

## ***How Christ Fulfilled the Law***

***Clay Peck***

As we continue our study of the covenants, let me remind you of the purpose of the law with three simple object lessons:

First, A ***Mirror***.

A mirror is a good and helpful thing. You can use a mirror to see that your face is dirty or that your hair is sticking up. The mirror is helpful because it points out these problems. But it does not help you solve the problems. You can not use the mirror to clean your face or comb your hair. You need a wash cloth or a brush to address the problem.

The law is like a mirror. It shows us that we are sinners, but it does not provide the solution.

Second, A ***Flashlight***.

If you blow a fuse and the lights go out suddenly at night, it is very helpful to have a flashlight. You can use it to guide you down the darkened basement stairs to the electrical box. When you point it toward the fuses, it helps you see the one that is burned out. You can then flip the fuse or if you have the old fashioned kind, you have to remove the fuse and replace it with a new one. But after you have removed the bad fuse, you do not use the flashlight to solve the problem. You do not try to insert the flashlight in its place. You put in a new fuse to restore the electricity.

The law is like a flashlight. It shines in the dark and points out the problem, but it cannot fix things.

Third, A ***Plumb Line***.

When a builder wants to check his work, he may use a plumb line, a string with a weight on the end, to see if it's true to the vertical. The plumb line is helpful because it never lies. Gravity pulls it straight as an arrow to the ground. But if the builder finds that he has made a mistake, he doesn't use the plumb line to correct it. He gets out his hammer and saw.

The law is like a plumb line. It points out the problem of sin, but it doesn't provide the solution.

The old covenant law was a good thing. It pointed out God's moral principles. It established some healthy and necessary boundaries - boundaries that form the protective framework of every civilized society. The law was valuable in pointing out sin, but it was incapable of solving the problem. Not because the law was bad or faulty, but because we human beings are!

There was already sin in the world before the law was given. But there was a greater degree of accountability when the law was added.

*"For before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam." ([Romans 5:13-14](#))*

Adam had sinned by breaking a direct commandment when God instructed him to avoid a certain tree in the Garden. But from the time of Adam until Moses people were not under the law, so there was not the same degree of accountability, because "sin is not taken into account when there is no law." Nevertheless, sin was still in the world.

That does not mean that there was no accountability for sin before Sinai or that there is no accountability for sin where people have not known God's written law since Sinai. Because humankind was created in God's image, the basic principles of God's law of love have been written on our hearts. The image of God in man has been marred by sin. That is why we must have the law written in our hearts at conversion and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to obey. But there is still a certain degree of accountability that exists even for those who have not known God's written law.

*"Indeed, when the Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature the things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them." ([Romans 2:14,15](#))*

### ***Why was the law added?***

The Scripture says that the law was added at the time of Moses. Sin had already existed before the law was added, but with the addition of the law came increased accountability. Why was the law added?

*"What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed... had come." ([Galatians 3:19](#))*

In that verse it sounds like the law was added to decrease transgressions -- because there was sin, the law was added to stop sin. But that is not what it is saying.

*"The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more." ([Romans 5:20](#))*

Isn't that a weird verse? I love the last part of it and am eternally thankful that "where sin increased, grace increased all the more." But what about the first part? How could the law increase the trespass?

The law increased the trespass in two ways:

First, it brought knowledge of sin. You may not even know that your face is dirty until you look in a mirror. In that sense your dirtiness is increased or magnified when you see it.

*"...through the law we become conscious of sin." ([Romans 3:20](#))  
"What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law." ([Romans 7:7](#))*

So the law increased sin by providing awareness. It helped define sin.

Second, the law increased sin by turning it into forbidden attraction.

*"For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet.' But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead." ([Romans 7:7-8](#))*

It is a strange but true thing about humans that we tend to be more attracted to something when it is forbidden!

The Flagship Hotel in Houston, Texas is built right next to the water. Large plate glass windows adorn the dining room, which is on the lowest floor. However, the windows kept getting broken by guests fishing from the balconies above. Heavy sinkers had to be used to cast to the water, but the lines were often too short and so would crash against the windows below.

Finally the management removed the "**No Fishing from Balcony**" signs from the rooms. The windows were safe at last!

The law bears fruit in disobedience.

One of the biggest flops the federal government has ever promoted was the Susan B. Anthony dollar. Literally millions of these coins are stored in the government's vaults, unused and unwanted. Even when they were first issued, no one wanted them, and they soon became the basis for seemingly endless jokes.

However, the rejection was not universal. A postal worker in one town put up a sign that said, "Susan B. Anthony dollars: limit of two per customer." He said he had been previously trading two or three per day, but when he put the sign up, he traded at least fifty per day!

