



The New with the Old

Eleventh in a Series

You shall have no other
gods before Me.
You shall not make for
yourself an idol...
You shall not take the
name of the Lord your
God in vain...
Remember the sabbath
day, to keep it holy.
Honor your father and
your mother...
You shall not murder.
You shall not commit
adultery.
You shall not steal.
You shall not bear false
witness against your
neighbor.
You shall not covet...
anything that belongs
to your neighbor.

from Exodus 20:3-17

Once we are heading down the healthy path of taking God seriously, and begin to examine what God has to say about the real Jesus in His word, we must glean from that Scripture how Jesus described Himself. And here again, the truth is often contrary to what we may think.

For example, for Jews and much of the unsaved populace, the Old Testament's "Ten Commandments" represent the pinnacle of moral and ethical law; that is, good and righteous people obey them—or at least make an effort to obey them. In contrast to this position, many Christians believe that, in Christ, the Ten Commandments no longer apply; that they have been superseded by "grace." Thus, they believe, faith in Christ Jesus *replaces* the Ten Commandments.

But that is not what Jesus said.



Jesus prefaces His six antitheses ("you have heard...but I say"), in what is referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, with a powerful, defining statement:

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill."

Matthew 5:17

The "Law or the Prophets" was a common way for the Jews of Jesus' day to refer to the entirety of their Scriptures—what a

Christian would call the Old Testament. It would include, but certainly not be limited to, the Ten Commandments. When Jesus told the gathering of His disciples that He came to "fulfill" Scripture He meant that all of it, from Genesis to the prophet Malachi, pointed to Him. The physical, earthly incarnation of the Son of God "fulfilled" Scripture in the sense that everything they read in Scripture about the promised Messiah was now standing in front of them.

In the early days of His public ministry Jesus entered the synagogue of His hometown of Nazareth, and when the book of Isaiah was handed to Him, He selected the following passage to read:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He anointed Me to preach
the gospel to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim release
to the captives,
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set free those who are oppressed,
To proclaim the favorable year of
the Lord.

Luke 4:18-19 (Isaiah 61:1-2a)

He then astounded those present by declaring, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." By this Jesus was telling them, *I am the One being prophesied by Isaiah. I am the promised Messiah.*



In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus then followed His remarks about His fulfillment of Scripture with another incredible statement:

“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”

Matthew 5:18

By this Jesus was saying that the smallest part of God’s written word would not be destroyed until beyond the end of the age, until every last prophecy had been fulfilled as promised. It is true, of course, that some of the cultic regimen of the Law became unnecessary once Christ had made His once and final sacrifice on the cross. No longer was it necessary to kill innocent sheep and goats and bulls to atone for sins, because the Lamb of God had been killed to atone for *all* sins. No longer was the intercession of the priest necessary for common men to approach God, for the death of Christ on the cross tore down the veil that separated the two. And no longer was one’s righteousness before God determined by adherence to the Law; now one’s righteousness before God would be determined by faith in the atoning sacrifice of His Son.

But this did not nullify the Old Testament Law, for God had never intended it to be, as some people think, a doorway into His eternal presence. From the very beginning, satisfying God has been accomplished *by faith*, not by obeying the dictates of the Law.

For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Romans 4:13

The purpose of the Law was to demonstrate man’s inability to keep it; no human being has ever been justified by keeping God’s Law. Heaven would be an empty space indeed, if that were the only way to spend eternity with God. Instead, God intended the Law to reveal in a most practical way our inability to attain righteousness through our works of obedience, and to thus prove our need for Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice.

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21



In final preparation for His antitheses to follow, Jesus sets in place the line of demarcation that would divide those who, though in the kingdom of heaven, would be considered a lower rank, and those who would be considered great.

“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.”

Matthew 5:19 ESV

Since the Law had never been a gateway to heaven, there is no need to remove or ignore or relax it now that it is fulfilled in Christ Jesus. It remains God’s *moral* Law, and instead of dismissing it as something now obsolete, Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount actually *expands* it; instead of minimizing or relaxing its strictures, He broadens their application.

Jesus stands there, before His most intimate disciples, the larger group of individuals that may or may not be aligned with Him, and the still larger group of the curious. In just a brief moment Jesus will set down some specific examples to demonstrate how, as dramatically earth- and life-changing as His coming was, the original Scriptures that were the foundation for everything in Jewish life would remain—would remain pertinent and true “until all is accomplished.”

Continued...

The foundation of all divine law is the person of God. What He requires is only the expression of what He is. Since He is holy, just, and good, His ideals, standards, and requirements must be holy, just, and good. The ideals and ways of fallen people are, of necessity, far removed from these divine standards which reflect the character of God. Comparison of these two standards has ever demonstrated the measure of human failure. Throughout the history of God’s dealings with the world this comparison has brought into bold relief the unmeasured gulf which exists between God and humanity, between holiness and sin, and the complementary revelation of the divine compassion which led God to bridge that gulf.

Lewis Sperry Chafer

