

Till All Be Fulfilled

‘Oh, we don’t need to keep those things now because Christ has fulfilled them.’ How often do we hear those words, used to justify the mistaken belief that God’s Eternal Law no longer applies to Christians under the New Covenant.

The confusion comes about because some of the laws we read about in the Old Testament were not originally part of the moral law or commandments given at Sinai; they were instead added later as a hedge around God’s Eternal Law because of the failure of the people to keep it, Galatians 3:19, *‘Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed [Christ] should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.’*

However, it had been God Himself who gave the Eternal Law at Sinai, both by His spoken word, and written by His finger, not angels, Exodus 20:1, *‘And God spoke all these words, saying.....’* Then follow the Ten Commandments, in verses 2-17. The next chapters, until Exodus 24:8, are the statutes or case law, which informed the judges how to apply the law in individual cases. All of this moral law the people promised to obey. It was the Old Covenant, and included a supplement for the judges, to the covenant given to Abraham, verses 7- 8 *‘And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said **will we do, and be obedient.** And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.’*

Only after the people failed to keep the Law and turned to idolatry, worshipping the golden calf made by Aaron, was the sacrificial system instituted, in the book of Leviticus, to make the people realise that there would be penalties to be paid if one chose to break the moral law – Jeremiah 7:22-23, *‘For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.’*

The sacrificial system is referred to here because keeping God’s commandments was part of the earlier covenant referred to in Galatians 3:14-18, *‘so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.’*

That covenant and promise is described in Genesis 12:2-3, and more fully in Genesis chapter 17. *‘And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’* And Genesis 17:1-2, ‘ When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, *“I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.....’*

Abraham was chosen by God because of his respect for that way of life God had originally revealed to Adam and Eve, which taught what was good and what was evil, but wrong choices had brought about the flood. Genesis 6:5, 12, *'The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continuallyAnd God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted **his way** upon the earth.'*

God trusted Abraham to keep the way of the Lord and teach it to His children, Genesis 18:19, & 26:5, *'For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him **to keep the way of the Lord** by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.'* *because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, **my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.***"

So we can see that what was added to Abraham's covenant was not the moral law God Himself had re-issued at Sinai, after it had been forgotten during the Israelites sojourn in Egypt, but the rituals and the sacrifices to be payable by sinners to discourage the breaking of the moral laws, for sin is the transgression of the law, 1 John 3:4, *'Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth [breaks] also the law: for **sin is the transgression of the law.***'

Only when Jesus Christ came to give His life (as our Creator) could the price be paid in full for the penalty for all of mankind's sins to be covered. His sacrifice made the sacrificial system added in the book of Leviticus obsolete, null and void. Galatians 5:22-23, *'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: **against such there is no law.***' Hence, the law which was added, the sacrifices required for sin, was indeed a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, and His gift of grace, Galatians 3:24-25, *'Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.'* Unlike the moral law given by God Himself at Sinai, it was ordained by angels and provided the appropriate penalty for different sins, Hebrews 2:2, *'For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward....'*

Now that Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for our sins if we repent, we are no longer under the ritual sacrifices required for sin, but under grace, Romans 6:15, *'What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.'* With the help of God's Holy Spirit we may now overcome sin in our lives, but when we fail and repent we can be forgiven and remain holy, Romans 6:18, *'Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.'*

Jesus made this subject even clearer to us in His Sermon on the Mount. In discussing the Law, Jesus began by telling His hearers not for one moment to imagine that He had come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, i.e. the whole Old Testament. The way that He phrased this, suggests that some had been thinking that very thought, which He now contradicts, Matthew 5:17, *'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.'* Still today, people misunderstand the relationship between Jesus and Moses, the New Testament and the Old, but Christ says here that He did not come on a mission to abolish the Law and the Prophets, in any way doing away with them, or even just to endorse them in a literalistic way, but to *fulfil* them.

The verb translated 'to fulfil,' (plerosai) means literally 'to fill' and indicates a drawing out and filling up of them. How did Christ do this? First, Jesus fulfilled the doctrinal teaching of the Old Testament, by bringing it to completion by His teaching, His example and His work. It has been said that the Old Testament is the Gospel in the bud, the New Testament is the Gospel in full flower.

Secondly, the OT contains predictive prophecy about Christ. Jesus fulfilled it all, in the sense that what was predicted came to pass in Him.

Thirdly, the OT contains ethical precepts – the moral Law of God. Jesus fulfilled them in the first instance by obeying them, but rejects the superficial interpretation of the Law given by the scribes; He himself supplies the true interpretation. His purpose is not to change the Law, still less to annul it, but to reveal the full depth of meaning that it was intended to hold, and He depicts that righteousness by giving examples in the rest of Matthew 5. Today we still have those who will not accept Christ's attitude to the Law. They declare that the very category of Law is abolished (though Christ said He had not come to abolish it), that no Law binds Christians, except the law of love, the only absolute that exists. But it is apparent that the attitude of Jesus to the Old Testament is not one of destruction and discontinuity, but rather of an existing, organic continuity. He summed up that position not as 'abolition' but 'fulfilment'.

Jesus said, Matthew 5:18, *'For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.'* A jot is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, almost as small as a comma, a tittle is one of the tiny projections which distinguish some Hebrew letters from others. His reference here was now only to the 'Law' rather than to 'the Law and the Prophets'. None of it will pass away, i.e. until the heaven and earth themselves pass away, when the *written* words of God's Law will no longer be needed.

Christ then goes on, in verses 19 and 20, to say that personal obedience is not enough; Christ's disciples must also teach others the permanently binding nature of the Law's commandments, *'Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.'* Eminence in God's Kingdom will belong to those who are faithful in doing and teaching the whole moral law. In verse 20 Jesus goes further still, *'For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.'* Entry into the Kingdom is impossible without conformity to the Law, much better than that of the scribes and Pharisees. They were content with an external and formal obedience but the righteousness which He requires is an inward righteousness of mind and motive. 1 Samuel 16:7, *'for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.'*

The time had come when Jeremiah 31:33 would be fulfilled, *'But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.'* How would He do it? Ezekiel 36:27, *'And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.'*

We must not imagine, as some do, that when we have the Spirit we can dispense with the law. For what the Spirit does in our hearts is to write God's Law there. So, 'Spirit' 'law' 'righteousness' and 'heart' all belong together. Now, it is this deep obedience which is righteousness of the heart, and is possible only in those to whom the Holy Spirit has been given, and now indwells, Acts 2:37-38, *'Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'*

Only those, who with the help of the Holy Spirit, gain a righteousness deeper than that of the Pharisees, will enter into God's Kingdom, after being changed from mortal into spirit being – fully born again into the ruling family of God, Romans 8:29, *'For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be **the firstborn among many brethren.**'*

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