That is what the law did. It made desirable that which was less desirable before. The law was not the problem; humanity was the problem. The apostle Paul writes:

*"So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good... We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin." ([Romans 7:12-14](#))*

The law was holy and good, but it could not save us. It could not produce the perfect righteousness that it demanded. Therefore it resulted in condemnation ([2 Corinthians 3:7-9](#)).

But praise God for the **new** covenant!

*"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit." ([Romans 8:1-4](#))*

Christ has done for us what the law could never do. The law pointed out sin and the need for a savior, but it could not save us. It couldn't produce the holiness it demanded. So when Christ came it was the end of the law. The moral principles of the Ten Commandments still remain, of course, but now God's law is written on the hearts and minds of believers and we are led by the Spirit to live God-honoring lives. The Spirit not only convicts, but also empowers and produces the fruit of holiness in our lives. God guides New Covenant Christians through His Spirit. "The law of the Spirit has set us free from the law of sin and death."

Therefore, our focus is not on the law, but on Christ. Which would you rather focus on? The one that condemns you or the one that justifies you?

### ***Christ is the end of the law***

In [Romans 10](#) the apostle Paul reveals his passion for his brothers and sisters who were still caught up in the legalism that once ruled his life:

*"Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness." ([Romans 10:1-3](#))*

Even to this day there are many people caught up in legalistic bondage - living in the old covenant. Like Paul, my heart goes out to those people. They may be very zealous for God, "but their zeal is not based on knowledge." What is the knowledge they need to set them free? The gospel -- an understanding of the truth as it is in Jesus revealed in the New Covenant.

That's the only thing that can set anyone free, truly free. Without the gospel there is a veil that hangs over people's eyes. They spend their lives miserably "seeking to establish their own righteousness" - a discouraging, never-ending and totally impossible task!

They need to give up on themselves and come to Christ and depend on his righteousness alone. Look at the very next verse:

*"Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." ([Romans 10:4](#))*

The law demanded perfect righteousness, but couldn't produce it. Christ provided perfect righteousness, and gives it to us as a gift to be received by faith. Christ is the end of the law. All the law -- the entire old covenant -- pointed forward to and was fulfilled in Christ.

The old covenant was in effect up until the cross. When Christ said "It is finished" -- it was! The veil in the Jewish Temple was torn from top to bottom signifying an end to the old, temporary system. The entire old covenant (which became known as a "ministry that condemns," [2 Corinthians 3:9](#)) was nailed to the cross - the old had passed away, the new had come.

*"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross."  
([Colossians 2:13-14](#))*

What was nailed to the cross? The "written code, with its regulations." What was that? It sounds like the law, the old covenant, to me. Some people interpret this verse to be referring to the record of our sins which was nailed to the cross. That is a possible interpretation. It is interesting, though, to compare this verse with another in [Ephesians 2](#) and notice the similarities:

*"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations."  
([Ephesians 2:14-15](#))*

Now someone is probably sitting there saying, "Wait a minute! That text says he abolished the law, but didn't Jesus himself say that he did not come to abolish it?" Good question!

Let's look at that passage:

*"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. I tell you the truth, 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 5:17-18](#))*

What is that text saying?

### ***How did Christ fulfill the Law?***

In order to rightly interpret those words we have to understand clearly what is meant by the words "law" and "fulfill". What is meant by those words in this verse?

First, "law?" Is Matthew talking about just the Ten Commandments? Or is he referring to the whole old covenant, the books of Moses?

If you do a survey of the book of Matthew with your concordance, you will discover that every time the word "law" is used it is referring to the whole thing - the Torah, the writings of Moses, the old covenant. For example: [Matthew 11:13](#) --"All the prophets and the Law prophesied until John."

That is apparent in [Matthew 5:17](#) because the word "law" is coupled together in the phrase, "Law or the Prophets." That was an oft-used phrase to refer to the Scriptures (the Old Testament).

So Jesus is talking about the Scriptures and he says he has not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets... but to fulfill.

What does "fulfill" mean? Again, if you take your concordance and look up all the times that the words "fulfill" or "fulfilled" are used in Matthew (and there are many), you will see that the word is consistently used to describe something that was completely accomplished in the life, works, events, or ministry of the Messiah. For example: [Matthew 1:22,23](#) - "All this took place that what was spoken of by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Behold the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son..."

Now, with that in mind, let's consider the meaning of Jesus' words:

*"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. I tell you the truth, 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 5:17-18](#))*

Some have used this text to say that the Ten Commandments are a binding law as long as heaven and earth exists. But we've seen that "the Law" here refers to the Torah - the writings of Moses, the old covenant.

Some have said that "fulfill" means to "**keep**"; that Jesus is saying that he came to keep the law and so must we. But we have seen that Matthew uses the word "fulfill" to refer to fulfilled prophecy. It means to be accomplished once and for all in the ministry of the Messiah.

