

Fulfillment of the Law

BIG IDEA:

It has always been God's intention to reveal Himself and His glory through mankind. As we are now transformed further into the image of Christ, reliance on the external obedience to the law is diminished as we recognize our inability to produce righteousness.

Legal obligations make us debtors to men; an instance is when one individual has a claim upon another for debt. The duties and tribute, the obedience and honor, we owe to political government are of this legal character. Though personally these things are not essential to the Christian - - they do not justify him nor make him more righteous - - yet, because he must live here on earth, he is under obligation, so far as outward conduct is concerned, to put himself on a level with other men in these things, and generally to help maintain temporal order and peace. Christ paid tribute money as a debt (Matthew 17:27), notwithstanding He had told Peter he was under no obligation to do so and would have committed no sin before God in omitting the act.

Martin Luther

In Sermon for the Fourth Sunday After Epiphany



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READ

Read Matthew 5:17-20 and think about why Jesus would emphasize the fact that He did not come to “abolish” the Law. Pay attention to the emphasis that He puts on the law and His connection to it as a teacher of the Law.

The Law is a reflection of Yahweh's purity and holiness. He is perfect and calls us to be like Him and do as He does. Since the time of Moses, the Jews had added so many extra proscriptions on how the people should live their lives that much of the true meaning behind the laws had been lost to them. Jesus comes not only to teach them the true meaning of these laws but to make it clear that they still stand true more than ever. In fact, He states that His life has a direct connection to the Law and that its purpose is somehow found in Him. After all of the teachers who have come before Him, Jesus in one comment sweeps the teachers all aside. He not only reestablishes the authority of the Law, which the teachers had been manipulating for their own purposes, but He also establishes Himself as the only authoritative teacher on this Law. This passage will not only be one of the reasons for Jesus' coming, but everything He says afterwards should be taken as the principles by which we are to live our lives.

Prepare

What does it mean to fulfill the Law, and why is this important?

How did Jesus fulfill the Law?

How seriously does Jesus take the Law of the Old Testament in this passage, and how does this passage communicate this?

If Jesus did not come to abolish the Old Testament Law, what role should it play in our lives?

Where do we go from here?

Take time to think about how you view the rules in your life. Do you generally follow the rules, or do you always push the limits? Our attitudes toward rules can influence the way we read the instructions of Christ on living the Christian life and His command to be "perfect." Pray that Yahweh would give you His perspective on rules and would prepare you for what He has to say in the passages to come.

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Read Galatians 3:1-29 and think about the reasons Paul says that those who are in Christ are no longer under the law. What tone do you sense in Paul's message as you read?

Paul is writing in reaction to a group of Jews who are requiring Christians to follow the Mosaic Law in order to be genuine believers. First, he makes the point that these new believers were not following the Law perfectly in order to become saved, yet the Spirit testifies that they have been saved (3:1-5). He then makes the point that Abraham, the father of the faith, was declared righteous and saved even though the Mosaic Law did not yet exist (3:1-14). Clearly, obedience to the Law is not what makes one right before Yahweh and saved. He then states two reasons the Law was given (3:19-22). First was to reveal how sinful man was, in that not only could he not follow the Law, but it made him want to rebel all the more. Second, it was to be a temporary guide or tutor until something more powerful could come that would enable men to live righteously. Paul, on the one hand, makes it clear that salvation does not come from obeying rules, for they cannot change us. On the other hand, the Law was Yahweh's perfect way of revealing our need for a savior who can redeem us and give us the ability to live the Law.

Prepare

Why would Paul “discredit” the Law for Christians if Jesus in Matthew 5:17-20 said that He did not come to abolish or do away with the Law?

Do you think that the mere existence and enforcement of laws or rules makes someone a better person?

On the contrast, what would life be like if there were no rules governing it?

Do you believe that obeying Yahweh’s rules can improve your life and make your relationship more meaningful?

Where do we go from here?

Do you obey the rules in your life perfectly? Do you even have the desire to obey all the rules? Based on how you respond to the rules placed over you, think about what you have learned about yourself and how your response to rules reveals that you really need help to do the right thing.

Chapel Scripture

Thursday, September 23

MATTHEW 5:17-20 (NIV)

17Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Notes:

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READ

Read Romans 8:1-4 and think about what Paul's main point is, especially in light of the last two devotionals and chapel. If you need some context for this passage, read Romans 6-7 and think about how they compare to Galatians 3.

How did Christ fulfill the law? The Law is perfect and is Yahweh's standard for the righteous life. Yet, we are incapable of living the Law perfectly, and the Law could not make us completely righteous even if we did. This is what the Law teaches us, and the misery of this knowledge drives us into the arms of our Savior (Romans 7:24-25). Christ did not abolish the Law, because it is Yahweh's perfect standard of righteousness. He came to live the Law perfectly and fulfill all the prophecies of the Old Testament. From His baptism and His temptation in the wilderness to His death and resurrection, He meets every requirement and standard of the righteous law. Yet, that is not the major point that this passage makes. We are now (and only) able to live the same righteous life because He lives in us, and thus the Law is fulfilled in us (8:4). The only way that we can live righteously and gain the desire and ability to be changed internally is if we submit to the power of the Holy Spirit who is the living Law in Christ! We can now walk by the almighty power of the Spirit instead of in our own strength!

Reflect

Would truly knowing and believing this change the way you look at the rules in your life?

Which is easier, following written, external rules or giving yourself over to the Spirit? Really think about it.

Are you constantly asking Yahweh to give you another chance, or do you ask Him to take control and change you?

What area in your life is Yahweh leading to submit to Him first?

Where do we go from here?

Spend some time praying, and ask Yahweh to give you not only the ability but also the desire to truly seek Him out first and to submit to Him in your thought life, desires, choices, actions, and relationships. Ask Him to guide you to Him first and immediately in all areas in your life.