

## The Fulfilment of the Law

### Introduction

**Matthew 5:17-18** is usually quoted by those who want to justify the keeping of certain Old Testament laws by Christians:

*“Do not think that I came to annul the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to annul, but to fulfil. Truly I say to you, Until the heaven and the earth pass away, in no way shall one iota or one point pass away from the Law **until all comes to pass**” (Matt. 5:17-18, My emphasis).*

The meaning of the statement **“until all comes to pass”** helps us to understand what the fulfilment of the law means. What were the things that still had to come to pass before the law could be “fulfilled?” At the time of His speaking in **Matthew 5:17-18** the crucifixion, the resurrection, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the ascension still had to “come to pass.”

The shadow types in the Law and the Prophets concerning the life and suffering of Christ had to “come to pass” before the Law could be fulfilled. This is what Jesus referred to when He explained to His disciples:

*“Pay attention! We’re going up to Jerusalem. **Everything written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled**” (Luk. 18:31, my emphasis).*

This is what Jesus also explained to the travellers on their way to Emmaus:

*“And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself” (Luk. 24:27).*

### How did Jesus fulfil the Law?

The Greek word, **pleróo** for *fulfil*, according to *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, means:

*“...to fill out, complete, make perfect, accomplish an end.”*

*Fulfil*, thus, does not mean to abolish the law, but to give it a fuller meaning:

*“Do no think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; **I did not come to abolish, but to fulfil**” (Matt. 5:17).*

At His death Jesus cried out, “It is finished!” (**Joh. 19:30**). What was “finished?” The purpose for coming to earth was completed. Through His death He had atoned for the sin of the world and through it also initiated the dispensation of the New Testament. This time in which Jesus “fulfilled” the Law, Paul refers to as the “fullness of the time” –

*“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, having come into being out of a woman, having come under Law, that He might redeem the ones under Law...”*

**(Gal. 4:4-5).**

In summary:

*“The Law and the Prophets were **until John**; from then the kingdom of God is being preached...” (Luk. 16:16, my emphasis).*

After the beheading of John the Baptist we no longer read of any other Old Testament prophet ministering in the New Testament (**Matt. 14:10**). **Hebrews 1:1-2** confirms this fact:

*“In many ways and in various ways of old, God spoke to the fathers in the prophets; in these last days He spoke to us in the Son...”*

Is the beheading of John the Baptist significant in the sense that it symbolises the cutting off of the Old Testament? –

*“For Christ is the end of Law for righteousness to everyone that believes”*  
**(Rom. 10:4).**

### **Truth that came with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit**

Before the crucifixion Jesus told His disciples that they would have to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in order to fully understand things concerning the New Testament and the fulfilment of the Law:

*“I have yet many things to tell you, but you are not able to bear now. But when that One comes, the Spirit of Truth, **He will guide you into all Truth**, for He will not speak from Himself, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will announce the coming things to you” (Joh. 16:12-13, my emphasis).*

One of the important things that they learned and which they shared in their letters to the church was concerning the fulfilment of the Law. So for example Paul wrote:

*“**Christ is the end of the law** so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:4, my emphasis).*

*“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. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross...”*

**(Eph. 2:15-17, my emphasis).**

**(See Rom. 10:4. Gal. 3:23-25, Gal. 4:9-10, Col. 2:14-17).**

## How did Jesus fulfil the Law?

By looking at what Jesus taught, it becomes clear what He meant when He said that He came to fulfil the Law. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus repeatedly refers to what Moses commands and then contrasts it with what He requires. We see how He repeatedly replaces the requirements of the Law with the higher moral standards of His teachings. So for example, because He is not satisfied with what the Law says about adultery (**Exodus 20:14**), He “fulfils” it by declaring:

*“You have heard that it was said to the ancients, “You shall not commit adultery.”  
But I say to you that whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:27-28, my emphasis).*

Jesus does not only condemn the deed, but also the attitude behind it, whether the transgression had been committed or not. In the Old Testament witnesses had to be produced before an adulterer could be judged and condemned. This led to a type of morality that is still prevalent to this day – do what you like, but don’t be caught.

Jesus does the same with the sixth commandment (**Ex. 20:13**):

*“You have heard that it was said to the ancients, “You shall not kill” —and, “Whoever shall kill shall be liable to the judgment.” But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be liable to the judgment...” (Mat 5:21-22, my emphasis).*

Again we see how Jesus judges the attitude that can lead to evil deeds:

*“For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean' ” (Mark 7:15-23).*

As can be seen in the comparison made below, not one of the moral standards of the Law is broken or contradicted by what is taught in the New Testament. **Because the moral standards of the New Testament are so high, spiritual rebirth is necessary so that the indwelling Holy Spirit can enable the believer to live it.**

## The Fulfilment of the Law

### The Old Testament

1. You shall have no other god (**Ex. 20:3**)

### The New Testament

1. “I am the Way...” (**Joh. 14:6**).  
“Salvation is found in no one else...no other name under heaven by which we must be saved” (**Acts 4:12**).

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| <p><b>2. No idols in any form</b></p>                       | <p><b>2. The glory of the image of God may not be exchanged for the image of man or anything in nature (Rom. 1:21-25).</b></p>      |
| <p><b>3. May not take God's Name in vain (Ex. 20:7)</b></p> | <p><b>3. Not only judged for taking God's Name in vain, but we will be judged for every careless word spoken (Matt. 12:36).</b></p> |
| <p><b>4. The Sabbath –One day in seven to be kept</b></p>   | <p><b>4. The Sabbath a shadow type of a holy life of rest in Christ (Heb. 4:10, Joh. 6:28-29).</b></p>                              |
| <p><b>5. Honouring of parents (Ex. 20:12)</b></p>           | <p><b>5. Not only must children honour parents, but parents are instructed not to provoke their children (Eph. 6:1-4).</b></p>      |
| <p><b>6. You shall not murder (Ex. 20:13).</b></p>          | <p><b>6. Will have to give an account of every insulting word and wrong attitude (Matt. 5:22).</b></p>                              |
| <p><b>7. You shall not commit adultery (Ex. 20:14)</b></p>  | <p><b>7. By looking with lust, one is guilty before the deed is committed (Matt. 5:28).</b></p>                                     |
| <p><b>8. Thou shalt not steal (Ex. 20:15)</b></p>           | <p><b>8. Must not only stop stealing, but must be productive in order to share (Eph. 4:28).</b></p>                                 |
| <p><b>9. Shall not give false testimony (Ex. 20:16)</b></p> | <p><b>9. Your yes must be yes, and no must be no (Matt. 5:33-37).</b></p>   |
| <p><b>10. Shall not covet (Ex. 20:17).</b></p>              | <p><b>10. Lives must be kept free of love for money and one must be contented with what you have (Heb. 13:5, 1Tim. 6:6-10).</b></p> |

## **Conclusion**

So we see how each one of the Ten Commandments is “fulfilled” by the teachings of the New Testament and how each one has a counterpart which requires a higher standard of morality. The teachings of Jesus and the apostles which make up the New Testament are not merely “nice” suggestions, but authoritative pronouncements that should determine the conduct and attitudes of the followers of Christ.

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