

“Jesus and the Old Testament” – Hebrews 8:13; Matthew 5:17-20

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Open your Bibles to Matthew 5...

I had actually planned for this sermon after we finished Hebrews 8, but toward of the end of the week I became convinced that it might help us better to lead with this sermon before we venture into the next chapter of Hebrews. Hebrews 8 ends with these words,

“In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” (Hebrews 8:13)

The Old Covenant is one way of referring to the covenant that God made with the people of Israel through Moses and the terms of that covenant are enshrined in the Old Testament Law. Yet saying that the Old Covenant has now been rendered obsolete suggests that Mosaic Law is no longer functioning over us as law. We are no longer under the Law because of the work of Christ. Paul shares this conviction with the writer of Hebrews, though he comes at it in a different way. We will see how the writer of Hebrews arrives at this conclusion next week. What I want to consider with you today is a passage that seems to say something different, namely, that Christ’s intention was not to abolish the Law. So we will consider this text in Matthew in its own context and then we will see next week how it actually helps us understand what’s going on in Hebrews.

Matthew 5 puts us back in the Sermon on the Mount. I preached on this text before, but it’s been close to four years ago. It’s a fascinating and controversial text to say the least. If you were to survey some of the books, articles, and commentaries that attempt to explain what Jesus says in verses 17 to 20 (which we will be examining today), you discover almost immediately that no consensus exists. You’d be hard-pressed to say anything that everyone would agree with, except perhaps that this passage is as important as it is debated. Let me just read you some of the claims that I’ve read while preparing for this sermon...

- Grant Osborne, in his commentary, claims that “This seminal text is at the heart of the modern debate about the place of the OT in the NT.”¹
- Scot McKnight writes, “Our passage is the most significant passage in the entire Bible on how to read the Bible...”²
- Tim Keller once claimed in a sermon that these verses offer “One of the most important statements in all of the Bible to help you understand the overall point of the Bible.”³
- David Platt calls Matthew 5:17-20, “the interpretive key to the rest of the Sermon on the Mount.”⁴
- Similarly, Craig Blomberg describes these verses as “the thesis paragraph of the Sermon on the Mount and the key to understanding Matthew’s presentation of the relationship between Jesus’ teaching and the law (or the OT more generally).”⁵
- D. A. Carson states that “Matthew 5:17-20 are among the most difficult verses in all the Bible.”⁶

There is virtually no end to the superlatives that could be quoted. We have our work cut out for us today. But don't worry, most of the debate is about which true thing that the Bible claims about Jesus elsewhere is Jesus claiming about Himself here. In other words, many of those who I would disagree with on this text are claiming things that are still true about Jesus, things that are taught elsewhere in Scripture, I just don't think they are the primary point that Jesus Himself was getting at here. It's a "right doctrine, wrong text" situation.⁷ You'll see what I mean as we go along.

But now it is time to pause and do the most important thing we will do today—hear God's Word. Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 5, starting in verse 17. This is God's Word...

"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 say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:17-20)

Now then, there are two startling things that Jesus says in this text, the first is found in verse 17 and the second in verse 20. The first would have rattled the religious leaders of Jesus' day because of what Jesus was claiming about Himself that no one before Him would have ever dared to claim. The second would have rattled those hearers who were aware of their sin and how far short they fell of God's standards. Both statements are shocking. Both are paradigm shifting. Both would have elicited strong reactions from Jesus' audience. And we have a tendency to just pass them by and totally miss how jarring the claims were. But we only have time to deal with the first one today.

So then, here is the first lesson I want us to pick up on in this passage...

JESUS WAS FOR THE OLD TESTAMENT

That is, Jesus was pro-OT. That may seem obvious to us, but it evidently wasn't to some of His contemporaries. Look again at how Jesus introduces the subject in verse 17—"*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets...*" He sounds as though He was defending Himself against some misconception or outright lie that His opponents were spreading among the people. It's as if there were people, likely even in the crowd that Jesus was addressing, who were told that Jesus was against the Law found in the Old Testament (i.e., the Torah), or that He was a Law-breaker, or that He was setting aside the teaching of the Law and establishing new regulations in its place, or something like that.

It's not hard for us to imagine why some of the religious leaders would have spread such rumors about Jesus. We see repeatedly in the first four books of the New Testament that Jesus was accused by the religious elite of His day of breaking what God's Law taught concerning the Sabbath or the purity rituals (e.g., Matt. 12:1-8; 15:1-20). In reality, Jesus never once broke God's Law, but He constantly violated the interpretation of God's laws that were popular among many other rabbis.

