

# Anti-dispensational-newcovenant-mentarianism:

Opposition to the withdrawal of the Reformed Hermeneutic from those who have their roots in Reformed Theology; esp. Dispensationalists and New Covenant Theology.

## A Reformed Defense of the Most Abused Passage in the Bible

**Matthew 5:17** "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

<sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

<sup>19</sup> Therefore whoever relaxes 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 does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

(Matthew 5:17-20)

---

Today I'm discussing a topic that is so near and dear to my heart that you may find me getting a bit riled up. At some points, you may think I'm meddling. But what I wish more than anything else in this sermon is to get you moving in the right direction, to learn to make the proper distinctions and gain the *biblical* perspective on the **two words of Scripture: Law and Gospel.**

The text is **Matthew 5:17-20** and it contains in that very first verse both law and gospel! Jesus said, “**Do not think that I have not come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill them.**” This passage is one of the most important teachings in all of Scripture as it concerns the relationship between the Old and New Testament. I know of few Scriptures in the entire Bible that are more misunderstood than this one. I also know of few other passages that have such a wide ranging effect upon the way a person interprets other Scriptures. Thus, if you don’t get this right, then it is very possible that your entire Christian worldview will be skewed at the start.

Christians make more mistakes in this area than in any other area of interpretation. **Spurgeon** said, “**Some men put the law instead of the gospel; others put gospel instead of the law. A certain class maintains that the law and the gospel are mixed... These men understand not the truth and are false teachers.**”<sup>1</sup> The author of the Heidelberg Catechism

---

<sup>1</sup> Spurgeon, *New Park Street Pulpit*, vol. 1, 285.

said, To confuse them is to corrupt the faith at its core.<sup>2</sup>

I get so passionate about this subject because I am convinced that Ursinus is right. The data is now in, and I believe the blurry, confused, and mistaken preaching on this matter has brought the 21<sup>st</sup> century church into the initial stages of a neo-dark ages. Do you know why the dark ages were dark? It is because the light of the gospel had been eclipsed by the medievals in their confusing concealing and contorting of the law and the gospel. What do you think the Reformation was? It was a re-discovery of the law and the gospel in their undistilled, pristine forms.

If a man preaches gospel where there is really law, He turns the Lord Jesus into a feminine Moses, where God no longer demands perfection, but simply hopes for devotion and emotion and sincerity and trying your best. On the other hand, if he preaches law where there is actually gospel, he

---

<sup>2</sup> Ursinus, Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, 2.

places precepts over the sinner where God places only promises. He creates consternation where God whispers only comfort.

The response from the pew can be only one of two results. Those who have **lessoned the laws demands** come away from the sermon thinking, ‘**Hey, I’m doing pretty well**’ and they **end up in the self-righteous abyss of the Pharisee**. But those who **put demands into the gospel** find their **souls shrieking in terror** and fear because they know that they aren’t doing what they hear that they should be doing and they are told from the pulpit that unless you do X, Y, and Z that God can’t work in their life.

If you are anything like me then you grew up with something like this for an interpretation of this text. Imagine Jesus speaking. “**Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to *abolish* them. You heard that right. Here is how it will work. You are still under the Dispensation of Law, and as such you will be**

required to keep the Law for another three years. At that time, the entire legal program will be put on hold until I return again in the future to re-institute the Law in the Millennium. At that time, the Jews will once more be placed under its demands and I will even reestablish the sacrificial program of animals in honor of myself.”<sup>3</sup>

“Until that time, take cheer. I have good news. After I come back to life, you will have a ‘grace period’ where you will not be under law, but under grace (Rom 6:14). This means that ‘Christians will not be under law either for justification or for sanctification.’”<sup>4</sup>

“Now, I know that you will still need to behave yourselves during this time, so I am giving you a ‘new law.’ Paul will write very soon, “Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). This is the law of love. “A new command I give you: Love one another” (John

---

<sup>3</sup> Scofield wrote, "Doubtless these offerings will be memorial, looking back to the cross, as the offerings under the old covenant were anticipatory, looking forward to the cross."

