

Matthew 5:17–20

<sup>17</sup> “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

<sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> 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.

### ***Christ and the Word of God*** **Matthew 5:17-20**

INTRO:

The Lord Jesus opened the body of His sermon by stating a principle. He did not come to somehow abolish the Old Testament, He came to fulfill it and accomplish it. Following this, Jesus will talk much about the commandments, correct the misconception of the scribes and Pharisees, and tell us what the Law was meant to teach. However, before we can understand this there is a basic truth we need to understand about the Old Testament and the righteousness we must possess.

***I. Our Lord and the Old Testament (v. 17-19)***

***II. Our Lord and Personal Righteousness (v. 20)***

***I. Our Lord and the Old Testament (v. 17-19)***

***“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 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. 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.” (Matthew 5:17–19).***

A. Some find these words of the Lord hard to understand. Does this say the Lord Jesus taught us that the Law and the Prophets would never change? Important observations need to be considered before we approach these words.

1. First why did Jesus say these things in this place? It no doubt came into focus because of the observation of those who heard the Lord Jesus in this sermon.

***“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.” (Matthew 7:28–29).***

From the writings of second temple Judaism we know that probably the Scribes and Pharisees taught by citing one or the other of the famous Rabbis. Jesus didn't. He had authority in Himself and people recognized it. He did not cite the “oral tradition,” which the scribes called the law but was not.

2. Second, we know some of the Law and prophets would be superceded. The writer to the Hebrews wrote:

***“For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law” (Hebrews 7:12).***

He also writes:

***“In that He says, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (Hebrews 8:13).***

3. Third, the Law was never designed to save anyone. Paul drew this conclusion in **Galatians 3:10-11**

***“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.’ But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for ‘the just shall live by faith.’”***

It was designed to drive us to Christ.

B. Let us seek to understand then what Jesus said. Two statements in **verses 17 and 18** qualify what Jesus said.

***“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 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 [accomplished].”***

The language of fulfilling the Old Testament Scriptures abounds in the Gospels. It appears early in some texts like in **Luke 4:21**.

***“And [the Lord Jesus] began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’”***

It is most commonly found in passages describing events surrounding the Lord's passion.

***““Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus? But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.’ Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled” (Matthew 26:53–54, 56)***

C. The Lord Jesus did not teach against the Old Testament. Rather He sought to establish it as it was supposed to be understood. Some of the Law and the Prophets would be superseded by the New Covenant. Two points arise from this survey. First, the Scripture cannot be broken. Second, some of the Old Testament revelation will be superseded by the New Covenant.

D. We will find a lot of our Lord's burden was to make us understand what the Law actually involved. Under the New Covenant the righteous demand of the Law was not done away. It was restated in the New Testament. This is why Jesus said, ***"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"*** (v. 19).

## ***II. Our Lord and Personal Holiness (v. 20)***

***"For I say to you, unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven"*** (Matthew 5:20).

A. Although the Law and the prophets' predictions and sacrificial system were fulfilled in Christ, it did not mean we do not have to be righteous. Instead of an external Law which demanded an external obedience, in the new Covenant it would change. In **Hebrews 8:10** the writer cited the new Covenant.

***"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."***

This anticipates the Holy Spirit's indwelling ministry. God changes us from the inside out. He takes away our heart of stone and makes us want to please Him.

B. This is what the Apostle Paul described in **Romans 8:3-4**.

***"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."***

C. Our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees because the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is only an apparent righteousness, not a genuine righteousness. It looked good on the surface, but didn't affect the heart.

D. The righteousness that saves is a righteousness that begins with faith, and then becomes practical in the life. God saves us and He changes us to be conformed to the image of His Son. This righteousness that comes from God and from the heart, controlled by the Spirit of God, makes us heirs of the Kingdom of heaven.

## **Where Are We In This?**

Do we understand that our Lord Jesus came to accomplish the Law and Prophets and not destroy them?

Are we living a life which desires to be as holy as a pardoned sinner can be made?  
Have you put your faith in the Lord Jesus as your Savior? Are you working with the Holy Spirit Who lives in you to grow to be like Jesus and to please God?

## **Hymn #437 *Pure and Holy***