If you think that the word "fulfill" means to "**keep**", then you are in for a real challenge, because the text refers to every "jot and tittle" - every "smallest letter and stroke of a pen." If you believe that this text means that you have to keep every jot and tittle of the Law, that means that you are obligated to keep all of the old covenant: *every detail* (Exodus through Deuteronomy).

*"Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised [for religious reasons] that he is obligated to obey the whole law." ([Galatians 5:3](#))*

There are only two interpretations: either Christians are obligated to obey the whole law - to keep every bit of the old covenant, or they are freed from the dominion of the old

covenant because Jesus fulfilled the law for us. The latter interpretation fits best with the text.

Jesus was

*"...born under the law, to redeem those under the law." ([Galatians 4:4,5](#))*

So the old covenant law was still in effect during Jesus' life and he observed it until he had fulfilled all of the prophecies and types and shadows that pointed forward to him. Not until the end of his life, as he hung on the cross, could it be considered accomplished or completed.

*"After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I am thirsty.'" ([John 19:28, NASB](#))*

It had been prophesied that the suffering Messiah would be in thirst... so Jesus said those words to fulfill the prophecy, knowing that everything else had already been "accomplished" (or "completed", [NIV](#)).

With that in mind read [Matthew 5:17-18](#) once more:

*"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. I tell you the truth, 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 5:17-18](#))*

Notice the last phrase. The old covenant with all its laws and details would not disappear "until" everything is accomplished. Once it was fulfilled by Christ's life, death and resurrection, the old covenant **did** disappear because it had been accomplished.

The writer to the Hebrews uses the same word used here - "disappear"-- applying it to what needs to happen to the old covenant now that Christ has fulfilled it:

*"By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear." ([Hebrews 8:13](#))*

So how did Christ fulfill the law? We will examine this more in the next two chapters. Many details of the old covenant pointed to Christ and he fulfilled them all.

- All the sanctuary services were fulfilled in Christ. He is the temple, where we meet God; he is the High Priest who intercedes for us; he is the candlesticks as the light of the world; he is the holy bread that feeds our soul; he is the water of life in the laver; he is the lamb sacrificed on the altar...
- All the holy days pointed to Christ. He is our Sabbath rest; he is our Passover; he is the first fruits from the dead; he is our Atonement; he is our Jubilee - in him debts are canceled and prisoners go free...

- All the acted parables of events and people are fulfilled in Christ. He is our kinsman redeemer; he is our Joshua (the Hebrew word for "Jesus") who leads us into the Promised Land; he is the snake that was raised up on the pole by Moses to deliver from the venom all who would look; he is the rock that gave water of life in the wilderness; he is the manna - the bread of life...

I could go on and on. Jesus fulfilled it all! He's God's final word. More than that, Jesus fulfilled the moral principles of the law. He kept the law perfectly and provided his righteousness for all whom would receive it by faith.

*"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."  
([Romans 3:21-22](#))*

### **A new order has come**

So for New Covenant Christians a new order has come. There is a new covenant with a new law. We are released from the old.

To illustrate this in [Romans 7](#), Paul uses the illustration of marriage. He says that a married man and woman are bound to each other by the law of marriage until one dies. If that happens, the living spouse is "released from the law" and is free to remarry without committing adultery. He then uses that as an example:

*"So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."  
([Romans 7:4-6](#))*

You can be married to the law (that's the old covenant way) or you can be released from the law and married to Christ (that's the new covenant way). **But you cannot have both.** You cannot be married to the law *and* Christ. That is spiritual adultery!

Don't be afraid of this study. Some people hear words like these -- "we have been released from the law" -- and become afraid that people will run out and start killing, stealing and committing adultery. Come on! The text says that when we are united to Christ we "bear fruit to God."

New Covenant Christians serve God in a new way - "the new way of the Spirit, and not the old way of the written code." The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

The text says that focusing on the law just arouses sinful passions; but focusing on Christ, and allowing His Spirit to lead and guide, results in the fruit of the Spirit which

develops and grows in our lives: "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." ([Galatians 5:22,23](#)).

New covenant morality supersedes and far exceeds old covenant morality. By declaring "love one another" as the commandment of the new covenant, Jesus intensified the law.

Over and over in [Matthew 5](#) Jesus said, "you have heard it said" and he quoted from the old covenant, then he said, "but I say" and he showed how much more encompassing the law of the Spirit is than the law of the letter.

Let's look at one example:

*"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' ['empty headed'] is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way... Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." ([Matthew 5:21-25,44](#))*

### ***New covenant morality is superior***

Christ's words show how the new covenant does not throw out the old, but improves it. New covenant morality far supersedes old covenant morality.