<sup>4</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Grace* (Chicago, IL., Moody Press, 1947), p. 239.

13:34). Thankfully, this law of love does not consist of commands to be obeyed, but principles to live by. If you follow these principles, you will live happy and contented lives. If you don't, then God won't be able to do much of anything through you. Isn't that sad?"

"I know that what you are about to hear in the rest of this Sermon on the Mount is difficult. Frankly, it is going to seem impossible. That is why I have come to abolish this law until the time of the end. 'For these reasons, the Sermon on the Mount in its primary applications is neither the privilege nor the duty of the church.'<sup>5</sup> Isn't that good news?"

In a nut shell this is the theology that I and millions of other American Christians grew up with. The practical effect of this, of course, is that since the Sermon isn't written to me, that it doesn't matter what I think of Jesus' words here. Nor should I particularly care. The logical extension of this (though I thank God that more who grow up under

---

<sup>5</sup> Scofield Notes, pre-1917 edition on Matt 5:48.



this teaching don't take it to the logical conclusion) is that since I'm not under law but under grace that I can live my life however I please... after I have taken out my fire insurance policy by deciding to take Jesus as my Savior. God no longer cares about my following the law. I'm free to do what I want.

Maybe you didn't grow up under this basically Arminian teaching. But there is a more subtle and I believe pernicious one out there today that is masquerading itself as Reformed theology, when it is anything but. Many Christians in our day that have embraced the doctrines of grace are for some reason also running with arms wide open to embrace this so called "new covenant" theology of the law and gospel.

New Covenant theology has arisen as a sort of half-way house between Dispensationalism (the theology I was raised under) and Covenant theology (the way of reading this verse that I will defend later). The basic teaching seems to run something like this. It starts off well enough. When

Jesus said he came to fulfill the law and the prophets, he meant that *he* is the purpose for which they were written. He is what they anticipated in legal and prophetic form. He fulfills the law in particular because *“The old law was not "full" in itself; it had a forward look. It anticipated a "fulfilling" which in Christ's teaching finally came to perfect realization.”*<sup>6</sup>

This part of new covenant theology is wonderful. In fact, this eschatological emphasis of Christ being the purpose of the law is much of what I believe Matthew is getting at. The problem comes in the strange (and I believe extremely dangerous) application of this that new covenant theologians are making, but which does not follow logically at all.

One writer says the following, *“The whole law was taken up into Christ.”* Now here comes the application, *“And He gave to it its truest significance.”* What is this significance? First, let's

---

<sup>6</sup> Fred Zaspel, “New Covenant Theology and the Mosaic Law,” at:  
<http://www.biblicalstudies.com/bstudy/expostudy/nctlaw.htm#2>.



see what it is not. “The significance is *not* established by a pre-determining hermeneutic.”

Let me stop here for a moment. This is a direct assault both Covenant theology which approaches the Scripture with the basic idea that the Bible is a unity, and Dispensational theology which approaches the Scripture with the basic idea that the Bible is split apart into unrelated dispensations. The idea here is that we shouldn't come to the bible with any pre-determining hermeneutic.

Let me warn about something. I can't emphasize enough how important this is. I hear things like this all the time from folks teaching new and strange doctrines. Whenever someone tells you that the Bible tells you something apart from a pre-determined hermeneutic, they are asking you to trust everything that *they* are going to tell you about what it means, and you are to trust them on blind faith alone. It effectively turns the person into a Pope of one. It gives him great power. On the one hand, he is telling you that his interpretation is right, while implying that everyone else is wrong.

On the other hand, he is taking the interpretation of the community of faith and making it a matter of private interpretation.

