

## Lesson 4

### Matthew 5:17-20

#### A Christian's Righteousness – Christ, the Christian and the law

Textbook pages 69-81

#### 1. Christ and the law (17,18)

- Jesus begins by telling them not for one moment to imagine that he had come *to abolish the law and the prophets*, i.e. the whole Old Testament or any part of it.
- People had been struck by his authority. 'What is this?' they asked. 'A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him' (Mark 1:27).
- It was natural therefore that many were asking what the relation was between *his* authority and the authority of the law of Moses.
- Jesus spoke with his own authority.
- What was this authority of his? *Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets.*
- Jesus had come into the world neither to *abolish* the law and the prophets setting them aside or abrogating them, nor even just to endorse them in a dead and literalistic way, but to *fulfill* them.
- Old Testament
  - a) The Old Testament contains **doctrinal teaching** 'Torah', usually translated 'law', really means 'revealed instruction'; Hebrews 1:1,2 and Psalm 38;
  - b) The Old Testament contains **predictive prophecy**. Much of it looks forward to the days of the Messiah, and either foretells him in word or foreshadows him in type. 'Fulfilled is the time. . .' (Mark. 1:14). His very words here, *I have come*,  
  
'All this 'took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet - Matthew 1:22  
  
'shadow' of what was to come; the 'substance' belonged to Christ (Colossians 2:17).
  - c) The Old Testament contains **ethical precepts** or the moral law of God. Yet they were often misunderstood and even more often disobeyed. Jesus determined (as he had already told John the Baptist) 'to fulfill all righteousness (Galatians 4:4 and Matthew 3:15).
  - d) In every generation of the Christian era there have been those who could not accommodate themselves to Christ's attitude to the law - 'new morality',

- For the moment it is enough to emphasize that according to this verse (17) the attitude of Jesus to the Old Testament was not one of destruction and of discontinuity, but rather of a constructive, organic continuity.
- Summed up his position in a single word not 'abolition' but fulfillment. The apostle Paul taught very clearly the same truth (Acts 26:22, 23).
- This is what Jesus has to say about the law he has come to fulfill. *Truly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota not a dot will pass from the law all is accomplished.* - a mighty rebirth of the universe (Matthew 24:35 and 19:28).
- Thus the law is as enduring as the universe.
- Jesus could not have stated more clearly than this his own view of Old Testament Scripture (Luke 16:16, 17).

## 2. The Christian and the law (19, 20)

- The word 'therefore' reveals a vital connection between the law of God and the kingdom of God.
- *Therefore* greatness in the kingdom of God will be measured by conformity to it.
- Christian disciples must also teach to others the permanently binding nature of the law's commandments.
- True, not all the commandments are equally 'weighty' 23:23. Yet even *one of the least of these commandments*, precisely because it is a commandment of God the King, is important.
- Entry into the kingdom is impossible without a conformity better (much better: the Greek expression is very emphatic) than that of the scribes and Pharisees,
- Scribes and Pharisees calculated that the law contains **248** commandments and **365** prohibitions,
- Christian righteousness far surpasses pharisaic righteousness in kind rather than in degree.
- For 'The Lord looks on the heart'. (1 Samuel 16:7 and Luke 16:15)
- It was a new heart-righteousness which the prophets foresaw as one of the blessings of the Messianic age. Jeremiah (31:33 and 36:27)
- We must not imagine (as some do today) that when we have the Spirit we can dispense with the law,
- The rest of Matthew 5 contains examples of this greater, or rather deeper, righteousness. It consists of six parallel paragraphs contains a contrast or 'antithesis'

- What Jesus is contradicting is not the law itself, but certain perversions of the law of which the scribes and Pharisees were guilty. Far from contradicting the law, Jesus endorses it, insists on its authority and supplies its true interpretation. Four arguments will be sufficient to prove that this is so.
  - a) First, there is the substance of the antitheses themselves. Now the first half of this sentence is a clear command of the law (Leviticus 19:18),
  - b) Secondly, there is the introductory formula, beginning *you have heard that it was said to the men of old* (21, 33), or *you have heard that it was said* (2.7, 38, 43), or more briefly still, *it was also said* (31). - 'the first gives a scriptural rule narrowly interpreted, the second a wider demand made by Jesus'.
  - c) Thirdly, there is the immediate context. We have already seen that in the verses preceding and introducing the antitheses (17-20) Jesus affirmed in a quite unequivocal way what his own attitude to the law was and what his disciples' ought to be. This was '**fulfillment**' in his case and '**obedience**' in theirs. .
  - d) Fourthly, there is Christ's known attitude to the Old Testament. Each subtle enticement of the devil was countered by an appropriate quotation from Old Testament Scripture. Jesus had no need to debate or argue with the devil.
    - From these four factors it is evident that the antitheses do not set in opposition to each other Christ and Moses, the New' Testament and the Old Testament, the gospel and the law, but rather Christ's true interpretation of the law and the scribal misinterpretations,
- What, then, were the scribes and Pharisees doing? What were the 'tortuous methods',
- What the scribes and Pharisees were doing, in order to make obedience more readily attainable, was to restrict the commandments and extend the permissions of the law.
- What Jesus did was to reverse both tendencies.
- The Pharisees had 'obscured' the law; Jesus 'restored it to its integrity'.
- We have no liberty to try to lower the law's standards and make it easier to obey. That is the casuistry of Pharisees, not Christians. Christian righteousness must exceed pharisaic righteousness.

## Six Antithetical Statements

<b>Verse</b>	<b>“It Was Said”</b>	<b>“But I Say”</b>
22	You shall not murder	Who is angry without cause
28	You shall not commit adultery	Who looks with lust
32	Whoever divorces his wife without a certificate of divorce	Whoever divorces his wife without reason
34	You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform oaths to the Lord	Do not swear at all
39	“An eye for an eye”	Do not resist an evil person
44	You shall love your neighbor	Love your enemies