Have you heard of the Mishnah? The Mishnah is a collection of the oral traditions taught by the rabbis. Its composition was gradual and not completed until after the time of Jesus, but its traditions are considered by the Jews to be quite early and authoritative. In it we can read statements like, "He that talks much with womankind brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the law and at the last will inherit Gehenna." So what then would they have thought about Jesus keeping company with women or His encounter with the Samaritan woman? The Mishnah also states that the great rabbis taught, "Keep thee far from an evil

neighbor and consort not with the wicked.”⁸ What do you think the Pharisees thought when they saw Jesus eating meals with sinners, and tax collectors, and the outcasts of His day?

There were times that Jesus taught that all food was clean (Mark 7:14-19; Matthew 15:17-20), healed on the Sabbath, forgave people without sending them to the priests or temple, cast out authorized businessmen from the temple grounds, touched lepers, and so on. All of these things put Him in tension with the traditional Jewish understanding of the Law that was popularized by the Jewish leaders of that day.⁹

In the teaching that comes next in the Sermon on the Mount, we see Jesus pick up Old Testament laws and then explain them in ways that were completely foreign to mainstream Jewish thinking in the first century, ways that put him in direct conflict with the legal experts of His day. So it’s not hard to imagine how Jesus’ opponents would have taken His teaching or lifestyle and spun it as evidence that He disregarded God’s Law, or despised God’s Law, or failed to understand God’s Law. Jesus seems to be preempting that accusation. Nothing could have been further from the truth. He says plainly, “*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets...*” (Matt. 5:17).¹⁰

But notice, please, what many have failed to notice—He says “*the Law or the Prophets,*”¹¹ not just “the Law.” So He is referencing the beginning and the end of the Old Testament, which was a common way of referring to the entire Old Testament. Of course, they didn’t think of it as the Old Testament; they just thought of it as the Scriptures. This is their Bible. His point then is not simply that He didn’t come to abolish the Law (Torah), but that He didn’t come to abolish any of the Scriptures.

So quite the opposite of Jesus having a low view of Scripture, Jesus is here describing what a high view of Scripture He has. In fact, He continues in verse 18, “*For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*” This time “Law” is probably shorthand for “*the Law and the Prophets*” He just mentioned in the previous verse. His point is that none of that is passing away until all of it is accomplished. An “iota” is the smallest Greek letter. That word translated “dot” is literally the word for “hook” or “horn” and here is being used to describe the subtlest stroke of a pen like the one that distinguishes a lowercase “r” from a lowercase “n.” Not even that will pass away until it is accomplished Jesus says.

“*Therefore,*” He adds, “*whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven*” (5:19). Some have argued about what Jesus means when He refers to “*these commandments.*” Is He looking backwards to the Old Testament commands?¹² Or is He looking forward to the commands found in the Sermon on the Mount?¹³ I think the evidence favors that He is referring to the Old Testament, but the two are not mutually exclusive.¹⁴ In our preaching series through the Sermon on the Mount we saw that Jesus’ teaching in the coming verses doesn’t contradict the Old Testament, but express the meaning and intent of the Law. So He’s not adding to it. He’s explaining it. He’s endorsing it. He’s confirming it.

Far from relaxing commands, He seems to be raising the bar in their eyes. Far from having a low view of Scripture, Jesus had the highest view of Scripture anyone could possibly have. Jesus was for the Old Testament. But the second thing we should notice is that...

THE OLD TESTAMENT WAS FOR JESUS

Look again at verse 17. “*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to [what?...] fulfill them.*” Whooh! That’s a pretty bold claim, isn’t it? Everyone agrees it is. But here’s the rub: in what sense does Jesus “*fulfill*” the Scriptures?

The verb that is used here (translated “*fulfill*”) is a very versatile word capable of capturing several different senses. Its basic meaning is “fill to the full,”¹⁵ but it’s used for literally filling up an object (like a cup) or figuratively. So, for example, if we say we filled up a period of time, then we mean that we used it all up or we brought that period of time to completion. It’s also used for something reaching its intended goal (i.e., fulfilling its purpose). And various other related nuances. So what is Jesus saying here?

