

Date : 11 Aug 2024

Theme : Kingdom living from the Sermon on the Mount

Topic : Do the Law and the Prophets apply today?

Key Passage: *Matthew 5:17-20*

Key Verse : *Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them Matthew 5:17*

Introduction

The context of Matthew's gospel is about living a righteous lifestyle for those who are saved by faith. We relate to God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Why Jesus? Because He fulfilled God's law perfectly while on earth. So, when by faith, we acknowledge Jesus as Lord and King and trust in His sacrifice for our sins, we are reckoned righteous = He imputes to us His righteousness.

This means Jesus' flawless obedience to the Law counts for us who trust in Him; so that we are endowed with His righteousness to live out His righteous life. *...through the obedience of one Man the many will be made righteous... Romans 5:19(b)*

Jesus' Sermon in Matthew's gospel, indeed the whole gospel, addresses His disciples in relationship terms like *...sons of God, glorify your Father in heaven... ...let your light shine...*

(In Matthew, our Lord preached 5 discipleship sermons culminating with the Great Commission).

Today, we shall address the following:

- What does the Law and the prophets involve?
- Are Jesus' disciples required (following His example) to fulfil the commands in the Law and the Prophets (ie Old Testament)?
- Does fulfilling the Law mean salvation by works?

1. What are the Law and the Prophets?

The Law refers to the first 5 books in the Bible (Genesis to Deuteronomy).

A) These 5 books, in narrative and teaching forms, depict what the journey of faith looks like.

In them are laws (=spiritual principles) governing how God works to bless or curse.

i) **Genesis:** Which God to put our faith in? Who are the 4 men of faith?

ii) **Exodus:** Example of faith of the Israelites

- going out faith from the Passover
- going on faith through the wilderness
- going forth in covenant relationship with God (God treats them as His treasured people, while His people pledge to serve, obey and worship Him).

(As the Lord wrote the 10 commandments with His fingers, all that He wanted us to obey were clearly spelt out there).

iii) **Numbers:** How the Israelites failed to continue their faith journey and the consequences of not attaining to the land that was promised.

iv) **Deuteronomy:** A new generation arose after 40 years. They completed their faith journey and moved on to take possession of their inheritance.

B) Very often the Law refers to the 10 Commandments. The Lord Jesus elaborated on a few examples to show how fulfilling these commandments involve heart attitudes that ultimately reflect our actions.

C) The Prophets refer to the historical books from Joshua to Chronicles. They document how the Israelites prospered when they kept their covenant faith but how severely chastised when they broke the covenant relationship with the Lord. (It is noted that all periods of blessings followed the Israelites' compliance with the principles given in the Law). Sometimes the word *Scriptures* is used to refer to the Old Testament and this automatically covers the Law. Another term the Lord uses is *...it is written...*

2. Are disciples expected to fulfil the commands in the Law and the Prophets (Old Testament)?

Some preachers claim that the Law and the Old Testament do not apply to us now.

We shall investigate this thinking in the light of other parts of Scriptures.

a) They teach that we are saved by grace not by works.

- It is true that we cannot work for our salvation but it does not mean we do nothing after we are saved. *Ephesians 2:8,9* tells us that grace is God's part in making us the offer. Our part is necessary to receive His offer. Grace must be accepted.
- *Ephesians 2:10* says that we are saved for works which God has prepared for us to do. These works are acts of faith as we continue our faith journey.

b) They teach that believers of Jesus are...*no more under the law... Romans 6:14*

(Actually, *Romans 6:14* means that you are not under the law of sin as your master, but under grace).

There are many kinds of law. We need to read the context of such statements.

Which law are we not under?

- *Romans 7:23* tells us it is the law of sin that we are not under. However, we are under the law of the Spirit of life (which has made us free from the law of sin and death *Romans 8:2*).
- *...if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law... Galatians 5:18.*

What does being led by the Spirit mean?

Galatians 5:22 tells us that this means you have the fruit of the Spirit which is *...love, joy, peace... self-control... Galatians 5:22-23*. Such Spirit-led behaviour is not under the law of sin and death; while the deeds of the flesh are evident from the law of sin and death. *Galatians 5:19-21*.

c) They preach that the old covenant is obsolete, as the Old Testament does not apply anymore.

...By calling this covenant "new", He has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear... Hebrews 8:13. What is the context of this verse? What has become obsolete?

- What is the "new" covenant about?

Hebrews 8 & 9 is about the superiority of the priesthood of Christ being contrasted with the high priests of old. What's "new"? The Lord offered His own blood and obtained our forgiveness. His once-for-all act contrasted with the old covenant when the priest went repetitively once a year with the blood of bulls. The Lord Jesus' blood is the blood of the new covenant. It is not God's laws which have become obsolete but the sacrificial slaughtering of goats and bulls were done

with and rendered obsolete.

On the contrary, *Hebrews 8:10* says *I will put My laws in their minds...* His laws are not obsolete.

- Also *1 John 5:2 & 3* say that we love God when we keep His commandments because His commandments are not burdensome.