A diagram on the following page helps to illustrate the superiority of new covenant morality as outlined by Jesus in the verses we just read. You can immediately see how the old covenant law of "Thou Shalt Not Murder" is far surpassed in the new covenant. The standard is much higher in the new covenant, and where the standard is higher, so is the obedience of Christ who provides us with the covering of his perfect righteousness!

A husband and wife didn't really love each other. The man was very demanding, so much so that he prepared a list of rules and regulations for his wife to follow. He insisted that she read them over every day and obey them to the letter.

Among other things, his "do's and don'ts" indicated such details as what time she had to get up in the morning, when his breakfast should be served, and how the housework should be done. After several long years, the husband died.

As time passed, the woman fell in love with another man, one who dearly loved her. Soon they were married. This husband did everything he could to make his new wife happy, continually showering her with tokens of his appreciation.

One day as she was cleaning house, she found tucked away in a drawer the list of commands her first husband had drawn up for her. As she looked it over, it dawned on her that even though her present husband hadn't given her any kind of list, she was doing everything her first husband's list required anyway. She realized she was so devoted to this man that her deepest desire was to please him out of love, not obligation.

That is how it is for New Covenant Christians! Both the law and the motive are the same -- **Love**. The law is very simple, yet very comprehensive.

### ***A new law, a new motive***

The new law of the new covenant is really as old as God himself, for it is the expression of his character. James calls it the "royal law" ([James 2:8](#)).

Here it is, in the words of Jesus:

*"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." ([John 13:34](#))*

Throughout the Old Testament the reason for obedience is because the Law says so, or because of God delivered his people from Egypt. In the New Testament the reason for obedience is never the law, but Christ.

- "Love, just as Christ loved us..." ([Ephesians 5:2](#))
- "Forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." ([Ephesians 4:32](#))
- "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ... [who] humbled himself..." ([Philippians 2:5-8](#))
- "The body is not meant for sexual immorality... your bodies are members of Christ... a temple of the Holy Spirit... you were bought with a price..." ([1 Corinthians 6:13-20](#))

The law is love and the motive for obedience is love: love for Christ.

*"The love of Christ compels us..." [2 Corinthians 5:14](#)*

Let me give you a few more examples of the new covenant law:

*"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." ([Romans 13:8-10](#))*

The moral principles of the old covenant law remain, but they are far exceeded by the new covenant law of love, which is written on the hearts and minds of believers and prompted by the Spirit rather than the letter.

*"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." ([Galatians 6:2](#))*

*"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ([Galatians 5:13-14](#))*

What is the new covenant commandment? Love others like Christ loved you.

In Revelation, God's faithful people are described as those who obey his commandments.

*"Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring-- those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus." ([Revelation 12:17](#))*

Some have used this verse to say that all true followers of God in the end times will worship on the seventh day Sabbath because of the fourth commandment. There is nothing wrong with worshipping on the Sabbath as long as you are not making it a salvation issue or placing demands on others. But do not use this verse to say something it is not saying!

The "testimony of Jesus" is the Gospel (see [John 8:18](#), [1 John 5:9-12](#), [Revelation 1:2](#), etc.).

And what are "God's commandments?" Does this text say that the final generation goes back under the old covenant in order to find acceptance with God? NO!

If you want to know what John means by "commandments of God" you need to let John tell you! It is a phrase that he uses often in his letters; a phrase that he also defines.

*"This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome" ([1 John 5:3](#))*

Those who love God will obey his commands. And what are his commands?

*"And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us." ([1 John 3:23-24](#))*

*"And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love." ([2 John 6](#))*

So [Revelation 12:17](#) is saying that God's remnant or true people in every age will be those who accept Jesus as Savior and live for him as Lord - they hold to the Gospel ("the testimony of Jesus") and are obedient, loving disciples (obey God's commandments).

John never uses the word "commands" or "commandments" (Greek *entole*) to refer to the Ten Commandments or the Law.

Whenever John referred to the Old Covenant Law he used the Greek word for law - *nomos*.

For example:

*"For the law [nomos] was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." ([John 1:17](#))*

I have used that verse as an illustration of the word John used to reference the old covenant. But think about what the last part of that verse is saying. Please recognize that a commitment to Jesus Christ is a commitment to grace and **Truth**.

Some of what you are reading in this study may be different from what you have always thought or believed. If so, I hope you are being provoked to study God's Word with greater depth and intensity than ever before. Stay committed to truth. Never shut your mind to the truth of God's word in favor of some cherished, comfortable tradition.

Hang on to truth as God reveals it to you no matter where it leads you. Jesus said, if you know the truth - it will set you free!

*"And if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." ([John 8:36](#))*

---