

The Sermon on the Mount: A Reformed Exposition

Chapter 12: Christ's Relationship to the Old Testament

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Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:17-20).

After speaking of a Christian's character in the beatitudes and the true believer's influence upon this corrupt and dark world, our Lord proceeds with the main body of His sermon (Mt. 5:17-7:12). In the main body, the Savior concerns Himself with the kind of righteousness His disciples are to follow. He had already touched upon this in the beatitudes which are introductory, but now wants to go into greater detail. Therefore, in this section He clarifies His relationship to the Old Testament canon and contrasts His teaching with that of the Pharisees, who were the dominant religious leaders at that time.

The text before us introduces the question of righteousness and serves two main purposes. First, Christ wants to make His position on the Old Testament, and especially the law of God, perfectly clear before the general public in Israel. The Redeemer's teaching and actions were so radically different than that of the predominant religious leaders that the people would have wondered about His loyalty to what they considered the only true religion. The Pharisees' supposed loyalty to the law of Moses was expressed by "fencing" the law with all sorts of manmade traditions ("the tradition of the elders," [Mt. 15:2; Mk. 7:2, 3]). Jesus not only refused to cooperate with such manmade regulations, but also emphatically rejected them (Mt. 15:3-9; Mk. 7:6-13). Also, there were confrontations with the religious leaders during our Lord's ministry over the proper observation of the Sabbath (Mt. 12:1-12), divorce and remarriage (Mt. 19:3-9), eating without the ritual of hand washing (Mt. 15:1-9), as well as differences over the proper use of oaths (Mt. 5:34) and the use of retaliation (Mt. 5:39). To a people trained to follow the traditions of the elders, the Savior's message seemed very radical and perhaps even revolutionary. Therefore, almost at the outset of Jesus' public ministry, He makes His full and unswerving loyalty to the law and prophets public.

Second, Christ needs to clarify His position on God's law in order to instruct His disciples on the true meaning of righteousness. True righteousness is never rooted in human traditions, philosophies or ideas, but rather is founded solely upon the Word of God. The ethics of the kingdom are not contrary to Scripture, but they are contrary to the perversions of Scripture caused by human traditions. This interpretation is proven by the six contrasts set forth in the remainder of this chapter where our Lord says, "You have heard it said" (5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38,

43). “Jesus’ corrections of the mistaken understandings involve the presentation of the true meaning of the Torah, not its cancellation as might at first seem to be the case.”¹

By way of introduction there are some things to note regarding this section of Scripture. First, verse 17, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets...,” is the key statement (in a sense our Lord’s sermon text) for the rest of chapter five. Jesus states His proposition in verse 17; then gives a reason in verse 18; then gives a related warning in verse 19 and backs up this with a reason in verse 20. In verses 21-48, Christ then sets forth His view (i.e. the biblical view) in contrast to that of the Pharisees which He condemns. We could learn the most about effective preaching from the Savior’s example. He not only backs up His statement with excellent argumentation, but He also has a lengthy section of illustrations that serve as explication and application.

Second, note that the Redeemer teaches in both a positive and negative manner. He emphatically and clearly teaches the truth regarding Himself and the Old Testament Scriptures with a focus on the moral law; and, He strongly and repeatedly criticizes the predominant religious views that were popular in His own day. This observation is particularly important for our own time because evangelical, as well as Reformed, churches and institutions have increasingly come to condemn our Lord’s manner of teaching. When pastors critique other views, especially those held by evangelicals or backslidden Reformed denominations, they often hear comments such as: “Why don’t you just focus on positive teaching? Why do you have to criticize this other viewpoint?” But such comments contradict the very practice of Jesus. He sharply criticized the Pharisaical perversions of God’s law and, thus, obviously considered the exposing and denouncing of false doctrine to be pastoral and biblical.