Let me give you the top three suggestions that are usually put forth. I’ll explain each of them, I’ll tell you why they matter if they are true, and I’ll offer some suggestion on what you should do in light of these truths. In other words, for each I’ll offer I’ll try to capture the “What? So what? And now what?” If you listen closely, you’ll hear them. Here’s the first common suggestion...

The Old Testament Was Flawlessly Obeyed by Jesus

In other words, Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures in that He obeyed them perfectly. He fulfilled it by doing what it says. He may have violated the traditional Jewish interpretations of the Scriptures, but never the Scriptures themselves. Instead, He embodied what faithfulness to Scripture looks like. “He actualized it by doing it.”¹⁶ He never once violated a single command of His Father, whether in thought, motive, or action.¹⁷ He was sinless.

Why does that matter (i.e., “so what?”)? Here’s why: if that wasn’t true—that Jesus’ perfectly obeyed he Scriptures and never once sinned—then your entire salvation crumbles! Here’s what is happening on the cross—listen up, because this is the Gospel—an innocent person is laying down His life for the guilty. There is a legal-substitution taking place.

When someone is guilty there is a punishment to be had. In the case of humanity our sin is against a holy God and so the only just penalty is death and experiencing God’s just wrath. So if you have sinned against God—and you have—then you deserve that. That’s what you have earned. That’s what everyone has earned because everyone has sinned against God. We’ve all lied. We’ve all belittled God. We have all taken glory for things that only God deserves glory for. We’ve all taken His name in vain. We would all be ashamed if the world knew the things we have done, said, and thought. We’re guilty. All of us.

Jesus’ wasn’t. And on the cross, He offers Himself up in the place of the guilty. He lays down His life and experiences the death we deserved and the wrath of God that we deserved to have poured out on us was poured out on Him. Because of this God’s perfect justice is satisfied and there is now no condemnation for those who believe in Jesus and trust in Him for salvation. Isn’t that amazing? Isn’t that good news? You deserve to be destroyed and cast out, but Jesus says no I will experience that in your place so that you don’t have to. We didn’t earn that. We’re not lovely enough to deserve that. That’s what we call grace. We are getting something we don’t deserve and, in fact, getting the opposite of what we deserve completely because of Christ’s work for us.

Timothy Keller has a brilliant illustration of this that connects the dots between this good news and Jesus’ fulfilling the Law. He says that there are two ways you fulfill a given law—you either keep it or you pay the penalty for not keeping it. So just pick a law, like in Tyler there is a law that says you have to stop at stop signs. How do you fulfill that law? You can fulfill it by stopping at every stop sign. Stop before the line. Full stop. No rolling stops. Bam, you fulfilled the law. But what happens if you run the stop sign and you get pulled over by a cop? You’re going to get a ticket, right? Nevertheless, you can still fulfill the law. How? By paying the ticket. Once you pay the ticket, you’re guilt in the eyes of the law is removed. The law has no more claim on you. It doesn’t condemn you. So whether you stop at the stop sign or pay the ticket, in both instances you have fulfilled the demands of the law.

Now think about what Jesus has done for us. He has fulfilled the law in both of those senses. He fulfilled the Law by keeping it perfectly *and*, on top of that, He fulfilled the Law by paying the penalty that a Law-breaker deserves. In that sense, He fulfilled the Law twice! And if that penalty has been paid in full then the Law no longer condemns the Law-breaker that Jesus paid the penalty for. So who did He pay the penalty for? For all those who turn from their sins and trust in Christ alone to save them. He paid the penalty for those who admit they need Jesus to save them and in faith turn to Christ for salvation. Do you see why this matters? Do you see why this is good news?

How should you respond (i.e., “Now what?”)? For some of you, today you need to put your faith in Christ. You need to stop trying to be good enough to earn God’s salvation and realize you can’t earn it and that’s why Jesus died and was raised. He substituted Himself for you because the only way you could fulfill the Law of God was being condemned by it. And if you don’t want to be condemned by it, then today you need to give your life to Jesus. You need to turn from your sin, acknowledge that it’s wrong, and turn to Christ to save and forgive you. That’s what it means to become a Christian. Being in a Christian church doesn’t make you a Christian. Faith in Jesus makes you a Christian.