**What is a hermeneutic?** Simply put, a hermeneutic is the glasses that you put on when you open your bible and start reading. The fact of the matter is, everyone puts on one pair of glasses or another. Therefore there is no such thing as *anyone* coming to a passage of the Bible without bias, without prejudice, or without preconceived ideas of what it means. Everyone has a hermeneutic. **There is no utopian un-interpreted text that God is just waiting for you to read so that he can put the “true” meaning of that text into your little brain via the Holy Spirit.** That is not how interpretation works and it is not how truth is derived. Those that try to convince you otherwise are not telling you that *they* are coming to the text with a pre-determined hermeneutic too. They don’t want you to know that. It is deception in the extreme and it is the first tool that Satan used on Eve in the Garden. **“Has**

God really said...? You tell me Eve. You interpret it.”

With that in mind, let me continue the quote. Instead of this *terrible pre-determined hermeneutic* he says, “Jesus determines *what details [of the law] endure and in what sense.*”<sup>7</sup> Think about this very carefully. This quote comes from an article called, “New Covenant Theology and the Mosaic Law: A Theological and Exegetical Analysis of Matt 5:17-20.” It is an odd thing, is it not, to say that Jesus determines what details of the law *endure* in light of Jesus’ own words that say, “I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matt 5:18). According to Jesus, all of law will endure until everything is accomplished. Jesus is not talking about his death like Dispensationalists think. Luke makes it clear that this accomplishment arrives at the Last Day. “It is easier for *heaven and earth* to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law” (Luke 16:17).

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

I'm going to contrast for you a bit more of this "new covenant" theology as we continue. But for now, I want to tell you my view, which is the Reformed view, the view of our Confession of faith, and not my on made up opinions on these matters.

**This is our understanding.** Contra to Dispensationalists, Jesus is talking to Jews *and Gentiles* here, the Disciples *and the crowds*. This is not just a sermon for the Jews. It is for the church. It is about the Kingdom, which is not in a future millennium, but as Jesus said, "*within you*" (Luke 17:21) *now* (Matt 12:28). It was not started and then put on hold. The kingdom was not postponed. Once it arrived, it has stayed every since (for example, Heb 12:28).<sup>8</sup> This simple realization keeps you from splitting the OT and the NT up into little segmented pieces.

Jesus does not want you to split the Scriptures up like this. And so he says, "*I have not come to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them.*" The "*law and the prophets*" is a way of summarizing the

---

<sup>8</sup> The verb is a present active participle. We are receiving (presently) a kingdom.

*whole* OT. It includes prophecies and moral precepts scattered anywhere from Genesis to Malachi. The New Testament is therefore to be in some meaningful sense a fulfillment and therefore a continuation of the OT. Reformed theology sees this as one book.

The word fulfillment is critical and most of the rest of our time will be spent thinking about it in one way or another. *On the one hand* the word must take seriously the meaning Matthew has already given it in this book. And so, it does mean that Jesus is what the OT anticipated because this is what it has meant several times already (*especially Matt 3:15*). *On the other hand*, this fulfillment does not mean that Jesus came to do away with the law (*vs. 17*). This is why we have *verses 18-20*! This will not happen until heaven and earth disappear (*Luke 16:17*). Every single 'i' will continue to keep its dot and every 't' will continue to be crossed until heaven and earth pass away (*vs. 18*). Importantly, this includes the least of the commands which I hope you can see includes every single command in

the entire OT (**vs. 19**). The result of this means that Christians are obligated to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees if they wish to enter the kingdom of heaven (**vs. 20**).

My understanding of this text will **not allow for the Law of Moses to be replaced with a Law of “love.”** Jesus is not giving a replacement theology,<sup>9</sup> but a *fulfillment* theology. Law and love are not to be pitted against one another. Instead, the “law of love” is the epitome of what the Law of Moses always was. When Jesus gave his great “love” summary of the Mosaic law, he was quoting the OT (**Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18**), not making something up that was brand new.

In the same way, my understanding of this text will **not allow for the OT to be pitted against the NT** as if the two are somehow locked in a mortal battle of life and death. The God of the OT is not therefore a God of wrath while the God of the NT is a God of love. It is the same God who has the same law that he

---

<sup>9</sup> Its interesting that Dispensationalists call Covenant theology “Replacement theology.” Who is the one replacing the law with the “law of love?”



gives to “his people”<sup>10</sup> in both Testaments of Scripture.

