

Matthew 5: 17; “Christ Came to Fulfill the Law”, Sermon # 17 in a series entitled – “These Sayings of Mine”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on September 12th, 2021, in the Morning Worship Service.

What does Jesus mean when He said that He did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them? Well, He was speaking about His fulfilling the whole of God’s law as it is found in the Old Testament Scriptures. He came to fulfill all of the Law of God from beginning to end, in relation to the Scriptures. But, let us ask ourselves another question. The Jews of Jesus’ day, His own countrymen, did they really understand what God was looking for, from them, in terms of obedience to His law? No, it is apparent that they did not. And the same is true of many people today, in terms of their keeping God’s holy law as it is found in the 10 commandments.

If this is the case, then we really should take the time to consider why the Lord Jesus Christ had to come into the world, according to His own words, here in the Sermon on the Mount. There are a couple of important things to remember about Christ’s relationship to the Law of God, if you would glorify God in the way that you live your life. 1st of all – Christ did not come to destroy the Law and so you should not destroy it either. 2nd – Christ came to fulfill the Law, and so You should strive to keep the commandments of God. May the Lord help us now, to grasp the implications of Christ’s fulfilling of the law, on our behalf.

1st of all – The Lord Jesus did not come to destroy the Law.

Jesus says here – “I did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill.” Let us understand that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Son of Man. As the Divine Son, He has always been of one Essence with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, as the Lawgiver. Isaiah 33: 22 – “For the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our king; He will save us.” The Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was the Lawgiver in the Beginning of the world, in the creation of man, just as much as He was the Lawgiver on Mt. Sinai, in the giving of the Law to the children of Israel. Genesis 1: 26 – “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.’”

Let us also remember that man was created in the beginning with God’s Law written on his heart. Genesis 1: 27 says – “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” When God created man, he created Him upright. This was the law of man’s first creation. That is, He created them in original righteousness. Adam and Eve were created with knowledge, and righteousness and holiness woven into their very being. They had the ability to discern the difference between good and evil, and a heart which was inclined toward doing everything good.

God placed the them in the Garden of Eden, in perfect conditions for them to live and flourish, both spiritually and physically. At this time, they had free will to be able to please God by keeping whatever commandment which God would give to them. He gave them one law to go along with the law of their original righteousness in their creation. It would be to them a test as to whether they might love Him enough to keep all of His commandments. He told them that even they might freely eat of all the trees of the garden. But He also told them that they should not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For in the day that they would eat of it, they would die.

You remember how it went. Satan, who had fallen from His original righteousness through the sin of pride, came into the garden, and taking the form of a serpent, tempted Eve by telling her that she would not die if she ate of the forbidden fruit. She would become like God, knowing the difference between good and evil. And thus he deceived her, for she listened to this line of reasoning. And she thought that she would become wise if she ate of it. And so, she did eat of it.

And Adam, listening to her voice after she ate, he also ate, and they both fell from their original righteousness. Their original righteousness was the law of their first creation.

Now, the law that they violated that day was both the law of their first creation, (what they were created with, real uprightness of heart), and also the one commandment which God gave to them to keep. (the law of their being able to remain in that state) The covenant of works was related Adam and Eve's keeping themselves from partaking of the knowledge of good and evil, because God commanded them to do so. That is called a positive law in theology. You do it, because God said so, not because the command was intrinsically moral in itself. God knew that if they partook, they would be guilty of sin against Him in not keeping His word. But He also knew that sin would enter their being and defile every faculty of their being.

They did not heed His word to them, and that was their sin. They ate the fruit, and in doing so, they broke this law of their first creation. They fell under God's righteous judgment of physical and spiritual death. They were both guilty and defiled by sin. They were under the curse of God's law, and sin by its entrance into their minds and hearts, affected every part of their being, so that they did not love communion with God the way that they had. And they were unable to restore themselves to their original righteousness. Since Adam was the head of our race, we all enter the world as sinners, defiled by his sin in the all the faculties of our being. This is what is called Total Depravity in theology.

Who was it then, who came looking for Adam and Eve in the Garden after they had fallen into sin and lost their original righteousness? If you will recall, it was none other than the Pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ. He was the One who "came walking in the garden in the cool of the day"; prefiguring His Incarnation. He, as God, along with the Father and the Spirit, had given the original law of man's creation to them, as a very good thing for them. But now, He knew, that they could not save themselves or restore themselves by their own works of righteousness.

In this awful situation, we do not find Him coming to destroy the Law, and we do not find Him condemning them forever, as they deserved to be. Instead we find Him giving them a promise of what He would do when He became Incarnate. Speaking to the serpent who had deceived Eve, He said in Genesis 3: 15 – "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heal." In other words, He Himself would take it upon Himself to be "born of a woman, the Virgin Mary, and He would be born under the law, to redeem those who under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons".