Are you ready to do that? Do you want to talk to someone about that? Then do this for me. In the pew in front of you, you’ll see a white card labeled “Response Card.” Take one of those, fill it out, give us a way to contact you, check the box or boxes that best describe you, and when the offering plate comes around later in the service, drop that card in the plate. Let that be your offering to us today. Someone from our staff will follow up with you this week. And we will be available after the service to talk to you too, if you’d like. You can find me at this back door today. So if you are feeling that tug, you take that step today because that very well may be the reason God brought you here today. Don’t ignore what God is encouraging you to do...that’s how you got in your mess in the first place. Fill out a card. Or let’s chat after service. Or come forward during the invitation. Or all of the above. Doesn’t matter which one, just make the most of those opportunities today.

Maybe you have already done that. Great. Then how should you respond to the fact that the Old Testament was flawlessly obeyed by Jesus? Worship! You were saved in part because Jesus was without sin. Without that reality your salvation would evaporate. So when you hear that truth—about Jesus’ perfect obedience—it should lead you to worship. Amen. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord.

Having said all that, however, I don’t think Christ’s perfect obedience is the primary point that Matthew is getting at in verse 17. It’s absolutely true that Jesus fulfilled all of God’s expectations, but that is not how Matthew tends to use that word. In fact, as common as the word (“to fulfill”) is in Matthew’s Gospel, there is only one other place where you might be able to argue that obedience was in view (Matt. 3:15).¹⁸ This is not the word we would expect if obedience was the primary idea.¹⁹ So that interpretation, while true, doesn’t fit the context as well as the others.²⁰ So here’s the second option...

The Old Testament Was Accurately Interpreted by Jesus

In other words, He fulfilled it by completing it. Maybe not in the sense of adding to it, but unpacking it fully. Jesus is the authoritative interpreter of Scripture.²¹ His interpretation of the intent of the Law is the right one. He alone can parse its true meaning perfectly. So we look to His teaching and lifestyle to understand the intent of the Law and the other Old Testament teachings.

This was John Wesley’s view. In one of his sermons Wesley said,

“Some have conceived our Lord to mean, I am come to fulfill this by my entire and perfect obedience to it. And it cannot be doubted but he did in a sense fulfill every part of it. But this does not appear to be what he intends here, being foreign to the scope of his present discourse. Without question his meaning in this place is (consistently with all that goes before and follows after): I am come to establish it in its fullness, in spite of all the glosses of men; I am come to place in a full and clear view whatsoever was dark or obscure therein; I am come to declare the true and full import of every part of it; to show the length and breadth, the entire extent of every commandment contained therein, and the height and depth, the inconceivable purity and spirituality of all its branches.”²²

Again these things are true and ample support could be found in the rest of the New Testament. Because this is true we must take serious the teachings of Jesus and follow His instructions (“Now what?). But the question is: Is that what Matthew is getting at here? Perhaps. Wesley is right to claim that Jesus is offering us the accurate interpretation of various laws in the Sermon on the Mount. And more support could be found for the fact that, as we’ve seen, Matthew on several occasions likens Jesus to Moses. So, for example, just as Moses went up a mountain and passed the Law of God on to the people, so Jesus is preaching from a “mountain” and explaining the Law of God. He is the true Lawgiver that Moses merely foreshadowed. So you could make a case that when Matthew says Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets that he was drawing attention to how the teachings of Jesus enable us to understand and interpret Scripture properly. This is true.

Still, I don’t think this is Matthew’s main point here, again because that’s not really how he uses the word “fulfill” in this book. The verb occurs 15 other times and 13 of those occurrences are in reference to Jesus.²³ Of the 13, at least 12 refer to how Jesus fulfilled certain prophecies found in the Old Testament. So in most cases you read something like, “this happened to fulfill what the prophet so-and-so said,” or something like that.²⁴ Again and again that is how Matthew uses the word. And several instances throughout the book, he doesn’t use the word but still shows how Jesus fulfills some prophecy from the Old Testament. This is a huge theme for Matthew.

It seems to me then that when Matthew uses the word “fulfill” it has a prophetic flavor. And I think it does here in Matthew 5 as well. When Jesus says he has come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, He seems to be saying (in light of how that word is used) that the Law and the Prophets point to Him. He even says that the Law prophesies (cf. Matt 11:12f). So even though the Law doesn’t really contain predictive texts, nevertheless, it too prophesies about Jesus. So the idea is that all of Scripture—the Law and the Prophets—points to Jesus.²⁵ It was all written to get us ready for Jesus. Therefore...