My understanding of this text is that Jesus is going to take the law *more seriously* than the Pharisees were doing (vs. 20), by demonstrating the intent of the actual Law of Moses rather than creating his own abusive interpretations like the Pharisees were doing. Their interpretation conveniently allowed them to look spiritual before others while being hypocritical towards God and spiritually dead inside.

Jesus’ warning that your righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees shows us that *we* are to take the Law of God in even its tiniest and seemingly more trivial aspects very seriously if we want to enter the kingdom of heaven on the last day. But this is not a call to works righteousness. I’ll show you how the law of the Sermon relates to the gospel of justification in a moment.

---

<sup>10</sup> I was recently studying **Hebrews 10:30** and its application of “The Lord will judge His People” (cf. **Deut 32:36**) as applying to new covenant *Christians* who apostatize from the Church.

Let me say something perhaps **controversial** for you here. **Jesus words tell you that you should continue to observe every part of the Mosaic Law.** Now let me explain. This will undoubtedly look different than it did prior to the coming of Christ, when the function, intent, and application Law still remained in its shadowy forms.

This is controversial because people don't want to believe what Jesus actually said here. Here then is a place I want to **return to quote the new covenant theology teacher** to give you a comparison. In this quote he is talking about the meaning of the "**least of these commandments.**" He is trying to figure out what Jesus is talking about, because in his pre-determined hermeneutic, it doesn't make any sense. He basically takes what I just said about obeying all of the Mosaic Law and dismisses it with a misunderstanding of Hebrews and a most peculiar reference to humans. He says that the "**least of these commandments,**" "**Could be taken very literally to mean that throughout this age the church should continue to observe every detail of the Mosaic law.**"

[That's what I just said]. But given the teaching that is capsulized in the book of Hebrews, few Christians would want to go this far."

The second reason he gives for not continuing to obey all of the OT law is truly amazing. "Few Christians would want to go this far." Now, I don't know about you, but this is a very dangerous line of argument to take. Few people wanted to stop Hitler, and so he murdered 6,000,000 Jews. Since when does what people want dictate what is right? Be very wary friends of not doing something simply because no one else around you is doing it. Truth comes from God and not from what other people say, do, or feel.

Now, when he refers to Hebrews, it is pretty obvious that he is saying that no Christian wants to reinstitute animal sacrifices since Jesus has come and put an end to these sacrifices once for all (Heb 7:27; 9:12, 26; 10:10). This is such an obvious conclusion that no one, including me or any Reformed person I know, would disagree with it.

But how Reformed theology applies this and how new covenant theology applies it are very different things.

In light of *his* understanding on Hebrews, this man then makes the following assertion. “Virtually all Christian interpreters agree that the ceremonial aspects of Moses' law are ‘set aside’ in that they find a new significance (fulfillment) in the work of Christ.” This is very important and I want to explain a couple of things here.

First, what does he mean by “ceremonial aspects of Moses' law?” Here he is invoking the sometimes helpful distinction that even our own Confession makes regarding the Law of Moses. We sometimes break the Law into three constituent parts. We talk about the Moral Law, the Civil Law, and the Ceremonial Law.<sup>11</sup> Probably most of us have heard at one time or another that the Civil and Ceremonial Laws have been abrogated, while the Moral Law is still binding. The idea behind this kind of a

---

<sup>11</sup> LBC 19.1-4.

statement intends to take Hebrews seriously, while also taking our continuing responsibility to the moral law seriously. But I'm not sure this is completely helpful. \*\*\*If you haven't listened to anything I've said, please listen now.\*\*\*

While it is true that particular *ceremonies*, such as the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat, bloody sprinklings of furniture etc. have been abrogated, I do not think it is proper to say that the “*ceremonial law*” has been abrogated.<sup>12</sup> Rather, it is more proper

