

# THE LAW

## Christians Fulfilling the Law "In" Christ

Date 4/3/11 WBCFWB

Text: Matt. 5:17-20

Introduction:

(5:17-20) **Jesus Christ was accused of destroying the law of God.** *He has always been accused of minimizing God's law.* Every generation has its proponents who feel that Jesus **emphasized love** and **de-emphasized the law**. Many have felt that the **thrust of Jesus is love and forgiveness**, and the **afterthought is law and justice**. As a result, **many have felt less obligated to follow God's law**. They **have felt freer to live a looser life** and **to do as they wished**. The feeling has been that if they keep the law of God in the back of their mind, they have the **Christian liberty to interpret behavior as they see fit** (within some reason). Therefore, **the law's clear restrictions and obligations** and **its demand for obedience are minimized**, and **what is called love and forgiveness are emphasized**.

**Christ pulls no punches and comes straight to the point:**

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law...." (v.17),

"whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments...." (v.19),

"except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees...." (v.20).

### **I. Christ came to Fulfill the "Law" (v.17-18).**

(v.17) **Law** (*nomon*): referred to four different writings to the Jews.

1. It referred to the **Ten Commandments**.
2. It referred to the **first five books of the Bible, that is the Pentateuch**.
3. It referred to the **law and the prophets**, that is, **all the Scripture of the Old Testament**.
4. It referred to the **oral or the Scribal Law**. (It was the law of rules and regulations.)
  - Jesus neither contradicting nor destroying - O. T. Scriptures nor standing against them.
  - He was fulfilling them, completing them, bringing out what was implied.

**There are several ways in which Jesus Christ fulfilled the law.**

**1. Before Christ, the law described how God wanted man to live.**

- The law was **the ideal**, the words that told man what he was to do or not to do.
- But Christ fulfilled and completed the law; that is, God gave man more than just mere words to describe how He wants man to live.
- **He gave man the Life**, the Person who perfectly pictures and demonstrates the law before the world's very eyes.

**(1 Peter 2:21-23)** "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously".

**2. Before Christ, the law was only words and rules.**

- It **could only inject the idea of behavior** into the **mind of a person**.
- It **had no spirit, no life, no power** to **enable a person to do the law**.
- **But Christ fulfilled and completed the law.**

- **He was *Spirit and Life*, so He was able to put spirit and life to the words and rules of the law.**
  - ***He was able to live the life described by the words and rules.***
  - **He was able to inject both the idea and the power to behave into a person's mind and life.**
  - **His life that sets the standard and the rule for the believer; it is His Spirit and life that gives the believer power to obey. (Romans 8:1-4)**
3. Before Christ, **the law stated only the rule and the principle of behavior.**
- It did not explain the rule nor the spirit behind the rule. **Not full meaning of the rule.**
  - The law **always had to have an interpreter.** Christ fulfilled and completed the law.
  - He explained the rule and the spirit behind the rule. **He gave its real and full meaning.**
4. Before Christ, **the law demanded perfect righteousness; it demanded a perfect life.**
- Man just could not obey the law perfectly; he fell short of perfect righteousness.
  - But Christ fulfilled and completed the law. **He kept the law in every detail.**
  - He **secured the perfect righteousness demanded by the law.**
  - He fulfilled all the requirements, all the types, and all ceremonies of the law—perfectly.
  - **He became the Perfect Man, the Ideal Man, the Representative Man for all men.** (Romans 3:20-22)
5. Before Christ, **the law demanded punishment for disobedience.**
- If a man broke the law, he was to be punished. **Christ fulfilled and completed the law.**
  - **He paid the maximum price and showed the ultimate love.**
  - **He bore the punishment of the law for every man's disobedience;**
  - **He took the punishment of the law upon Himself.**
  - **As the Ideal Man, He not only embodies the righteousness that must cover all men, He also frees all men from the penalty of the law.**
  - **And He makes them sons of God.** (John 1:11-12)

### **Christ speaks to two different people.**

- 1) **The strict religionist or legalist.** Christ does not destroy or weaken the law. The liberty He preaches fulfills the law as it should be fulfilled.
- 2) **The carnal or loose religionist.** Christ does not weaken the law by allowing a person to live as he wishes—by conscience only. He does not release men from the duty and responsibility of the law. (Romans 10:3-4)

## **II. Christians Fulfilling the Law Through Christ, By Love (v.19)**

- ***Breaking and doing* the law carries with it ***the idea of continuous action.*****
- No person is perfectly obedient all of the time. (Rom. 3:23; James 3:2; 1 John 1:8, 10).
- A person cannot break a commandment and ask forgiveness, then **go out and break another commandment and ask forgiveness over and over.**
- **Such a person cannot expect God to think he is serious about the commandments of God.**
- **No man would think he is serious—why should God?**
- The person only deceives himself.

