

The Sermon on the Mount

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

Matthew 5:18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

It's important to remember that Jesus was not the first-century founder of a new religion. Nor were His disciples after Him. Biblical Christianity began before the foundations of the earth – before creation. Right when mankind fell into sin and death in the Garden of Eden, God the Father promised to send a Savior, called the Seed of the woman. The entire Old Testament tells the unfolding drama of just how He would send Him, and of exactly who He would be.

Along the way, God decided to create a new nation through Abraham and his descendants. The Hebrew nation, the children of Abraham's grandchildren, eventually needed delivering from slavery in Egypt. The deliverer, Moses, also received the **Law** of God. It was a system of legislation that regulated Jewish life. The Law is found in Exodus 20-31, in Leviticus, and in Deuteronomy. It is encapsulated and summarized in the Ten Commandments.

The **prophets** is a reference to the prophetic books of the Old Testament. This phrase, **the Law and the Prophets**, signified in the Jewish mind the entire collection of Scripture. It's like us saying 'the Bible.'

People must have thought Jesus came **to destroy the Law and the Prophets** or He would not have issued this correction. It indicates how radical His teaching sounded – both then and now.

We still struggle today with the relationship between Jesus and the **Law** of God. Christians want to know if we still are obligated to 'keep' the Ten Commandments; and, if so, when then don't we 'keep' the Sabbath Day as we're told.

The answer is partly in the word **fulfill**. Jesus didn't say, *I came to keep the Law*. He did, in fact, keep the Law. He kept it perfectly. He was the only One who ever did and who ever could!

He did something far greater than keep the **Law**. He fulfilled it. Everything in the **Law** – not just the Ten Commandments – pointed towards Him. As He lived, and spoke, He was the embodiment of what the **Law** was all about.

For example: All the sacrifices and offerings prescribed in the **Law** are fulfilled by Jesus in His life, death, and resurrection from the dead. I've often talked about Adam and Eve being covered by animal skins in the Garden of Eden. To cover them, God Himself killed animals. Blood was shed to show that there must be the shedding of innocent blood in order to cover sin. I speculate that those animals were lambs because you can trace the sacrificial lambs throughout the progressive revelation of the Old Testament. Finally, when Jesus is announced and introduced by John the Baptist, He is called the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. He ends all sacrificial offerings because, in His life, death, and resurrection, He fulfills what the **Law** only pointed to.

You best keep the **Law** when you **fulfill** it. As followers of Jesus; as disciples; we keep the **Law** by fulfilling it.

Let me use the fourth commandment, the Sabbath commandment, as an example. Seventh-day groups (also called Sabbatarians) say we should keep the Law and do no work on Saturday. I say we do 'keep' the Law no matter what we do on Saturday! The weekly Sabbath rest was symbolic of a future spiritual rest we would enjoy once we embraced the Savior. Every day is a spiritual Sabbath of rest. We fulfill the fourth commandment by entering into the spiritual rest of Jesus Christ. We cease to strive to be saved by keeping outward rules and rites and regulations and simply rest in His finished work.

So, really, we should be the ones going to our Sabbatarian friends and accusing them of failing to fulfill the Sabbath!

In verse eighteen Jesus says **Assuredly** (**Verily** in the good 'ole KJV!). It is a strong word of affirmation. **Til heaven and earth pass away** does not mean that the Law will cease when they do. It means nothing in Heaven or earth can alter God's character as revealed in and through the Law. It cannot pass away, or be set aside, or be ignored. It is part of the very fabric of creation. It must be fulfilled.

This is important to realize because people generally think they can 'keep' God's **Law**. Beginning in verse twenty, Jesus will point out that it is impossible for any merely human being to keep God's **Law**. Only He could, and did, keep it as God and man. He kept it for us; He fulfilled it in its letter and in its spirit. It is only because we are born-again and received God's nature within that we are free from the judgment and condemnation of the **Law**.

Again we can use the fourth (Sabbath) commandment. Jesus kept it, in letter and in spirit. He also fulfilled it. In a relationship with Him, we 'keep' it because we are empowered by His indwelling Holy Spirit to enter into the spiritual rest it promises.

One jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. The **jot**, or **yod**, is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet; the **tittle** is a small mark or projection that serves to distinguish one letter from another, much as the bottom stroke of a capital E distinguishes it from a capital F.

Jesus believed in the literal inspiration of the Bible, even in what might seem small unimportant details. Nothing in Scripture, even the smallest stroke, is without significance.

Till all be fulfilled. The words of God, which point out his designs, are as unchangeable as His nature itself. Every sinner, who perseveres in his iniquity, shall surely be punished with separation from God and the glory of his power; and every soul that turns to God, through Christ, shall as surely be saved.

A common question in a discussion of the believer's relation to the law is, "Should I obey the Ten Commandments?" The answer is that certain principles contained in the law are of lasting relevance. It is always wrong to steal, to covet, or to murder. Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the NT, with an important distinction - they are not given as law (with penalty attached), but as training in righteousness for the people of God (2Timothy 3:16). The one commandment not repeated is the Sabbath law: Christians are *never* taught to keep the literal Sabbath.

The ministry of the law to unsaved people has not ended: **But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully** (1Timothy1:8). Its lawful use is to produce the knowledge of sin and thus lead to repentance. But the law is not for those who are already saved: **The law is not made for a righteous person** (1Timothy1:9).

The righteousness demanded by the law is fulfilled in those **who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit** (Romans 8:4). The teachings of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount set a higher standard than that set by the law.

After the great events of Jesus Christ's Second Coming, and the Millennial Kingdom, and the Great White Throne Judgment, and the creation of a new Heaven and a new earth – **then** the letter of the **Law** will cease to exist, having been utterly fulfilled.

The spirit and substance of the **Law** goes on forever, because it is a reflection of God's character and Person.