and the prophets and the Psalms to not only live according the Universal Moral Law perfectly, but to exhibit the loving virtues of our God. We needed **mercy extended** to us. We needed **grace extended** to us. We needed that God that David described so accurately in Psalms to **reach out to meet our needs**. And Christ **fulfilled** that as well.

Now the law is no longer our enemy. The law no longer looms up against us in judgment against us. We can finally look at it like David looked at it. This law tells us **what God likes, what God wants, what God demands**. It tells us what **He hates, what He will not tolerate, what He will punish**.

Isn't that what children who long to please Him want to know?

But the law no longer condemns us. The law is no longer a standard that promises destruction to those who fail to perfectly obey it. It **defines failure** clearly. But Christ has **fulfilled the law**. Now, when the law **defines our**



**failure**, we can agree with the law. We can say, yes I have failed and I regret doing so. Christ deserves more from me. But I can **confess my sins** and I am forgiven on my sins. We **run** to the one who fulfilled the law. And there is **mercy and grace** to be had. And He is perfectly free to provide that forgiveness because He has not only **perfectly met the laws demands**, he has **perfectly paid the penalty** for our violations of that same law. He met those demands as well. He has fulfilled the **laws requirements** for **punishment** of our sins.

I just wanted to add one more thing quickly before we close. This week I challenge you to look at the prophecies in the Old Testament about Christ. This was one of the most convincing proofs of Christianity that drove away my doubts when I was 15 years old.

Some scholars believe there are more than 300 prophecies about Christ in the old testament. Many of them are extremely specific.

I want to read a quote about 8 of them.

**Peter Stoner, Chairman of the Departments of Mathematics and Astronomy at Pasadena College, was passionate about biblical prophecies. With 600 students from the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Stoner looked at eight specific prophecies about Jesus. They came up with extremely conservative probabilities for each one being fulfilled, and then considered the likelihood of Jesus fulfilling all eight of those prophecies.**

**The conclusion to his research was staggering. The prospect that anyone would satisfy those eight prophecies was just 1 in  $10^{17}$ . In [Science Speaks](#), he described it like this:**

**"Let us try to visualize this chance. If you mark one of ten tickets, and place all of the tickets in a hat, and thoroughly stir them, and then ask a blindfolded man to draw one, his chance of getting the right ticket is one in ten. Suppose that we take  $10^{17}$  silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state.**

**"Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and**

**having them all come true in any one man, from their day to the present time, providing they wrote using their own wisdom."**

We serve a remarkable God. And that God has given us, in Christ, all that we need to believe. Christ did not fulfill **some** of the Messianic prophecies. He did not fulfill **most** of the Messianic prophecies. He fulfilled **all of them** that needed to be fulfilled up to this point. And He will fulfill the rest at His return. There are no prophecies about the Messiah that are unable to be fulfilled.

**Christ completely fulfilled the law and the prophets.**

If you want to be encouraged in your Christian walk, spend an hour researching a few of the prophecies about Christ. Then consider what it took for God to arrange everything for this to happen. And then consider what you are afraid to trust Christ with in your life. And consider how fortunate we are to have the blessings of this great God through Christ.