**A. The Christian's Disobedient Example is Teaching Others: (called least) (v.19a)**

- A person teaches by what he does. Others learn from what he does.
- If a person breaks and breaks a law, no matter how small a law, **he teaches that the law is not important—not worthy enough to be kept**.
- Note also that continuing to disobey a commandment is denying the commandment—treating it as though it is unimportant and unnecessary.
- It treats the commandment as though it is not even existing and has no bearing upon a person's life.
- Such behavior is consciously or unconsciously teaching men to void the law (God's Word). (Romans 2:23-24)

**B. The Christian's Obedient Example is Teaching Others: (called great). (v.19b)**

- A person teaches by what he does.
- Others see and observe and learn from what he does.

**(Matt. 7:24-27)** "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."

**C. The Obedient Christian can expect great reward. He shall be called great in heaven.**

**(Romans 13:8-10)** "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: **for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law**. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: **therefore love is the fulfilling of the law**."

### **III. A Christian's Righteousness Is Only In Christ (v.20)**

A person must have more righteousness than a religionist to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

**A. Note three facts.**

1. **Righteousness is necessary to enter heaven:**

**(Romans 1:18)** "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness".

**(Romans 3:10, 23)** "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one....For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God".

**(2Thess. 2:10)** "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

**(2Thess. 2:12)** "That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

2. **The religionists, the Pharisees and the Scribes, had some righteousness.**

- They just did not have enough. They were, in fact, strict religionists.
- They worked at obeying thousands of rules and regulations, governing everything ranging from dress and social behavior to ministry and work.
- However, **they lacked the one essential: loving God so much that they would deny themselves and seek their righteousness in His Son, Jesus Christ**.

**(Romans 3:20-22)** "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference".

**(Romans 10:3-4)** "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" .

3. **A person must have more righteousness than a strict religionist to enter heaven.**

➤ Many are religious, but few are strict religionists.

➤ What did Christ mean? Who can enter heaven if a strict religionist cannot?

**(Ephes. 2:8-9)** "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast".

**(Titus 3:4-5)** "But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost".

**B. There are three facts in this verse that must be heeded.**

**1) Many religionists make the same fatal mistake that the Pharisees and Scribes made.**

**They seek acceptance with God...**

- by giving God good works instead of giving God their hearts.

**2) Many make the fatal mistake the religionists made, but to a lesser degree.**

**They worship and do good...**

- to be respectable in the community - their own consciences
- to secure the approval of family and friends.

**3) Some feel they must do good to be acceptable to God.**

- Their motive is to work and work at doing good in order to secure God's acceptance.
- They have never learned the truth: they **cannot do enough good to be perfectly acceptable to God.**
- **They must trust His love—that He loves them so much that He will take their trust in Jesus Christ and count it as righteousness.**

Close / Inv. **(PP)**

- Don't try to please God by keeping the Law – you can't!
- Only IN Jesus Christ is the Law Kept and Fulfilled – God is Pleased!
- Through Jesus Christ is the "Only" hope for people to receive God's Righteousness and Forgiveness!

1. Have you been trying to please God by your own goodness and righteousness?

2. Will you submit to Jesus as Your only hope to please God and have forgiveness / therefore receiving Christ's righteousness?

(5:21-48) "Ye have heard"— "It hath been said": these words are found in every paragraph or subject of these verses.

It is important to understand this: Christ is referring not only to the ten commandments, but also to the Scribal Law of the Jewish teachers.

He is directing the listeners' attention to what they had heard from their teachers, that is, to their interpretation of the law.

Very simply put, Christ is giving the real meaning of certain laws, just what God originally intended the law to say.

this Scripture is of critical importance. It is God's Son explaining the law of God.

1. Christ confirmed God's law, all the Scripture of the Old Testament. Christ said He was not destroying *the law or the prophets*. The term "the law and the prophets" was a reference to the whole Old Testament. What Christ said was that He, as God's Son, came to fulfill the law; and His teaching was just as binding as the Old Testament law. (See note—[§Matthew 5:17-18](#).)
2. Christ illustrated God's laws, explaining the broad principles which were and still are to be applied to everyday life. He took a few practical laws and showed how a person was to take the broad principle and apply it to his own daily behavior.
3. Christ condemned the oral or Scribal Law (condemned it rather strongly.) When Jesus Christ and the other New Testament writers condemned the law, it always referred to the oral or Scribal Law, not to God's Law (see note—[§Matthew 5:17-18](#)).