That verse from Galatians 4: 4 and 5, is not simply talking about Jews there. It is talking about Jews and Gentiles alike, for all need to be redeemed. We all need to be bought back from our sin by the purchase of Christ's blood. Christ become a Man, and He fulfilled the Law of God in regard to keeping Himself from sin, as a Man, and also then, keeping all of God's commandments on our behalf. He would also go to the cross where He would crush Satan's head by bearing the just punishment which our sins so richly deserve. He would be the sinless sacrifice which would satisfy God's righteousness on our behalf, and His justice in punishing His dear Son in our place, for our sins.

The Bible tells us that God's holy Law did not begin with the Jewish people. As our Confession says in Chapter 19, Paragraph 2 – "The same law that was first written in the heart of man continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall, and was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables, the four first containing our duty towards God, and the other six, our duty to man." In other words, God gave man His holy law in the Beginning, when he was first created. And when He created man He saw that it was very good. And what was very good in the Beginning, that is the Law written in the heart of man at that time, continues to be very good to this day.

When God created man He knew that, left to himself, that he would fall into sin. But this did not nullify the Law which he had been created with. That Law was still holy, and righteous, and good. This is why, when the Lord Jesus was sent into the world by the Father, He was sent with this mission; to fulfill the righteousness of the law by His living a perfect life in relation to fulfilling the prophecies which speak of Him as a Savior. Psalm 40, verse 7 – “Then I said, ‘Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me.’ “I delight to do Your will, O my God, your law is within my heart.” It is this which makes the Lord Jesus unique among men. This is what makes Him the only suitable Savior for your soul. God did not give His law to men, and create it in their very nature, so that it would be lost forever when Adam fell. Quite the contrary. He would take every step necessary to preserve it through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Jewish people of Jesus’ day had many thoughts about Him when He came upon the scene. They wondered about Him, why He didn’t go along with the view of God’s law that their scribes and Pharisees had. They thought that perhaps He had come to destroy the law. He often spoke about righteousness, but He did not look up to any of their spiritual leaders. He was raised in obscurity in Nazareth, and they thought that nothing good could come out of Nazareth. But they did know, as they looked at His life, that He was always concerned with doing what was right, even though He didn’t have their view of the Law at certain points. Even from the time that He was very young, they saw Him being submissive to His parents and to God at every point. He was not noticed by very many people in Israel for some years.

But when His public ministry began, then they knew that He was someone very different from their scribes and Pharisees. His teaching was with power. And His life was a godly life in every way. They saw that He took God’s holy law, the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament, as His authority for everything that He said and did. In Matthew 22: 34-40 it says that “when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together”. “Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, ‘Teach, which is the great commandment in the law?’ “Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all our heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ “This is the first and great commandment.” “And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

So, Jesus did not come to destroy the Law, but to establish its authority over every person’s life. And this was evidenced especially in the way that He lived His own life; in loving God with all His heart and His neighbor as Himself. This leads me to ask you whether you look into God’s law to see whether you are keeping it, or not? Have you ever experienced conviction of sin? This is one of reasons that the Law was given. Do see the Law as an authority over your life in terms of you going about to do what is right? Do you know that even though the law was written on Adam’s heart in the Beginning, it was also written upon your heart as well, in your being, when you were formed by God in your mother’s womb? That is, even though Adam’s sin has marred every aspect of your being, still, because you are his descendant, you are a law to yourself in your having been created by God, in His image and likeness, fallen though it is.

The work of the law was written on your heart, but because of sin, that work is marred in every man coming into the world. No man will acknowledge this as they should until the Holy Spirit convicts them of sin. But your conscience will bear witness, either against you or for you, in relation to all that you do and say. And your thoughts will either accuse you, or excuse you, in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ; that is, on the Day when Christ returns and judges the world in righteousness. So will you take heed to the perfections of God’s Law, and realize that in yourself you are not by any means perfect? The Law shows you that perfection which is only found in Christ, and the Law is your schoolmaster to lead you to Christ. Christ did not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill it.

2nd – Christ came to fulfill the Law, and so You should strive to keep the commandments of God because He kept them perfectly.

Christ's chief delight was in keeping the Law of God. He was, and He is, the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. God's law was in His heart. You can see this if you will turn over with me to Psalm 119, verses 1-8. This is the Aleph section. All of Psalm 119 is a Psalm which speaks to us of how much Christ loved God's Law as it was found in the Old Testament Scriptures. Here we find statements being made by the Psalmist and prayers being offered up so that those statements would become a reality in his own life of righteousness. Even though this Psalm was written by Ezra or David, when we read it, we hear the thoughts and prayers of Christ, as He lived His life for God, and for us. Listen to verses 1-3. "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord!" "Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!" "They also do no iniquity." "They walk in His ways."

