

Fulfilling The Law

Jesus was a false teacher to the Jewish rabbis. His teachings did not agree with what they taught and He was not a member of the scribes, Pharisees, or Sadducees. Much had already happened before Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus had been baptized, tempted in the wilderness, sought after by maybe thousands for healing and had been confronted by these religious leaders. Jesus had already corrected the religious leaders when a crowd was present. It was the rabbis who were the false teachers and not Jesus. The conflict must have been obvious to the people.

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 away from the Law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (NASB)
Matthew 5:17-19

ABOLISH THE LAW? The beatitudes which Jesus taught disagreed with the rabbis' teachings. For example, the Rabbis would have never taught that those who hungered and thirsted for righteousness would be satisfied. For them it was what you did - it was how much money (alms) you gave that pleased God. It was your efforts and contributions that gave you favor with God - that was satisfaction. Christians can fall into the same trap today. Jesus even disagreed with the great Jewish Rabbi Hillel who had said, "My humility is my greatness, and my greatness my humility." To the crowd sitting on the hill Jesus taught, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The religious leaders had corrupted the Word of God. In Luke 16:16 Jesus implies His teaching was different,

The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since then the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached. (NASB) Luke 16:16

They considered Jesus to be a heretic, and it appears from Matthew 5:17-19 that the crowd sitting on the hillside may have been wondering the same thing. The crowd may have been quietly whispering to one another while He taught.

WHY HE CAME. Jesus responds with, "Do not think I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets . . . but to ful-

fill." The Greek word Jesus uses for "think" has the idea of "coming to a conclusion." Jesus was saying, "Wait, do not conclude that I am came to change the Law." Jesus came to fulfill the Law. Now some have read this passage too quickly and concluded that Jesus did kept the sacrificial system. If we read Jesus' words that way, we have a problem. We would need to rebuild the temple, follow the feast days, have a Levitical priesthood, and do the sacrifices. But that is not necessary since Jesus made the sacrificial system obsolete when He died and returned to life,

For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment [the Law] because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God . . . For if that first covenant [the Law] had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second . . . When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear . . . By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD . . . Now where there is forgiveness of these

things, there is no longer any offering for sin. (NASB) Heb. 7:18-19; 8:7,13; 10:10-12, 18

Animal sacrifices were symbolic of Jesus' future death - symbolic of His shed blood. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice that takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29); and Hebrews says that after His death, animal sacrifices were no longer needed. This is why He came. He came to fulfill the Law - this is the meaning and purpose of the Law.

Jesus also fulfilled the Law in another way. He corrected their false teaching about the Law, and we will see that He continues to correct their teaching during the Sermon on the Mount. For example, in Matt. 5:21 He corrects their teaching about God's intent for the sixth commandment, "You shall not commit murder." In Matt. 5:27, he corrects their legalistic concept of what it means to not commit adultery. Jesus does not eliminate the Law - He fulfilled it both in purpose and in teaching (Matt. 7:12).

STROKES AND DOTS. If the crowd wondered if Jesus thought the Law had changed, He corrects their thinking when He tells them the Law will "not pass away," not even the smallest stroke or dot in the Hebrew language. Jesus uses a double negative in the Greek, OU MA. It is the strongest combination possible. It literally means "no no never." He is

showing His heart and motive. Jesus came to fulfill - not to change the Law. He came to correct the false teachers - even their Rabbis. Jesus cared about truth. Do we?

LEAST IN THE KINGDOM. But Jesus does not stop there. In essence He says that if anyone removes a stroke or dot he or she will be least in the kingdom. This reminds us of James 3:1-2 which says,

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man. (NASB) James 3:1-2.

Teachers can "remove portions of scripture" or "change scripture" by the way they teach it or do not teach it. That was what the Pharisees were doing. Why is Jesus so serious? It is His Word.

CONCLUSION. Jesus came (Mark 1:38) to fulfill the very Law He gave - a divine Law that is absolutely unchangeable until heaven and earth pass away. Jesus has warned us to be accurate in what we tell our friends, children, neighbors or those at church about the meaning of His Word. He has asked us to diligently study it, memorize it, and meditate on it so that we can. Let us be faithful and seek His truth!

New "Rabbis" of Today

Today there are preachers and teachers who are changing more than strokes and dots in God's Word. They are minimizing the importance of the Word of God while claiming to do the opposite. Listen to the following excellent quotes from "The Coming Evangelical Crisis (Moody Press, 1996),

Part of our problem is the disdain for theology that abounds in Christian circles. Although theology is taken from two words that, together, mean 'the study of God,' many brothers and sisters prefer shortcuts to 'relevance.' To say that theology is boring is really to say that God is boring.

- R. C. Sproul

What is the most significant expected gain from Bible study? Only 9.3 percent answered that it "helps me to [know more] about my faith." While instruction for life won 58 percent, and 32.1

percent answered that it "helps discern God's speaking to me . . . this says more about the pragmatic and subjective orientation of popular culture than anything else.

Apostasy begins harmlessly enough. First, we [minimize Biblical teaching] . . . Next, we are asked to tone down on our doctrinal distinctives and emphasize that which unites all religious people of goodwill. The result of this is the rejection of the gospel. Finally, we are told, "All we need is Jesus," and we are left with moral crusader.

- Michael Horton