

August 16, 2015

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW

Matthew 5:17-20

"Love is the fulfillment of the Law!" (Romans 13:10)

The Law is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Because *"God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have life eternal."* (John 3:16) A few verses later, John writes, *"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but humankind loved darkness instead of light..."* (19-21)

Good deeds.... Light... *"You are the light of the world."* (Matthew 5:14) That light is the light of salvation, the fire of grace, the vision of goodness. Love. And love is the fulfillment of the Law!

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 5:17) Jesus did not try to establish a new religion. The Hebrew faith was supposed to be centered around such a love for God that it would pervade every aspect of life: *"You shall love the Lord your Gods with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength."* (Deuteronomy 6:5) Luke added *"mind"* in Luke 10:27 as he unfolded the story of the Good Samaritan. And along with this all-consuming love for God was included: *"And you shall love your neighbor as yourself."* (10:27b) Hear again that passage from Romans 13 – *"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the Law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'you shall not covet,' and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the Law."* (8-10)

Jesus did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them. He does not abolish them, but neither does He affirm the status quo. *"Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."* (Matthew 5:18)

When Jesus includes *every letter of the Law*, He includes the ritual and ceremonial law as well as the moral law. It is our love for God that makes us want to live within the minutest details of the Law, right down to the food regulations, the Sabbath stipulations, and the rules about things clean and unclean. It was a point of pride among the Pharisees that they did this so well. And yet, they did so in an almost idolatrous way, which left them rarely practicing their love for God, let alone their love for neighbors. They grew to love the Law more than they loved God. This reality is depicted well in the story of the Good Samaritan; in Jesus' condemnation of the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23; and in the story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Luke 18:9-19. Jesus challenged the status quo...severely. He called for seeing beyond the letter of the Law to the spirit of the Law. This will come up in a matter of weeks when we study the passages where six times Jesus says, *"You have heard that it was said.... But I say to you..."*, concluding with love... for enemies! (5:43-47)

Jesus did not abolish the old, but he inaugurates its promises. The Law and the Prophets are fulfilled in Him. And... the moment when *"everything is accomplished,"* was on the Cross when Jesus said, *"It is finished!"* (John 19:30)

“Anyone...” (5:19) “Anyone who breaks 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.” When we break a commandment of God, we are not automatically banned from heaven, but we will be considered *“least”* in the Kingdom. Realize that we teach others not only by actually saying, for example, *“Go ahead and steal, or, covet, or, forget the Sabbath,”* but by our example as well. We teach children by our example, more than with our verbal instruction. Our personal obedience (our example), *and*, the instruction we offer can also be enough of a positive influence that in the Kingdom of Heaven we will be called *“great!”* Obedience, following Christ seriously, can’t hurt us, and, it can only help others who see us doing so. Commitment to the faith is a powerful witness.

And hopefully, the witness of our example will surpass the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, and we will thereby, without a doubt, enter the Kingdom of Heaven. You see, all we have to do is, with Christ, fulfill the Law. And love, which the Scribes and Pharisees did not practice well, is the fulfillment of the Law!

And love is wonderful!