

Righteousness of Christ ... Sermon on the Mount

¹⁷ “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. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, 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 makes up the Law?

“Biblical law is characterized in general by several unique aspects: law has a divine authorship, and God is the ultimate source and sanction of law. Since law is a direct expression of divine will, all crimes are also considered sins... In the biblical corpus, civil, moral and religious obligations are all interwoven. The law itself was given publicly to the corporate body of Israel, which shared equally in the responsibility for observance.” – *Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible*

“Abolish.” Destroy. Tear down. Render null and void. Abrogate. What might Jesus have meant by this?

“Fulfill.” Establish. Confirm. Do. Obey.

“The law Jesus refers to is the law of the old covenant, not a new law, but the same law which he quoted to the rich young man and the lawyer when they wanted to know the revealed will of God. It becomes a new law only because it is Christ who binds his followers to it. For Christians, therefore, the law is not a ‘better law’ than that of the Pharisees, but one and the same; every letter of it, every jot and tittle, must remain in force and be observed until the end of the world.” – *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

Luke 16:16-17 (p. 1626)

John 10:31-39 (p. 1667)

Romans 7:6 (p. 1755) What did Paul say about the Law?

“But there is a ‘**better righteousness**’ which is expected of Christians. Without it none can enter into the kingdom of heaven, for it is the indispensable condition of discipleship. None can have this better righteousness but those to whom Christ is speaking here, those whom he has called.” – *Bonhoeffer*

How do we know about better righteousness? What does it look like?

In Chapter 5:21-43, six times Jesus says, “You have heard that...”

How can verses 17-18 live in harmony with what is to come?

“He [Jesus] has in fact nothing to add to the commandments of God, except this, that he keeps them. He fulfils the law, and he tells us so himself, therefore it must be true. He fulfills the law down to the last iota. But that means that he must die, he alone understands the true nature of the law as God’s law: the law is not itself God, nor is God the law. It was the error of Israel to put the law in God’s place, to make the law their God and their God a law.” – *Bonhoeffer*

¹⁹ “Anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.” – Matthew 5:19-20

The puzzle of verse 19... “least in the kingdom” – still in the kingdom?

In verse 20, does the text imply that the Pharisees and teachers of the law do not practice righteousness?

“We must ask, how exactly does the righteousness of the Pharisees differ from that of the disciples? Certainly the Pharisees never imagined that the law must be taught but not obeyed: they knew their Bibles better than that! No, it was rather their ambition to be doers of the law. Their idea of righteousness was a direct, literal and practical fulfilment of the commandment, their ideal was to model their behaviour exactly on the demands of the law.” – *Bonhoeffer*

Quantitative vs. Qualitative

Some Christians downplay and downgrade the Old Testament. What does this passage say to you about that idea?