---

<sup>12</sup> I believe the LBC is imprecise on this point. It recognizes, for instance, that in the *civil law* there are “**principles of equity which appear in them and are still valid,**” while the “**sundry judicial laws which applied to the nation**” remained only as long as Israel was a nation. Thus, the civil law continues while most of its peculiar applications to Israel have ceased. It seems proper here to ask, “Where are these principles of equity” derived? I would respond that they are derived from the moral code, the “10 Commandments.” **Why were they to put a fence on their roof? Because life is important to God and this is the sum of the commandment not to murder.** The civil law is but the moral law applied to a civilization. Because since Israel was a theocracy; her civil laws and ceremonial laws were interrelated. We don't find her making such a distinction that we outside the theocracy find ourselves needing to make. Thus, some of her civil laws actually anticipated the coming of Christ every bit as much as her ceremonial laws did. We might ask the reverse question, what *are* the 10 Commandments if they are never applied to a society or to worship? It seems to us that the civil and ceremonial laws are themselves derived entirely from the moral code! Civil and Ceremonial are not second and third types of laws, but two subcategories of moral law applied to specific situations. God gave Israel in her typological function very specific regulations to be followed. These regulations anticipated Jesus Christ. Thus, the ceremonial law must also continue (as LBC implies that the civil law continues) because it is part and parcel of the moral law too. What does not continue are the *applications* that belonged to shadowy, typological, theocratic Israel.

to use Jesus' words that it has been "*fulfilled*." But the \$64,000 question here is "what does that mean?" I'm about to show to you the fundamental difference between a basic grid that sees the Scripture as one unified organism vs. any view that sees it as basically disconnected and discombobulated from one epoch to the next. And basically, how you come down on this matter defines everything about what you understand about God, his word, and its meaning for your life today. So this is terribly important to understand.

Here is how New Covenant Theology interprets "fulfillment" in light of all we have said so far. "*The whole of the law may be viewed as being taken up into Christ and given His new and authoritative interpretation... [here comes the implication] With some details of the law the "fulfillment" will entail extension or even addition (vv.21-22, 27-28). With some details the fulfillment will involve restriction (vv.38-39) or even abrogation (vv.31-32, 33-34)... Jesus determines what details remain and in what form, and it is in this form only that the law remains*



valid in this Messianic age... Accordingly, the church is not at all obliged to follow the old law in its older form. She is required to follow the law only as it comes to her through the grid of Jesus Christ, the law's Lord and Fulfiller.”

Now, let me get specific in a couple of places here. While this sounds pious, I want you to see how arbitrary and ultimately man centered this actually is. He says that Jesus determines what stays and what goes (in spite of Jesus’ own words in this very paragraph which say that nothing goes.) But in reality it is this *author* that is defining what stays and what goes. When he talks about certain laws being abrogated, he actually gives two references as examples. Curiously, these are found in the Sermon on the Mount.

**5:31-34** contain two different laws that are supposedly abrogated. These two laws are **divorce** and **oath taking**. This man is saying that the OT Laws here have been abolished and Jesus is making new commands that we are to follow instead. As I

thought about these particular examples, I couldn't help but begin to wonder if the reason why divorce and oath taking have become so controversial in modern Protestantism is because the hermeneutic of covenant theology and its unity of Scripture has been changed to a hermeneutic that says the NT is inherently different.

Since I will deal with them in their own time, I only want to point out two very basic things here. **The first deals with the law about divorce.** If you will notice carefully Jesus is not actually quoting the Mosaic Law here. He says, **"It has been said, 'Whoever sends away his wife *must* give her a certificate of divorce.'**" Friend, Moses never said that. This was the interpretation of the Mosaic Law by the Pharisees! This is why in the later account in Matthew 19 we read the Pharisees asking Jesus, **"Did Moses *command* that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"** Jesus responds by saying that Moses never commanded divorce. He permitted it. Matthew 5 and Matthew 19 are in perfect harmony with one another. The

implication of this is very interesting. Jesus cannot be abolishing the Mosaic Law, when he isn't quoting it in the first place. What he is "abolishing" is the Pharisaical interpretation of the Law.