The Old Testament Was Fundamentally About Jesus

James Montgomery Boice put it this way,

“the Bible is about Jesus and he is its fulfillment in all ways. He fulfills the moral law by his obedience, the prophecies by the specifics of his life, and the sacrificial system by his once-and-for-all atonement. This is a part of what Paul means in Romans 10:4 when he calls Christ ‘the end of the law.’”²⁶

Does that make sense? All the commands point to Jesus because He was the first and only person to ever keep all of them perfectly. There are hundreds of predictive passages that come to pass in the life and work of Christ. The entire story of Israel pointed to our need for a Savior. Character after character in the Bible and even the things they experienced pointed to Jesus, even without their knowledge.

Do you remember the disciples on the road to Emmaus who encountered the resurrected Jesus in Luke 24? Do you remember that verse that says, “*beginning with Moses [i.e., the Law] and all the Prophets, [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself*” (Luke 24:27)? That had to have been the greatest small group Bible study ever. Jesus just goes book by book and says, “that was about me...that right there pointed to me...that there shows you why you needed me...this is about me too...” and on and on. It all points to Jesus!

We’ve considered this before, but let me give you some examples.²⁷

- Do you know the story of Adam? Jesus is the true and better Adam who also faced a test in the garden, but he didn’t fail it and drag us down. He succeeded and brought us up. He’s the true and better Adam.
- Jesus is the true and better Abel, the innocent slain One whose blood cries out, but not for condemnation as it did against Cain, but for grace and acquittal.
- Jesus is the true and better Isaac, whose Father didn’t just raise the dagger over him but brought it down so it didn’t have to come down on us.
- Jesus is the true and better Joseph, who stands at the right hand of the throne and forgives and saves the ones who betrayed him.
- Jesus is the true and better David. Do you remember David who goes out to the big giant? He risked his life, and his victory over the giant is imputed to all of his people who didn’t even raise a stone or risk themselves at all. Jesus is the greater David, whose victory is imputed to us, even though we haven’t done a thing.
- Jesus is the real rock of Moses who was struck with the rod of justice and brings us water in the desert.
- Jesus is the real sacrifice to whom all the sacrifices point.
- He’s the real temple to which the temple points.
- He’s the real clean laws to which all the clean laws point because he’s our cleanliness.
- Do you remember Esther? Esther risked losing the palace and said, “... if I perish, I perish,” to save her people, but Jesus Christ lost the ultimate palace. He didn’t say, “If I perish, I perish,” he says, “When I perish, I perish,” in order to save his people.
- Every prophet, every priest, every king ... Jesus is the true and better Jonah who went three days into the belly of the earth to save us.
- Jesus is the true Job, the innocent Sufferer, who at the end intercedes for his people, for his friends, who were so misguided all during that time.

Everything points to Jesus.²⁸ Everything readies us to know and love Jesus better. We are not talking about how to interpret the Bible. We are really talking about seeing the point of the Bible.²⁹ Jesus fulfills the Scriptures in all of these ways and more. Do you see how bold that claim was? Do you see how startling this teaching would have been to His audience? He just claimed all of Scripture was about Him in one way or another. He’s either a crazy egomaniac or He is the most important man to have ever lived. Those are the options. Naturally, I’m going to opt for the second one.

So if the Old Testament is fundamentally about Jesus, then now what? How do we apply that truth? Are you ready, because I’m about to drop a profound little nugget on you? Ready? Here it is—read your Bible more. That’s deep, right? But read it like this. Read it through the lens of the Gospel. Read it looking for how it was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Consider how every page points to Jesus. It may not at every point be immediately obvious how it points to Jesus, but if you keep reading it will become increasingly clear in time. And as you do this, your affections for Jesus will be stirred and your love for Him will grow and your obedience to His teaching will flow naturally as an act of worship.

Next time, in Hebrews 8, we will see how several Old Testament images and activities pointed to Jesus. We will also see how Christ's fulfilling of those shadows leads to a passing away of one covenant and a dawning of a new covenant. And we will see a few glorious ways that this new covenant is superior to the old. Important stuff. Don't miss out. Bring a friend...

Let's pray...

¹ Grant Osborne, *Matthew* (ZECNT 1; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 184.

² Scot McKnight, *Sermon on the Mount* (SGBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 66. He continues, "...with a nod to Luke 24:13-49; Galatians 3:19-25; Romans 9-11; and the book of Hebrews, because Jesus tells us here how to read the Bible."