3. What is problematic with making a sweeping statement like *...we are no more under the law... .*

The question is which law?

Some say the 10 Commandments do not apply anymore? Let's examine this.

- Commandment No 1 You shall have no other gods.

No 2 You shall not make any idol, bow or worship them.

Violation of these two commandments automatically voids our relationship with God.

- What happens if we ignore the other commandments? It results in transgression against God. If the commandment against adultery is broken, can one say that one is righteous? Without righteousness can one inherit the Kingdom of heaven?
- The Lord's Great Commission for us is...
 - to make disciples
 - baptise them
 - teach them to obey **all** His commands
 How do we know what to teach if God did not state clearly which commands to teach and obey?

4. What conclusions can we make from this study?

- a) Our Lord affirms the validity of God's Law by His teaching and living amongst us.
- i) He came to fulfil, not abolish the Law and the Prophets (the Pentateuch and books of History) *Matthew 5:17*. (*1 Peter 2:21* says to follow in Jesus' steps; not invalidate God's Law ourselves).
 - ii) The whole Law (even the smallest stroke) will never pass away (until all is fulfilled) *Matthew 5:18*
 - iii) Greatness is attributed to those who obey and teach others to obey His Law. *Matthew 5:19*
 - iv) He raised the bar of righteousness for entry into His Kingdom: to exceed the Pharisees' *Matthew 5:20*. This means that Christ followers must have Christ' joyful and complete obedience to God's law in contrast to the Pharisees' outward compliance in form only.

How to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees?

- Be like my Father
Throughout Jesus' Sermon, He calls His disciples to an obedience to the law to reflect the character of God...*you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect... Matthew 5:48 nkjv*
- By my love for my Father
Christians, therefore, dare not treat God's Law lightly, because how we view His Law indicates how we view God Himself. ...*This is love for God to obey His commands... 1 John 5:3*. Out of love for God who has loved us, we submit in joyful obedience to His Law. This obedience bears forth practical righteousness.

Does fulfilling the law mean salvation by works?

This righteousness is not the basis of our salvation for we are not justified by works (but it exceeds that of the Pharisees because their conformity to the Law did not come from their heart).

- Be my allegiance to His holiness
In Christ, we are not saved by the Law of God, but we have been saved to the Law of God as a way of loving and worshipping the God who saved us. ...*You have been set from sin and have become slaves to righteousness...so now offer (your body) in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness... Romans 6:18,19*

- v) The Lord's examples, based on the 10 Commandments, cited obedience as a matter of the heart rather than outward action. *Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43*

- b) To those who did not do the Father's will, the Lord declares ...*I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness* (= contrary to the Law, no regard for the Law; rebellion) *Matthew 7:23 nkjv*

5. Why is the Law and the Prophets still valid today?

Believers today are under the law of Christ *Galatians 6:2*.

It is also known as the law of the Spirit of life *Romans 8:2*

The 10 Commandments are found in the law of Christ.

Commandment No. 4 about keeping the Sabbath (representing the completion of the first creation) has been replaced by Sunday, inaugurated by the Resurrection of Christ. *Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:24, 25*

a) The Lord has not declared His commandments are obsolete. *Matthew 5:17*

b) The Lord has confirmed that the Old Testament remains valid so long as the earth and atmosphere remain intact.

...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.

Jesus warns against the one who would break just one of the commands. His focus is just one of these commandments, not the whole body of the Law and the Prophets. His language is very precise. To consider even one of the Old Testament's commands as least and thus to ignore it and teach others to ignore it is enough to be called least in the Kingdom of heaven... *Matthew 5:19*. But the one who practises and teaches them is great in the Kingdom.

c) His commandments are not burdensome *1 John 5:3*

- Keeping His commandments is an expression of our love for Him *John 14:21*

- Lawlessness prevents our entry into His Kingdom *Matthew 7:23*.

 - Whoever transgresses (breaks the law) and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, does not have God. *2 John 9 nkjv*

- Whatever things were written before were written for our learning so that we, through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope. *Romans 15:4*

d) The Psalmist wrote how much He loved God's law because it made the simple wise.

Meditating on God's Law day and night will result in prosperity and success. *Joshua 1:8*

Application

The Law and the Prophets contain life events that surface the spiritual principles or the Law. Many of us remember these events but miss the principles. The principles are important because how God's Law works is based on these principles.

Bible events

- Creation (seed time and harvest)

- Fall (Adam's disobedience)

- Flood (Noah's faith)

Spiritual Law

- Law of sowing and

(God created scientific laws in this world, like the law of gravity, laws of the aerodynamics, laws of thermodynamics).

- Law of and death, sin destroys not just subtracts.

- God demonstrated His righteous Judgement in the Garden when He sin.

- Law of faith (not perceived with our natural senses) vs unbelief (those who did not enter the Ark).

- The Flood witnesses to the righteous requirements of our Creator God.

(fill in the blank with these helping words: sin, judged, reaping)