The second law is perhaps even more interesting. Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, Do not swear at all.'" This new covenant theology teacher explains what this means, "Did the old law regulate oaths? The fulfilled law forbids them."<sup>13</sup> What is so very, very interesting about this is that at the time of his trial, Jesus refused to answer questions about his deity until he was placed under oath. When he was placed under oath, he answered the High Priest! (Mt 26:62-64). In other words, Jesus took an oath. If *this* law is being abrogated, then Jesus is not only a law-breaker, he can't even keep his *own* new laws.

---

<sup>13</sup> He adds, "...and requires honesty outright and absolutely." As if the OT law of oath keeping did not require honesty outright and absolutely?

This is hopelessly arbitrary and dangerously seductive, because while you think that exegesis is going on, it is really a hermeneutic of discontinuity that is driving the interpretation of the text. But that interpretation is completely contrary to everything else in Scripture. Jesus does not say that he abrogates the OT teaching on divorce or oath taking. *These people* are saying it. And beloved, this is the reason why I am spending so much time on **Matthew 5:17-20** today.

For some reason unbeknownst to me, Christians just don't want to believe Jesus when he says that he has not come to abolish the law. Perhaps, this is exactly *why* he says it. He knows that after he is done teaching this Sermon that many people will think this is exactly what he is doing. And so he makes it explicit in the most simple language imaginable up front. He has not come to abolish the law. **Whatever "fulfill" means, it is cannot mean that this.**

What then does "fulfill" mean? And, how does this work its way out in practice for us? The beginning

of the answer is found in the early chapters of Matthew. Just like we saw in **Matthew 3:15**, so we see here too. I believe that it must be answered the same way here as it was there.

When Jesus was **baptized**, he **fulfills all “righteousness,”** which is just another way of saying what he says here. Back there we saw this fulfillment take place on a few different levels. Jesus undergoes baptism because in doing so he is demonstrating that all OT water baptisms pointed towards him. **This takes place on the national level.** He is the new Israel that is baptized into the Jordan to begin to liberate the Promised Land from its bondage to violence and corruption. **It takes place on an individual level.** He is the new Moses that leads his people through the waters safely on dry land. **It takes place on a geographical level.** He is the dry land that provides the safety to walk through the waters unharmed. **It takes place on a sanctuary level.** He is the New Eden and the new temple, the home of God’s newly created people and the place of their worship. He is now the place

where the Spirit hovers over the waters and God pronounces everything good. **It takes place on a legal level too.** He is the faithful high priest, who undergoes the Levitical legal Law of baptism to initiate him into the priesthood. This is how I understand the fulfillment language of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount to be too.

**Let me flesh this out a little bit.** If part of the fulfillment of the law is Jesus' obedience to it, as it has been in every use of the word so far in Matthew's gospel, then this ought to make you thankful for *his* obedience. Here I am going to introduce **the three uses of the Law** that the Reformed and Lutherans developed very early on. **The first use of the Law is to lead you to Christ.** This is the use of the law that above all others forces you to distinguish properly between the law and the gospel.

In this use, the Law shows you your inability to keep its requirements. Paul says, **"I would not have known what sin was except through the law"** (**Rom**



7:7). And in Galatians he says, “So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.” Being under the supervision of the Law is what Paul means in other places when he says we are not “under law.” That is, because Christ has come, the law no longer serves this *anticipatory* function. But it does still serve a function! In fact, it serves more than one of them. I’ll get to that in a moment (2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> uses).

When you read the impossible command to be perfect (Matt 5:48), you ought first and foremost to see this command as driving you to your need for Christ. Don’t soften it to mean “*just try your best*” or “*be sincere*.” Don’t turn Jesus isn’t girly Moses. Believe the words that are written. “*Be perfect*.” Then, humbly confess to God that you can’t do that. Then, trust in Christ because he has done it for you. You no longer have to please God through your obedience to get him to look upon you with favor. That is gospel! No fallen man was ever supposed to

think he could! Old school Dispensationlism was wrong and today's Dispensationalists know it. Abraham, Moses, David were all saved by *faith*, not by law keeping. No one has ever been justified by keeping the law, except Jesus. This is part of what it means for Christ to fulfill the law.