People who do not like to hear criticism in sermons often stake their case on their own ideas of Christian love and community. But with our own Lord as an example, we could say that preaching that does not warn and convict those who contradict (Tit. 1:9) shows a lack of love and concern for God’s people. The worldly, antinomian spirit that is so much a part of professing Christian churches in our day has a very dangerous habit of protecting the wicked and the guilty, while endangering the Savior’s sheep. All ministers of the gospel have a duty to expose and refute doctrinal error.

Third, with the exception of a partial parallel in Luke 16:17 (“And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.”), this section of Scripture is unique to Matthew’s gospel. Matthew was writing primarily to a Jewish audience. Therefore, he was very concerned to prove that Jesus was the Messianic King foretold in the Old Testament and wanted to make clear the Savior’s relationship to the law. Although Christ was accused of being a lawbreaker (e.g., Mk. 2:24; Lk. 6:2) and a rejecter of the law, He rather came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. He was not an enemy of the Jewish religion, but rather was its true fulfillment and cornerstone.

Fourth, this section of Scripture is very important, for it helps us understand the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. It tells us the proper attitude that Christians should have toward God’s law. Although Matthew 5:17-20 in some respects is not an easy passage to understand and has engendered a wide variety of interpretations (particularly regarding the word “fulfill”), nevertheless a thorough examination and understanding of these verses will inoculate us against the many heresies that have arisen regarding God’s law and will help us in our quest for increased sanctification or personal righteousness.

¹ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 103.

Fifth, our Lord begins this section with a sharp command—“Do not think” (aorist imperative)—which implies that some of the Jews were likely to think that Jesus did come to abolish many of their laws and institutions. The Pharisees certainly accused the Savior of this, in that He did not keep the oral tradition which they regarded as coming directly from God to Moses and as having equal authority to the written law. Others may have been confused because Christ often spoke on His own authority. As God He had the right to do this, but even His disciples were slow in understanding His true character and mission. Still others may have been confused by His mingling with scandalous sinners and outcasts. Moreover, the gospel that the Redeemer preached was one of pure grace. The Jews at that time were taught that keeping the law in an external manner was the sure path to heaven. Jesus rejected all concepts of human merit and works-righteousness as a means of earning paradise (e.g., Lk. 18:10-13). Perhaps some of our Lord’s disciples were perplexed and were wondering if the gospel superseded the law. In any case, Christ’s strong language is designed to crush all such thinking before it spreads.

Defining Terms

In order to understand this section of Scripture, we first need to define the crucial phrases and words in it. Most of the expressions and words are easy to understand. The great disagreements over this passage (generally speaking) all flow from different understandings of the verb “to fulfill” (*plerosai*). Therefore, we will spend more time in attempting to arrive at a precise meaning of this term.

(1) The first thing that merits our attention in this passage is the phrase “I came” (*elthon*). This verb implies the pre-existence of the Messiah and that Jesus came to carry out a specific mission. His purpose in coming into the world was not to destroy, abrogate or abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them.

(2) The expression “the law or the prophets” refers to the whole of the Old Testament canon. The word law when used with prophets refers to the Pentateuch (lit. *the five rolls*) or the five books of Moses. The Jews in the days of Christ considered the law as by far the most important part of the Bible. Since the word “law” in such a context encompasses all the books of Moses, one should not attempt to restrict this term to the moral law alone. This point is important, for if Jesus is saying that He did not come to destroy or abrogate the whole law of Moses, including the ceremonial law, then this fact must be taken into account when we attempt to define the word “fulfill.” There are no examples in the New Testament of the expression “law and/or prophets” where the term “law” can be restricted to the moral law or the ten commandments (cf. Mt. 5:17; 7:12; 11:33; 22:40; Lk. 16:16; Jn. 1:45; Ac. 13:15; 24:14; 28:23; Rom. 3:21).

