

Jesus Fulfills the Law for Us

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text is from the Gospel reading. **Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”** Here ends our text.

Over the past generation, our country has developed a new definition of morality. Morality is a set of principles of right and wrong or good and bad behavior. The principles of morality in our western society used to be established by God’s Commandments in the Bible - what was righteous and good before God and what was unrighteous and evil to be judged and condemned by God. However, in America today, morality is no longer defined according to God’s Law but according to any person’s opinion. This is why people take offense to Christians and say, “Don’t force your morals on me.” They have their own set of morals, what they think should be right and wrong. “I can do anything I want as long as it’s legal. And all those state and federal laws,” - which were often based on the godly morals of the Bible - “we are free to tear down and rewrite according to the popular public opinion of our debased society.”

But our now secular country is not the only problem. Our Christian churches, which were once the conscience of America, have lost their bearings as well. Liberal theology now says that all those moral laws in the Old Testament were just based upon the culture and society of that time and place so they no longer apply to us today. Furthermore, since Jesus is only about love, the Old Testament Law is null and void, so sin is now okay. Sin isn’t to be repented of, confessed, and forgiven but tolerated. The only thing that’s not tolerated in these liberal churches is intolerance or the objection to sinful behavior as defined by God’s Law.

However, in our Gospel reading today, Jesus stands up in his Sermon on the Mount and says, **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”** Here, Jesus is clearly saying that his coming did not abolish the Law or Prophets of the Old Testament. Nor did his atoning death, resurrection, and ascension. Until heaven and earth pass away on the Last Day, not the smallest letter, the dot of an “i” nor the crossing of a “t” will disappear from the Law.

And then Jesus goes on to preach in crushing detail what God’s Law truly entails. Those liberal Pharisees said that only those who intentionally murdered someone would be liable to judgment. But Jesus rightly preaches God’s Law that anyone who was even angry with his brother or called him an insulting name was liable to the hell of fire. And if you’ve thought this or said this, don’t come to God’s altar expecting His forgiveness until you’ve first sought forgiveness from your brother. Make amends before you come to the altar, lest you receive God’s judgment instead of a blessing.

After rightly teaching the Fifth Commandment, Jesus also rightly taught the Sixth Commandment. The liberal teachers said that adultery was only the sexual act of a spouse’s marital unfaithfulness. And to get around that, you could simply serve your spouse with divorce papers and then carry on your affair. But Jesus got to the root of the sin when he said that any man who looked at a woman with lustful intent had already committed adultery with her in his heart. Sin wasn’t only the act but also just the thought. Jesus’ only exception to divorce was for sexual immorality, in which case the innocent spouse could, without sinning, divorce the adulterous spouse. But anyone who divorced his spouse so he could carry on with his affair or anyone who married a woman who divorced her husband so they could carry on with their affair was committing adultery.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus goes on to preach God’s Law about the Second Commandment and the right use of God’s name in taking oaths. He expounds on the Seventh Commandment which not only condemned stealing but also required the right use of possessions. Here we see that Jesus didn’t abolish the Law, but he took sin so seriously that he said, **“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out, and if your right hand cause you to sin, cut it off. It is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.”** Of course, our eyes and hands don’t cause us to sin; rather it’s our heart. What we need is a heart transplant, a new spirit.

Therefore, Jesus said, **“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.”** Now there may be some liberal Christian teachers out there who abolish the Law but by faith in Christ still make it into the kingdom of heaven. But Jesus says they’ll be least in the kingdom of heaven for relaxing the Law and not warning unrepentant sinners. They’ve only giving sinners false comfort by saying their sin is okay.

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany - February 12, 2023

But Jesus isn't only preaching against our secular society or liberal theologians. In the Sermon on the Mount, he's preaching to his disciples. He's preaching to us. For any of us who think we can water down the Law and get into heaven by our own righteousness, Jesus exhorts us, **"I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."** Our righteousness has to exceed that of those liberal teachers who lower the bar of God's Law. For us to enter heaven, our righteousness must match the righteousness of God, the righteousness which Jesus commands by keeping God's Law perfectly in thought, word, and deed. And those words should make you tremble. Those words of Law should remove your smugness and bring you to your knees in repentance. Those words of Law must lead you to confess, "I, a poor miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You and justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment." That's the purpose of the Law – to bring you to contrition. That's why Jesus didn't come to abolish the Law.

The good news of the Gospel is not that the Law is abolished and sin is okay. The good news is that Jesus came to keep the Law for us. Jesus said, **"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."** Jesus kept the First Commandment when he rebuked the devil and said, "Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only." Jesus kept the Second Commandment when he rightly used the name of God in daily prayer. Jesus kept the Third Commandment when he worshipped every Sabbath in the synagogue and every festival at the Temple. Jesus kept the Fourth Commandment when he honored his parents and was obedient to them. Jesus kept the Fifth Commandment when he spoke no ill words against his accusers and showed compassion to those who were ill. Jesus kept the Sixth Commandment when he had no lustful thoughts but elevated the position of women in society and endorsed marriage as the bridegroom of his Church. Jesus kept the Seventh Commandment by never stealing even when he had no place to lay his head. Jesus kept the Eighth Commandment by always speaking the truth, especially when he was under oath at his trial and his testimony that he is the Christ condemned him to death. Jesus kept the Ninth and Tenth Commandments when he preached, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Jesus kept all the Commandments perfectly in our place, satisfied God's Law, and gave us his righteousness.

But besides keeping the moral Law for us, Jesus also fulfilled the ceremonial Law. All those sacrifices in the Old Testament pointed ahead to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for us. When a person was convicted of his sin by the Law, he'd place his hands on the head of the lamb, confess his sins over it, and thereby transfer his sin to the animal which was then slain and sacrificed on the altar in his place. Jesus fulfilled this ceremonial Law by taking the sins of the world upon himself and then sacrificing himself upon the altar of the cross.

Finally, Jesus didn't abolish the Old Testament Prophets but fulfilled all that they prophesied about him. Jesus was born of a virgin in Bethlehem. He preached in parables and was the stone that the builders rejected. He was a light to the Gentiles and drew all people to himself. He healed the blind, the deaf, and the lame and freed prisoners from sin, death, and the devil. He triumphantly entered Jerusalem on a donkey, but then was betrayed by a friend for 30 pieces of silver. He was lifted up on the cross, and his hands and feet were pierced but none of his bones were broken. He was stricken, smitten, and forsaken by God. He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; and with his wounds we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; we failed to keep the Law. But the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Our sin was so not okay that Jesus died for it. Then he rose from the dead so he could pronounce, "Your sins are forgiven."

That's the purpose of the Law until heaven and earth pass away.
"The Law of God is good and wise and sets his will before our eyes,
Shows us the way of righteousness, and dooms to death when we transgress.
Its light of holiness imparts the knowledge of our sinful hearts
That we may see our lost estate and turn from sin before too late."

The Law prepares our hearts for the good news of the Gospel.
"The Gospel shows the Father's grace, who sent His Son to save our race,
Proclaims how Jesus lived and died that we might thus be justified.
It sets the Lamb before our eyes, who made the atoning sacrifice,
And calls the souls with guilt oppressed to come and find eternal rest." Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your heart and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.