When Jesus says here that your righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees or you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (20), this first use of the law is absolutely essential for you to understand. The only righteousness that God accepts is *perfect* righteousness. This only comes through faith in Jesus Christ, who is the Lord our Righteousness (Jer 33:16).

But this is not the only meaning of Christ fulfilling the Law, because justification does not get a person off the hook for obedience to the law. Again, *this is a sermon about what kingdom people are like*. Beginning in these verses, Jesus is telling you about the kind of righteousness that the kingdom will one day be like, which you, if you are in Christ, have

today as a status that God already reckons to you, and which today is even beginning to be made a reality as his people are being progressively set apart as holy and obedient kingdom people. How in the world can we exceed the Pharisees righteousness if it is not the whole law that applies to the body even as it applied to the Head, which is Christ?

But I must warn you as you move into the other uses of the law. You are never to replace Christ with Law keeping as a means of becoming something that you are not already by faith. I mean, you are not to give up living by faith in Christ simply because you read these commands and desire to follow them. The law is good (**Rom 7:16; 1 Tim 1:8**). *The desire to obey the law is good. However, the temptation to give up Christ to live according to your own righteousness is sometimes even stronger. And many people have stumbled here to their own destruction.*

Guard your hearts above all else, beloved, when you find yourself strangely desiring to know all the

ins and outs of the laws to where this becomes your all consuming passion in life. For if this is your passion, then Christ is not. **Be extremely careful that you do not fall into that legalistic mindset** that picks and chooses certain laws to study, to obey, to become personal hobby horses, and to make sure that all your friends are obeying. Because if you do this, you must know that there are equally important laws that you are not studying, not making a hobby horse, not obeying personally, and not caring a lick if your friends obey them or not.

This is why Jesus warns you that not the least of these commandments will pass away. And this is why he teaches that whoever teaches others to relax the least commandments will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. One of the ways we do this is by enforcing the big and important commands (that is big and important *to us*) to the exclusion of what seems (*to us*) like minor commands. This is *exactly* what the Pharisees were doing. They made personal hobby horses of Sabbath keeping and fasting and praying and of divorce and of taking

oaths and of murdering. But they lusted, they committed adultery, they hated, they did not care about the poor, they did not love humility, they were not patient. They were hypocrites in the extreme and Jesus saw their hearts, and he gave this sermon as the antidote for this self-righteous hypocritical disease.

Here is how Paul says it, “If you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth-- you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you" (**Rom 2:17-24**).

In light of this, we come to the **second use of the law: The civil use**. That is, law keeps a society working orderly and properly. I want to go back for just a moment now to the ceremonial and civil kinds of law to demonstrate just how it is that these categories of laws have *not been abrogated*, but instead have been fulfilled. And I want you to think about a couple of implications for what this means.

As I said earlier, it is obviously right and proper to say that we are not to sacrifice an animal because Jesus' sacrifice has done away with the need for these. Those sacrifices were typological. That is, they pointed forward to the sacrifice of Christ. **In his coming, the need to do these kinds of sacrifices is abolished. But that does not mean that all sacrifice is abolished.** Not one iota will pass away from any of the OT Law or prophets until heaven and earth themselves pass away.

What does that look like? Let me suggest a couple of things. Christians perform baptisms, don't we? But baptisms were OT ceremonial laws! Likewise,



Christians take the Lord's Supper. But the Supper is itself a fulfillment of Passover, an OT ceremonial law.

Now, we do not sprinkle one another with blood, because Jesus' blood now cleanses once for all. Yet, we continue to baptize following the fulfillment of one particular OT ceremonial law (**Ex 29:4**). This law used baptism to initiate a Levite into the priesthood. We obey this law in baptism, but its application is different today than it was then.

We do not have temples anymore and we do not have priests who come from the nation of Israel mediating God's wrath for us. This is different. Yet, Isaiah predicted a time when God would select people from all the nations to serve before his holy temple as priests and Levites (**Isa 66:19-21**). Do you see it Christian? This is fulfilled.