Although the term “prophets” can refer to the prophetic books of the Old Testament (e.g., Lk. 24:44 reads, “all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me”), when it is placed next to law it refers to all the other books in the Old Testament besides the five books of Moses. The fact that the word “prophets” is placed next to the term “law” does not imply (as some scholars assert) that the Savior’s focus in the passage is on the ethical context of the prophets to the exclusion of predictive prophecy. Also, there is no reason to restrict the term law to the predictive elements in the Pentateuch, to the exclusion of moral and ceremonial precepts. Both of these views not only contradict the common usage of the expression “law and prophets” in the New Testament, but also are essentially imposed on the text to accommodate a particular interpretation of the word

“fulfill.” (e.g., Dispensational authors want to restrict these terms to predictive prophecy to the exclusion of ethical stipulations, while certain theologians want to focus on ethics to the exclusion of predictive prophecy.) While it is true that Matthew 5:19-48 focuses on the moral law and completely ignores predictive prophecy, the Lord does this because His focus is on the true righteousness of His kingdom in opposition to Jewish traditions. Further, it would be rather strange to go into detail regarding His fulfillment of prophecy before most of the prophecies were fulfilled.

Some commentators see significance in the fact that Christ used the disjunctive particle “or” (“the law or the prophets”) instead of the much more common conjunction “and” (“the law and the prophets”). The use of “or,” however, in Matthew 5:17 is simply better suited for use with the Savior’s negative form of expression in 5:17a (“...not...law or prophets’ better expresses the negative correlation than ‘...not...law and prophets’”).²

(3) The Greek word *kataluo*, translated “destroy” (KJV, NKJV) or “abolish” (NASB, NIV, RSV), in first century Greek literature, with regard to civil law, meant to deprive by force, annul, abrogate, abolish or repeal. The same verb was used to describe the tearing down, dismantling, destroying or demolition of buildings. Indeed, the same word is used to describe the destruction of the Temple (Mt. 27:40) and the destruction of our bodies at death (2 Cor. 5:1). Jesus is not some radical or revolutionary who came to destroy or repudiate the authority of Scripture. Instead He came to fulfill, establish and enforce it. “Christ venerated the sacred Scriptures, was regulated by them in all His actions, and definitely set His imprimatur upon their Divine inspiration.”³

(4) The most difficult word to define in this context is “fulfill” (“*plerosai*”). This word has been interpreted a number of different ways and many views are completely wrong. The meaning of this word is crucial for understanding our text. If we go wrong here, we will misunderstand the whole passage. Therefore, we will carefully examine the meaning of this word and then come to a conclusion as to its use in this particular context.

The word “fulfill” means literally “to fill to the full.” “The verb ‘to fulfill’ suggests the image of a vessel which is filled to the top.”⁴ This word is used in its normal (non-theological or non-eschatological) sense in Matthew 13:48 where, at Jesus’ instructions, the disciples’ net is filled to the full with a catch of fish. “From this basic meaning comes such derivative meanings as ‘accomplish,’ ‘complete,’ ‘bring to an end,’ ‘finish.’”⁵ In Matthew 23:32 the word is used of scribes and Pharisees filling up the measure of their fathers’ guilt. The Jews’ rebellion reaches its climax and thus “completes” the Jewish history of guilt as a covenant nation.

When the word “fulfill” is used regarding Jesus’ fulfillment of prophecy, it clearly has the meaning of accomplish. Of the sixteen times this term is used in Matthew at least twelve refer to the fulfillment of predictive prophecy (1:22, “this was done that it might be fulfilled;” 2:15, 17; 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14 (*anapleroo*) 35; 21:4; 26:54, 56; 27:9). The things that were prophesied about the Messianic King in the Old Testament had their fulfillment in the historical events of Christ’s life. In Matthew 3:15 the word, “fulfill,” has the sense of

² Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament: with a Critically Revised Text, a Digest of Various Readings, Marginal References to Verbal and Idiomatic Usage* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), 1:42.

³ Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 50.

⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 205. In Romans 15:19, Paul describes faithfulness in spreading the gospel from Jerusalem to as far as Illyricum as fulfilling the gospel (*peplerokenai*). “Paul had discharged his commission and fulfilled the design of his ministry within the wide area specified” (John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968], 2:214).