There were two groups who gave their lives to the teaching and keeping of the law.

1. The Scribes: they were the writers and teachers of the law
  - The Scribes were a profession of men sometimes called lawyers.
  - They were of the sect known as the Pharisees. However, every Pharisee was not a Scribe.
  - A Scribe was more of a scholar, more highly trained than the average Pharisee.

They had two primary functions.

1. The Scribes copied the written law, the Old Testament Scriptures. In their copying function they were strict copiers, meticulously keeping count of every letter in every word.
2. The Scribes studied, classified, and taught the moral law.  
This function brought about the Oral or Scribal Law that was so common in Jesus' day.

It was the law of rules and regulations. There were, in fact, so many regulations that over fifty large volumes were required when they were finally put into writing. The great tragedy was that through the centuries, the Jews began to place the Oral law over the written law.

The Scribes felt that the law was God's final word. Everything God wanted man to do could be deduced from it; therefore, they drew out of the law every possible rule they could and insisted that life was to be lived in conformity to these rules. Rules were to be a way of life, the preoccupation of a man's thoughts. At first these rules and regulations were taught by word of mouth; however, in the third century after Christ they were put into certain writings.

—Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary

2. The Pharisees: they were the strict followers of the law (see [Deeper Study #3—Acts 23:8](#)).

#### **IV. The Old and the New ([5:17-48](#))**

Having declared the meaning of true righteousness, the Lord then explained the meaning of sin. He pointed out that He was not abandoning or nullifying the law but fulfilling it. The OT law dealt only with outward actions; but in the kingdom, we must beware of sinful inward attitudes. Jesus fulfilled the law in His life, for nobody could accuse Him of sin; and He fulfilled it in His death and resurrection. God's people do not obey Him because of outward constraint but because of an inward life, the power of the Spirit of God. While the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount, it is clear that we cannot practice what Jesus teaches here apart from the Spirit's help ([Rom. 8:1-13](#)). Jesus deals with several sins and explains how we must overcome them.

##### **A. Anger ([vv. 21-26](#)).**

The law said, "You shalt not kill [murder]" ([Ex. 20:13](#), NKJV); but Jesus said, "Don't be angry with others." Anger is like murder in the heart and it can lead to evil words and actual murder. "The judgment" refers to a local court and "the council" to the Jewish Sanhedrin, the highest court of the land. Don't wait for your angry brother or sister to take the first step; you do it, and do it quickly before things get worse!

##### **B. Lust ([vv. 27-32](#)).**

While actual adultery is far worse than inward lustful fantasies, the inner desires can quickly lead to this forbidden sin ([Ex. 20:14](#)). We must deal ruthlessly with ourselves and not encourage the imagination to “feed on” these sins. The eyes and the hands (seeing and touching) must be kept under control. For Christ’s teachings on marriage and divorce, see [Matt. 19:1-11](#).

**C. Deception ([vv. 33-37](#)).**

For the law of Moses, see [Lev. 19:12](#) and [Deut. 23:23](#). The Jewish legal experts had many ways to get around the law and break oaths, so that a person’s promises might mean nothing. Jesus does not forbid us to take a legal oath, but He warns us to speak the truth and not embellish our conversation with oaths that are supposed to strengthen our words. Have such integrity that people will believe what you say.

**D. Retaliation ([vv. 38-48](#)).**

The law of Moses ([Lev. 24:19-23](#)) prevented offended people from taking the law into their own hands and seeking private revenge against an enemy. It also kept magistrates from issuing exorbitant sentences that did not fit the offenses. But Jesus asks His people to suffer rather than cause others to suffer ([1 Cor. 6:1-8](#)). Keep in mind that this has to do with private offenses; the courts must still deal with people who break the law and must be punished accordingly. Christians may sacrifice and suffer as the Lord leads them, but they have no right to ask others to join them. [Verse 42](#) does not command us to give to everybody who asks whatever they desire, for in so doing we might do them harm. We must give them *what they need the most* and not what they want the most.

[Leviticus 19:17-18](#) deals with the treatment of enemies, and see [Ex. 23:4-5](#). Nowhere does the law command people to hate their enemies. Jesus advised us to pray for them and do them good, just as the Father does to us. If we treat our enemies as they treat us, we are stooping to their low level. Nor should we be satisfied to do what the average Christian does. “What do you more than others?” We must go higher and imitate the Heavenly Father. The word “perfect” in [v. 48](#) points the way to maturity of character, the kind of qualities described in [2 Peter 1](#) and [Gal. 5:22-23](#).