³ From a Timothy Keller sermon titled "Law and Love," preached on April 29, 2012 to Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City.

⁴ David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew* (CCE: Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 94.

⁵ Craig Blomberg, "Matthew," in *Commentary on the New Testaments Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 20.

⁶ D. A. Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 36. He writes elsewhere, "The theological and canonical ramifications of one's exegetical conclusions on this pericope are so numerous that discussion becomes freighted with the intricacies of biblical theology. At stake are the relation between the Testaments, the place of the law in the context of the gospel, and the relation of this pericope to other NT passages that unambiguously affirm that certain parts of the law have been abrogated as obsolete (e.g., Mk 7:19; Ac 10-11; Heb 7:1-9:10)." D. A. Carson, "Matthew" in *Matthew & Mark* (EBC 9; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 171.

⁷ For more detailed exploration of that sort of phenomenon, I would recommend a book edited by one of my former professors: G. K. Beale, *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994).

⁸ *The Mishnah*, trans. Herbert Danby (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), 446 (*Aboth* 1:5, 7). Also cited in Daniel M. Doriani, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Character of a Disciple* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2006), 48-49.

⁹ Some have claimed that no accusations would have been present this early in Jesus ministry because most of the interactions with the religious leaders recorded in the New Testament occur later in most historical reconstructions. I think this misses the point. Jesus could be issuing a preemptive strike against His opponents or, as John Stott notes, "Perhaps the sabbath controversy had flared up thus early, for Mark puts both the sabbath plucking of corn and the sabbath healing of a man's withered hand before even the appointment of the twelve" [see, Mark 2:23-3:6]. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (BST; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1978), 70.

¹⁰ Charles Quarles points out, "The grammatical form of the prohibition forbids the action as a whole and thus means 'Do not even entertain the thought!' or 'Do not let such a notion even enter your mind!'" Charles Quarles, *Sermon on the Mount: Restoring Christ's Message to the Modern Church* (NACSBT; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 89. Support for this observation can be found in Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 723-724.

¹¹ While it remains speculation, Quarles believes that the "or" instead of "and" in "the Law or the Prophets" may imply "that Jesus' opponents specifically accused Him of destroying the Law in particular." If that is correct, then the wording would amount to "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law, or the Prophets either for that matter" (Quarles, 89). I think He is probably correct, since the second reference found in verse 18 is simply to the "Law." Nevertheless, by linking the two Jesus is making a larger point, namely, that He in some sense "fulfills" both (i.e., the entire witness of Scripture).

¹² This position is most common. See, for example: R. A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 50-53; W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1988), 1:497; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 178-180; Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1993), 108; Carson, "Matthew," 146; cf. Carson's previous position, which illustrates how difficult the issue really is to settle, found in Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount*, 40.

¹³ Chrysostom, *Hom. Matt. 16:5*, who wrote that Jesus "said this not of the ancient laws, but of those which He was proceeding to enact." Other scholars who see this as a reference to the remaining commands found in the Sermon on the Mount include: R. J. Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition*, SNTSMS 28 (Gatlingen: Vandenhoeck and Reprecht, 1956), 110-112; B. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 108-109. These sources were derived from the citations in Quarles, 99.

¹⁴ For a great discussion on the merits and weaknesses of both positions and why they are not mutually exclusive, see Quarles, 99-100.

¹⁵ Osborne, 182.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “He has in fact nothing to add to the commandments of God, except this, that he keeps them.” Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (SCM: 1959), 111.

¹⁸ Even here a case is made by R. T. France that “fulfill” means to “bring about God’s redemptive purpose through Jesus (*The Gospel of Matthew* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 182). Also cited in Quarles, 91n.9.

¹⁹ According to Quarles, “if keeping commandments were the topic of 5:17-18, one would have expected Matthew to use the verbs ‘do’ (*poeiō*), ‘keep’ (*tērēō*), or ‘guard’ (*phulassō*) as He did elsewhere when referring to obedience to commands (5:19; 7:24, 26; 19:17, 20).” Quarles, 91.

²⁰ James Montgomery Boice adds, “The issue in this paragraph is not how Jesus lived but what he was teaching.” James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 81.

²¹ Osborne, 181-182.

²² John Wesley, *The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey* (ed. Kenneth J. Collins and Jason E. Vickers; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 528.

