

Authentic Christians

Lesson 6 – Matthew 5:17-20

1. Jesus & the Fulfillment of the Old Testament (vv. 17-20)

- The structure of the SOTM
 - Introduction (5:1-16) – theme established (kingdom of heaven) and the implication of self-examination (use of *inclusio*).
 - Main Body (5:17-7:12) – an explanation of the righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees (use of another *inclusio* – “Law and the Prophets” in 5:17 & 7:12).
 - Conclusion (7:13-27) – Jesus demands a choice (two paths, two trees, two claims, two foundations).
- We want to wrestle a bit with Jesus claim that He didn’t come to abolish the “Law and the Prophets” but to fulfill them – what about the abolishment of the food laws and the sacrificial system, and why don’t we follow the OT Law as believers?
- Several interpretations of this passage have been given:
 - Three divisions to the Law – moral, civil, and ceremonial
 - a. **Civil Law** has disappeared because God’s people no longer constitute a nation
 - b. **Ceremonial Law** has disappeared because Jesus “fulfilled” it by dying on the cross, rendering them obsolete.
 - c. **Moral Law** never changes and is never made obsolete; therefore, this is what Jesus is referring to.

What are some problems with this interpretation? (phrasing of what will not pass away, the three-fold distinction is not found anywhere in Scripture, what is meant by “moral” – were not all Jews “morally bound” to obey both ceremonial & civil law?)

- “Fulfill” actually means something like “to confirm” – we are again back to the meaning of vs. 18 (what did Christ mean by the smallest part of a letter not passing away)
- Two-fold fulfillment by Christ
 - a. Jesus fulfills the Prophets in a predictive way – what they predicted about Him came to pass and they were thus “fulfilled”.
 - b. Jesus fulfilled the Law by dying on the cross, thus He satisfied the righteous demands of the Law.
- Matt. 11:11-15 – the Prophets and the Law “prophesied” until John the Baptist ...
 - Jesus came to fulfill the Old Testament scriptures in their entirety ...
 - The OT both predicted the coming of the Messiah (e.g. Micah 5:2) and recorded events that pointed to the life and teaching of the Messiah (e.g. Deut. 8:1-5).
 - Lk. 24:44-45 – It is the entirety of the OT that pointed to Christ (see Jn. 5:39)!
- Jesus was saying that his life and ministry did not signal the abolishment of the OT, but it was the fruit of all the OT predicted, taught, and modeled.

“Jesus came not to abolish the Old Testament but to fulfill it – fulfill it in the sense that he himself was the object toward which it pointed. Therefore it is the height of folly not

to listen to his commands, the commands of the kingdom.” (Carson, The Sermon on the Mount, pg. 40)

Notice in Lk. 16:16 that the OT prophesied until John the Baptist ... then the “kingdom of God” advances – why? (Christ the Messiah is on the scene)

If Matt. 5:17-18 refers to Christ’s fulfillment of the OT “prophesying”, what is meant in vv. 19-20 by the expression “these commands”? (the commands of the kingdom that are about to be expressed in the rest of the SOTM)

2. Application

- The main theme throughout the rest of the SOTM is obedience to the commands of Christ; He has now positioned Himself as the pivotal point in all history, so His teaching is to be obeyed. (even the Great Commission emphasizes obedience – see Matt. 28:18-20)
- Rom. 3:21 bridges the gap between justification and sanctification ... *“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.”*
- The SOTM ends up demanding a kind of righteousness that can only come through God’s grace in salvation (justification) and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (sanctification).

Is there any place for the teaching of standards of righteousness?

In what way are all our righteous works “rubbish”? (See Philippians 3:7-11)