⁵ Donald A. Hanger, *Matthew 1-13*, 105.

“accomplish,” of “fully obey.” When John the Baptizer questioned the Savior’s need to be baptized our Lord said, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” In this passage Jesus was not fulfilling predictions, but was rendering full obedience to the Father on behalf of His people.

In James 2:23 Abraham “fulfilled” the Scripture *when he obeyed God* in offering his son on the altar. Abraham faithfully acted upon God’s Word and thus “fully obeyed” it. Paul speaks of fulfilling the law by obeying it: “He who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8). The apostle uses *pleroma* to describe obedience fulfilled, carried out, or completed in 2 Corinthians 10:6. In Revelation 3:2 Jesus rebukes the church at Sardis because He has found that their works are not being fulfilled (*pepleromena*) before God. This word is translated “perfected” in the KJV with the idea of good works obeyed or brought to completion. Given these examples we could say that Christ fulfills the prophets because all the prophecies regarding the Messiah find their fulfillment in Jesus. His birth, life, death and resurrection all perfectly accomplish Old Testament predictions. The Savior also fulfills the law because He obeys it or carries it out perfectly. Jesus, in His person and work, performs what the Law and Prophets require. He does not merely rescue the Law from the corrupt glosses of the Jews, but also brings in an “everlasting righteousness.” The moral law can only be “fulfilled” by a perfect obedience in thought, word and deed. This is something that only the God-man can accomplish.

Regarding the context and the meaning of fulfill, there are three important things to consider. First, the contrast of the term “fulfill” with the antonym “destroy” or “abrogate” is very helpful in telling us what “fulfill” does not mean. Jesus wanted to eliminate any idea that He had come to destroy, annul or abolish the law. Therefore, He set the word “fulfill” as a contrast to “destroy” to reassure the Jews of His intent. While grammatical contrasts do not have to be exact opposites, the word “fulfill” must at least be *contrary* in meaning to “destroy” or “abrogate.” Therefore, it would be out of accord with Greek grammar and simple rules of logic for our Lord to say, “Do not think that I came to abrogate the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy them, but to bring them to an end.” Such words are not only contradictory, but if that had been the Savior’s meaning His audience would have expressed shock and outrage. Further, such an interpretation (which is common among evangelicals) contradicts the rest of our Lord’s sermon where He demands, defends and commends a strict obedience to God’s moral law from the heart.

Second, the expression, “law or prophets,” points us in the direction of a multifaceted understanding of the term “fulfill.” The reason behind this statement lies in the obvious fact that prophecy and the law of God in all its variations (e.g., moral, civil and ceremonial) cannot be fulfilled in the exact same manner. While there is a similarity between fulfilling prophecy and the typology of the ceremonial laws relating to sacrifice and purification, moral laws are fulfilled in a different manner. Therefore, the old Puritan approach to this passage which says that Jesus fulfills the entire Old Testament (the law and the prophets) is the right approach in a number of different ways. As noted above, attempts to restrict the phrase “Law or Prophets” to only the predictive element in the Old Testament or only the law aspect of the Old Testament are arbitrary. The audience to whom Christ was speaking would certainly not have understood such a clever and narrow distinction.

Third, verses 20 through 42 concern a discussion of obedience to the moral law for Jesus’ disciples. Therefore, any approach to the passage which says that Christ brought an end to every aspect of the Mosaic law including laws that are moral such as the Ten Commandments cannot be true. It would be completely absurd for the Savior to say that He came to bring an end to the

law and then turn right around and preach on the necessity of a true understanding of various moral requirements so that His disciples would properly keep these laws.