So, I want you to see what the reality was for the Lord Jesus, in the communion which He had with His Father over the Law. The Lord Jesus would be undefiled in the way. He would have not the least little sin or defiling thought enter His mind. As He was sinless in His being, when a temptation to sin came to Him, He immediately extinguished it by His holy love for God, and for doing the right thing. He knew the great blessedness of purity of heart and mind. Every thought of His was pure. Every word that He spoke was not only true, but it was like apples of gold in settings of silver. It did people good if they would receive it.

All of the good deeds that He did were done to the glory of God. He loved God with all of His heart, He was filled with the Holy Spirit without measure, and so His fellowship and communion with God was constant. It was His chief delight. All of His fellowship with God was over how He would go about to do and keep God's testimonies; how He would do those things thinking of God, first and foremost, and then also thinking of He could do us good, and set the best of examples for us, to follow. All of the precepts, testimonies, and statutes of God's holy Law, He knew, must be taken into account, meditated upon day and night, prayed over at various points in the day, and then done in perfect love to God and man.

The Lord Jesus knew that love is the fulfillment of the Law, as it says in Romans 13: 10. He knew that He must fulfill all the commandments of God, completely in Himself, and by Himself; by His thinking righteous thoughts, speaking righteous words, and doing righteous deeds. He knew that He must work out a perfect righteousness on our behalf, so that we could receive the the benefits of it in the grace that He alone can give us; the strength, and the wisdom to be able to keep God's commandments ourselves. This is how the plural, "those who keep His testimonies" in verse 2, and the word "they" in verse 3, should be understood here. All of our doing righteousness is based upon what He has first perfectly done Himself, in fulfilling God's holy law.

If our righteousness is not founded upon His perfect righteous, then we are only keeping God's commandments from our own self-righteousness, and thus it will always fall far short, it will be imperfect and incomplete in the sight of God. But when we believe in Jesus Christ, not only is righteousness imputed to our person, so that we stand perfect and complete in Christ through our being justified by faith. Righteousness is also imputed to all of our works, so that they will be seen by God to be acceptable in His sight as we walk with Him. We are not perfect on our own, apart from Christ. Neither can we love God with all of our heart, or even seek Him with our whole heart, in any great measure, unless we have faith in Him.

We, the branches, must abide in Christ the Vine. When we abide in Him, we will bear fruit to God. Without Him we can do nothing, spiritually speaking. We certainly cannot say as it says in verse 3 that we will "do no iniquity" or "walk in God's ways" unless we are walking with Jesus, having communion with Him; having Him teach us the right motives for keeping the commandments of God, and the right way to go about keeping them, so that God will be

glorified and people around us truly loved and helped. If we can paraphrase verses 6 and following here – “Christ was not ashamed when He looked into all of God’s commandments.” Christ praised the Father with uprightness of heart as He learned God’s righteous judgments. For His heart was straight and true in all that He did for God.

It is because His heart was straight and true, that our hearts can become straight and true by His grace. Ah, you see, Christ had to suffer for this. The strength to obey God’s law consistently is not found inherently in ourselves. It is found in Him. It was because He had learned God’s righteous judgments as a Man, that He could go to the cross on our behalf, even though He knew that in that dread place, that God would forsake Him for a time as He bore our sins in His body on the tree. Yet, for the Joy that was set before Him, He could endure the cross and despise the shame, because His was the Overcoming Strength of Perfect Character. He would die the sinless sacrifice, and then rise again, because death could not hold Him, and God was well pleased with Him.

He would then ascend to sit, where He is now, at the right hand of God, as the One who would ever live to make intercession for us who believe in Him. Let me ask you now, whether you see, that you could never be saved by the best of your works? Your works in many ways fall short of the perfection which God requires. But in Christ you are accepted by God the Father as righteous, for Jesus sake. Your works as they come from yourself have imperfections which attend them; your works of obedience to God’s Law, and even your good works in relation to other people sometimes have motives which are selfish or sinful that attend them. But even though this is so, what is lacking or mistaken or even wrong, is being seen in relation to Christ’s mediation and His intercession.

In terms of your justification, this is why the apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 3, verse 27-31 – “Where is boasting then?” “It is excluded.” “By what law?” “Of works?” “No, but by the law of faith.” “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” “Or is He the God of the Jews only?” “Is He not also the God of the Gentiles?” “Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith?” “Do we make void the law through faith?” “Certainly not!” “On the contrary, we establish the law.”

How is the law established in the life of every believer? It is established in our lives in relation to Christ’s having fulfilled it. Because He has fulfilled it, the righteous requirement of the Law will be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. The Spirit is Christ’s Holy Spirit, and He dwells in us, and works in our hearts to give us wisdom in how to keep God’s commandments, and imparts strength to our determination to do God’s will at every point in our lives. We want to be like Christ in every way. And we will become more and more like Him, as we walk by faith in Him, in relation to our learning to do and keep all of God’s commandments.