The fulfillment of the ceremonial *laws* looks different now, but the ceremonial *law* itself is not abrogated. We are the temple of the Lord. That is,

the church and each Christian within it is the temple of the Lord. We are baptized to initiate us into the new covenant priesthood. Christ is the High Priest. But like the (lower) priests of old, we offer our bodies as living *sacrifices*. We offer fragrant offerings of prayers. We have the priestly duty of proclaiming the Lord's favor to the world. But this is all OT *ceremonial* language! This is how the law is fulfilled not only in Christ, but by extension in us, Christ's body on earth.

We do not celebrate Passover and the Exodus of Israel out of Egypt, because both Passover and the Exodus were typological of Christ who is the new Israel, the greater Exodus and the Passover Lamb. Thus, this particular ceremonial law is once more fulfilled in Christ. But we still have a ceremonial feast that fulfills the Passover feast. It is the ceremonial command celebrating the Lord's Supper, not once a year, but as often as we do it in remembrance of him.

The civil law is no different. How many people think that the Sabbath or tithing have been abrogated by Christ? But this is not so. Not one iota will pass away from any of the OT Law or prophets until heaven and earth themselves pass away. Paul takes, of all things, this abstract law of not muzzling an ox and applies it directly to the Corinthians to demonstrate from the *OT* how this civil law applies now in the new covenant to the congregation of the New Testament Church. They are to support their ministers fully with offerings because it is not right to muzzle the ox who plows and threshes and harvests the ripening fields of the Lord. This is a civil law finding its fulfillment in the NT church. It is not abrogated, but fulfilled.

These are just a couple of small ways in which I want you to see that *no* OT law, no matter how small, has been abrogated. They have been transformed, yes. Abolished, no. Fulfilled, yes. Eliminated, no. Applied different to us, certainly. Not applicable at all? By no means.

Finally, then, I want to point you to the **third use of the law**. This use is that the Law never ceases to be a guide for the Christian to righteousness, obedience, and holiness. Our obedience to the law is not merely obedience to the moral commands, but to the moral commands applied to ceremony and corporate civil life.<sup>14</sup>

What is new here is not that we obey out of faith while OT believers obeyed out of guilt or merit. Abraham was justified by faith (**Rom 4**). Nor is it that we know God but they didn't. Nor is it that we have the law written on our hearts where as they didn't. David said, "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (**Ps 40:8**). The difference is that our obedience comes in the full light of day. You look back upon what Christ has done, and not forward to a hope that he will one day do something for you. Paul put it this way. In the OT, it was God's forbearance that left sins

---

<sup>14</sup> This includes first and foremost the church, and secondarily, the world we live in. But this is not to become a Theonomist because the difference is that we believe that Israel's civil and ceremonial laws were typologically applied in ways that no longer obtain. Our application in civilization outside the church will therefore look different than it did in many respects from Israel.

committed in the OT unpunished. But in the NT, God's forgiveness is just and he justifies us through faith in Christ.

Whereas obedience to the law was always a result of gratitude for God's grace, your obedience now comes at least in part out of gratitude for what *has been done*, rather than anticipation only of what God will do. And you have the Holy Spirit given to you as a deposit of the rest of the guarantee to come. This Spirit groans and does not approve of your sin. But he also helps you and indeed sanctifies you if you are in Christ.

Obey him then, in the fullness of the day time light. Do not act like those who are awake in the night. For what takes place at night is often unspeakable. Let your light shine, the light that comes from Christ. Do not hide your light from men. But know that in the fullness of time, not one iota of the law has passed away. The smallest commands of the OT still apply, though the way that looks for us is akin to the way you look now compared with yourself

when you were in your mother's womb. The fullness of time has come. If you are in Christ, know that your righteousness does exceed that of the Pharisees. And therefore, live in that light by obeying Christ's commands out of a thankful loving heart of gratitude. For Christ has not come to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them.