(5) Jesus explains why verse 17 is true in verse 18: “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or tittle will by no means pass away from the law till all is fulfilled.” The expression “assuredly” (*amen*), also translated “verily” or “truly,” means that everything that our Lord is about to say can be completely relied upon. *Amen* is the transliteration of the Hebrew word for truth and faithfulness. When it is used by Christ it refers to an important solemn truth: “‘amen’ is the seal of *verity*, ‘I say to you’ the stamp of *authority*.”⁶

The expressions jot (*iota*) or tittle (*keriaia*) provide an extra emphasis on the absoluteness of Christ’s statement. The jot or Greek *iota* is the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet and is used to refer to the smallest Hebrew letter, the *yod* (a small curve). The tittle refers to a tiny mark used in Hebrew letters that is shaped like a hook. The point is that no part of the Old Testament, however small or seemingly insignificant, will be allowed to fall to the ground or remain unfulfilled. Every little bit will be fulfilled in the Messiah. It is clear from this passage that our Lord not only believed in the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, but also held a Christocentric understanding of the Bible. Jesus by His life, ministry, teaching, death and resurrection will fulfill all.

The phrase “till heaven and earth pass away” refers to the time in the distant future when Christ returns and ushers in the final state and the new heaven and earth. It will only be at this time when all the prophecies regarding the Messiah will be completely fulfilled and “the law” as a written code will no longer be necessary. The fact that all believers will be living in glorified bodies that are perfect; cannot sin; and exist in the very presence of God, will render the Bible as a written book superfluous. “Until that time arrives, however, nothing whatever will remain lacking as to fulfillment. God’s program with respect to Christ, the church, mankind in general, and the universe, will be carried out in full (Isa. 40:8).”⁷

The expression at the end of verse 18, “till all is fulfilled,” means literally “until all is accomplished” or “until all has occurred.” This phrase supports the interpretation that the word “fulfill” in verse 17 does not merely refer to Jesus’ role as a teacher of the law, but also a fulfiller of prophecy and one who obeyed the moral law. The Savior came to accomplish all things said of Him and the prophecies regarding Him will not be exhausted until He returns in triumph to judge the world and begins the eternal state.

The word “law” in verse 18 may refer to the Torah in the broader sense and continue the thought of verse 17 “the Law and the Prophets” (i.e. the entire Old Testament). Or in anticipation of the Savior’s discussion of righteousness in verse 20 and following, Christ may have a more narrow meaning in mind. In any case the interpretation of “fulfill” discussed above would remain the same.

Some Common Errors

Now that we have some understanding of how the terms and phrases in our passage are defined by Scripture, we would do well to briefly examine some common errors regarding Jesus’ fulfillment of the Old Testament, especially God’s law.

(1) Classical dispensationalism teaches that “fulfill” should be interpreted in the sense of “complete” or “bring to an end.” Thus, they teach that Jesus essentially abolished the whole law

⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 207.

⁷ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 292.

including the Ten Commandments and replaced them with the dispensation of grace. They support this view with passages such as John 1:17: “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” This statement does not mean that the law was defective or contained no grace or truth, but that the Redeemer surpasses the ministry of Moses and the revelation of the law in that He achieved the reality to which the types pointed and is truth itself. He achieved salvation, while the law could only point to it. He is the foundation of all grace and truth. None of this means that the *moral laws* as principles of godly living or sanctification are abrogated. But doesn’t Romans 6:14 say, “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace”? Indeed, it does. Paul, however, is not talking about dispensations. To be under law in this context refers to what the law does to the sinner. The law convicts, condemns and curses the bond servant of sin. The law can do nothing to save, justify or even sanctify the sinner (i.e. apart from faith in Christ and a work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart). To be under grace in this context means to be united with Christ in His life, death and resurrection and, thus, delivered from the bondage of sin. There is an absolute antithesis between the potency and provisions of the law which was never intended by God to be a means of salvation and the potency and provisions of grace which truly delivers men from the servitude of sin. Paul’s statement does not abrogate the moral law as a guide for Christian living. The only hope of sinners is that Jesus will set them free from the law’s condemning power and curse. Thus, we renounce the law as a means of salvation, or acceptance with God, when we embrace Christ. But, once saved we acknowledge that the moral “law is holy, just and good” (Rom. 7:12) and try to obey its righteous precepts out of gratitude for the Savior’s gift of salvation.

