

Christ, the Old Testament, and Overflowing Righteousness

(The Rules Haven't Changed)

Matthew 5:17-20

Introduction – Many Christians think that all they really need is the New Testament, the Old Testament being the old way God dealt with Israel. We are tempted to think that Jesus came and set all of those 'laws' aside, so that now all we need to teach is the grace of the Gospel. But the Gospel is about the Law. It is about a Man coming and obeying the Law to establish us in His righteousness. Christ teaches that His Words are in complete harmony with the Old Testament, but in complete disharmony with the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus did not come to soften the Law, or to set it aside, or to change it in any way. And we need to see how this is glorious good news.

The Never Changing Law of God –

To Destroy or To Fulfill (verse 17) - Christians who teach that we do not have to obey the Ten Commandments are in direct disobedience to Jesus right here. He sets up the idea of destroying or fulfilling the Law as direct opposites. He has come to fulfill. The Law is the very character of God (Deut 4:7-8).

“Do Not Think...” - Christ is anticipating objections to His teachings. Whenever you preach grace, there is always the charge of antinomianism (Rom 6). He proclaims free grace, but He proclaims free grace to fulfill His own righteous law (Rom 6:20-23).

The Status of the Law of God (verse 18) – Every jot and tittle is kept to the end. And this is taught in many passages of the New Testament – Man must live by *every* word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt 4:4); we are encouraged to hope through the Old Testament (Rom 15:4); the Word of God *never* fades away (1 Peter 1:22-25); the Old Testament is the means to equip ministers *completely* (2 Tim 3:15-16); the OT is given for our instruction and admonition (1 Cor 10:11); and the OT is the place to confirm the gospel (Acts 17:10-11). In short, without the Old Testament, the New Testament becomes incoherent.

“Amen” - Jesus gives a solemn vow – assuredly, I swear to you, this seals it.

Implications and Applications –

Least and Great in the Kingdom (verse 19) - Notice that it is anyone who *breaks or teaches others* to break the least of the commandments shall be called least in the Kingdom. To despise the least of His commandments is to despise Him, and to pick and choose is not different (Mal 2:7-9). On the other hand, notice that it is a noble endeavor to desire to be great in the Kingdom.

How well do you know? – How important, then, is it to know the Word of God? How well should you know the details, to know what is great and what is least, and how the parts fit into the whole? Do you let the word of Christ dwell in you richly (Col 3:12)? This becomes so important in light of the rest of the Sermon on the Mount.

Universal Obedience – The call is not for perfection, for we all stumble in many ways. But it is an admonition about being unconcerned about universal obedience. Have you settled now that you will repent of anything that is sin, that it is your desire to obey in every way? Does this flow out of your love for Christ (1 John 5:3) and therefore not burdensome?

Exceedingly, Overflowing Righteousness (verse 20) – Do not underestimate the shock-value of this sentence when it was first said. The Pharisees and scribes were the most respected religious people in their day. A proverbial saying was, that if God only saved two men, one would be a scribe and the other, a Pharisee. Keep in mind that in the following verses, Jesus is not 'raising the bar' of God's Law. He is correcting the teachings of these Pharisees, who in effect were law-breakers.

The Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees – It was motivated by self-love (Matt 23:5-7); it was concerned with outward appearances and not the state of the heart (Matt 23:25-28); it was partial in its obedience (Matt 23:23). The prayer of the self-righteous Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14) landed him a deep place in hell.

How Do I Receive That Righteousness? – You have to have the imputed righteousness of God through Christ, and the imparted righteousness, your ongoing sanctification, by the Holy Spirit. It is all of faith (1 John 5:1-5). It is a different righteousness in that it enables you to obey God from a heart of love and makes you a man concerned with reality, not appearances (pure in heart). It consists in desiring to keep each and every command of God (hungering for righteousness). It causes a man to submit to the authority of God and His Law (meek). And it enables him to see his obedience as the fruit of grace, and not the foundation of grace.