(2) Closely related to dispensationalism is the modern evangelical idea that this passage teaches that Christ came to replace the Old Testament law with a new law—“the law of Christ.” According to this interpretation, the whole Old Testament law flows into Christ and is fulfilled in Him; Jesus establishes His own law. The Old Testament had its Law of Moses which applied to the nation of Israel and the New Testament has its law of Christ which applies to all new covenant believers throughout the world. A favorite passage of those who hold this opinion is Romans 10:4: “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” Although in certain contexts “end” can denote a termination point (e.g., Mt. 10:22; 24:6, 14; etc.), in both the narrow and broader context of Romans, Paul is setting forth the antithesis between attempting to earn salvation through works or the righteousness of the law and God’s righteousness as the righteousness of faith. The apostle is teaching that using the law to attempt to attain an acceptable righteousness before God *ends* the moment we embrace Christ and lay hold of His imputed righteousness by faith. This point is proven by Paul’s qualification that only for the believer is Christ the end of the law for righteousness. Thus, Paul is not saying that Christ came to bring an end to the law, but that those who believe unto justification no longer use the law as a method of attaining salvation.

Another favorite passage of those who argue that Jesus came to eliminate the law is Galatians 5:18: “If you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.” In the book of Galatians Paul refutes the Judaizers who believed that faith in Jesus was not enough to be justified, but rather believed that one must also keep the Mosaic law before reconciliation with God is achieved. Paul says, “A man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 2:16); no one ever received the Holy Spirit by attempting to keep the law but only by the hearing of faith (Gal. 3:2). Therefore, the man who is led by the Spirit is the one who first

believed in Christ. All true believers are being led by the Spirit. Thus, in context, not being under law obviously refers to not attempting to use the law as a means of justification.

Regarding the idea that Jesus came to bring an end to the law and replace it, we should note the following. a) The verb *to fulfill* never means “to replace” in Scripture. b) The idea of Christ completely replacing the law suffers from the same objections noted above regarding the Savior coming to abrogate the law. To completely replace the law is to “end” it or “annul” it. c) A reading of the New Testament where, on a number of occasions, the apostle’s appeal directly to the Old Testament law for ethical guidance renders such an interpretation fallacious (e.g., 1 Cor. 5:1; 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18; Jas. 5:4; Rom. 12:19-20; etc.). d) The idea that moral laws, which are based on God’s nature and character and thus are absolute, can be abrogated is irrational. Dispensationalists, deep down, seem to understand this problem and thus will often say it is good to love the law of God and gain wisdom from it even though it is no longer binding.

(3) Another erroneous view is that our Lord came to perfect the law by supplementing it and adding an internal aspect to it. This view is based on a misunderstanding of God’s Old Testament law. The idea that the Old Testament was concerned with only external behavior is simply not true. For example, the tenth commandment covers unlawful lust in all its forms. The command, “love your enemies” (Mt. 5:44) is an application of the Old Testament laws which teach the proper treatment of strangers and sojourners. The Old Testament emphasized the need for inward heart obedience and repeatedly condemned the Jewish people’s sinful drift toward externalism and ritualism (see Ps. 51: 6, 10, 17; Ps. 40:8; 119:10-11; Hos. 6:6; Pr. 16:18, 19; Mic. 2:1; Job 31:1; etc.).

But (some will argue) did not Christ repeal the Mosaic legislation regarding divorce (Mt. 19:9), the Sabbath (Mt. 12:3-8; Mk. 2:25-28) and the death penalty for adultery (Jn. 8:3- 11)? A careful examination of these passages reveals that such an interpretation is completely wrong. Regarding divorce, our Lord first appeals to the creation ordinance of marriage (Mt. 19:4-6), then rebukes the Jews for their hardness of heart (Mt. 19:8) and finally sets forth the proper interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:11. (In this passage divorce is allowed for “some uncleanness” [*erwat dabar*] or “something indecent.” Jesus defines this indecency as sexual immorality.) Regarding the Sabbath, the Savior justified plucking and eating the grain on the basis of David’s emergency situation and the spiritual work required of priests on that day. Such Old Testament examples would prove that the Sabbath did not even apply to the Old Covenant era and are worthless. Further, the Redeemer says explicitly that He and His disciples were “guiltless” (Mt. 12:7) regarding the Pharisees’ charge.

Regarding the common notion that Jesus relaxed the penalty for adultery, we should note the following refutations. a) The Jews were under the Roman Empire and their rights to execute criminals had long been removed. Indeed, the Romans forbade the death penalty for adultery. If our Lord had participated in such an act, He could have been arrested by the Roman authorities. This whole situation was a trap set by the scribes and Pharisees. b) The death penalty for adultery was the maximum penalty for that crime, but not the only penalty. c) The crowd arbitrarily brought only one guilty person when there should have been two. d) Matthew 8:7-10 makes it clear that the witnesses present were not qualified under the law to testify against her. (Most commentators do not think that the Savior was demanding perfectly sinless witnesses, but that it was inappropriate for people who were guilty of the same sin to stand in judgment over her.) e) Our Lord did not come to be a judge, but to save sinners. His time of judging, at that moment, was still future.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was not adding to God's law or subjecting His disciples to a new, higher standard, but was countering the perversion of the scribes and Pharisees who externalized the law and rendered it void by their human traditions. A study of the New Testament reveals virtually no ethical principles not already found in the Old Testament. The difference in the New Covenant is not a new and different ethical standard, but Christ's completed work and His sending the Holy Spirit to empower and enable believers to more faithfully obey God's moral law.

(4) Greg Bahnsen's view that "fulfill" simply means to confirm (i.e. make firmer, establish or strengthen) the law of God in exhaustive detail is also erroneous for a number of reasons. First, the Hebrew word *qum*, which means "establish," is never translated as *pleroun* in the Greek Septuagint. Second, the word "confirm" is far too narrow and assumes that Jesus is only discussing His role as a teacher of the law and not a fulfiller of prophecy and fulfiller of the obligations of the law. Our Lord fulfills the whole Old Testament. Third, in our examination of the word "fulfill" in Matthew and the rest of the New Testament, we saw that it referred to either prophecy accomplished or the commands of God carried out or completed. It is never used to mean confirm as a teacher.⁸ Fourth, the Savior's words "I came," which refer to the incarnation, indicate a broad purpose and not only the one aspect of teaching. While Jesus did teach the truth about the law and established the moral law in opposition to the Pharisees' human traditions, His work of fulfilling the whole Old Testament Scriptures by His perfect obedience and sacrificial death are the focus of the term fulfill. Fifth, the fact that Christ goes into a lengthy section regarding His disciples' need to teach and obey the moral law in opposition to the Jewish leadership, does not *redefine* the word fulfill and is harmonious with our Lord's fulfilling the entire Old Testament. Sixth, if the term "fulfill" is not applied to the whole Old Testament with its different application to prophecy, the types and the moral law, then one has the problem of saying that Christ established the whole law in exhaustive detail while admitting at a later point that the ceremonial laws are actually fulfilled in a different way and thus do not continue in the New Covenant era. Bahnsen insists that fulfill can only have one meaning in the context (confirm), but then applies it in a *different* manner to the ceremonial laws because He knows they have been set aside by Christ. Bahnsen is forced by the analogy of Scripture to apply the word "fulfill" in a different way to the typological ordinances than the moral statutes.

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⁸ It is telling that the only passage in all of sacred Scripture that Bahnsen appeals to for the meaning of "confirm" is the Greek Septuagint translation of 1 Kings 1:14. Although the KJV and NKJV use the word "confirm," Young's Literal Translation of the Bible reads, "I came in after thee, and have *completed* thy words." Therefore, even the LXX does not necessarily support Bahnsen's contention.