²³ Matthew 1:22; 2:15; 2:17; 2:23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54; 26:56; 27:9. The one possible exception is 3:15, but cf. fn. xviii.

²⁴ By the way, while most of the formulas are referring to verses from the Prophetic writings, at least one comes from the Law—Matthew 11:10; cf. Exodus 23:20.

²⁵ D. A. Carson writes, “The best interpretation of these difficult verses says that Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets in that they point to him, and he is their fulfillment.” Carson, “Matthew,” 174. Similarly, Blomberg, 20; D. L. Turner, *Matthew* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 162.

²⁶ Boice, 81.

²⁷ These examples that follow are reiterated in a variety of Timothy Kellers sermons, preached at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, including, “Basics” (October 3, 1993), “What Is the Bible” (October 10, 1993), and “Born of the Gospel” (February 11, 2001). The quotation that follows was taken from the last sermon mentioned.

²⁸ A wonderful resource to help us understand this on each page of the biblical text is Crossway’s recently published *Gospel Transformation Bible*. The stated goals of this Bible, which is formatted like a traditional study Bible but has a different objective, are twofold: “(1) to enable readers to understand that the whole Bible is a unified message of the gospel of God’s grace culminating in Jesus, and (2) to help believers apply this good news to their everyday lives in a heart-transforming way. Our hope is that, as Christians throughout the world learn to see the message of salvation by grace unfolding throughout Scripture, they will respond to God with greater love, faithfulness, and power.” GTB, vii. Later in the “Introduction” Bryan Chapell, the general editor of the *Gospel Transformation Bible*, expounds four examples of how the Scriptures bear witness to who Christ is and/or what he must do. I’ll quote that section in its entirety below for your benefit and as a way of demonstrating the value of the resource so that you might consider purchasing it for your Bible study times. “(1) Some passages— such as the prophecies and the messianic Psalms— clearly predict who Christ is and what he will do. Isaiah wrote of the Messiah, that “his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end” (Isa. 9: 6– 7). This is a clear prediction of Jesus’ person and work, and there are many more such predictions in the prophetic portions of Scripture. (2) Other passages prepare God’s people to understand the grace that God must provide to redeem his people. When God uses his servant David to show mercy to King Saul’s lame grandson (a royal descendant who would be David’s blood-rival for Israel’s throne), we understand something about God’s ways of forgiving enemies and showing mercy toward the helpless. Not only do many Old Testament passages prepare God’s people to understand the grace of his provision, they also prepare the people to understand their need. When Paul writes in Galatians 3: 24 that the law was our schoolmaster or guardian helping lead us to Christ, we understand that the high and holy standards of the law ultimately prepare us to seek God’s provision of mercy rather than to depend on the quality of our performance to make us acceptable to him. The sacrifice system further prepares us to understand that without the shedding of blood there is no atonement for our failures to keep the law (Heb. 9: 22). And because Abraham’s faith was counted to him as righteousness, we are prepared to understand that our standing before God depends upon our faith in the provision of another (Rom. 4: 23– 24). Grace does not spring up like a surprise jack-in-the-box in the New Testament. God’s people have been prepared for millennia to understand and receive the grace of Christ on their behalf. (3) Because grace is the key to understanding the purposes of God throughout the whole Bible, culminating in Christ, aspects of the gospel are reflected throughout Scripture. When a text neither plainly predicts nor prepares for Christ’s person or work, the redemptive truths reflected in the text can always be discerned by asking two questions that are fair to ask of any text: What does this text reflect about the nature of God who provides redemption? and/ or What does this text reflect about the nature of humanity that requires redemption? These simple questions are the lenses to the reading glasses through which we can look at any text to see what the Bible is reflecting of God’s nature and/ or human nature. Inevitably these lenses enable us see that God is holy and we are not, or that God is sovereign and we are vulnerable, or that God is merciful and we require his mercy. Such reading glasses always make us aware of our need of God’s grace to compensate for our sin and inability. Christ may not be specifically mentioned in the text, but the reflection of God’s nature and ours makes the necessity of his grace apparent. Using these reading glasses throughout the Old and New Testament will enable us to see the gracious nature of God who provides redemption as he gives strength to the weak, rest to the weary, deliverance to the disobedient, faithfulness to the unfaithful, food to the hungry, and salvation to sinners. We also learn something about the human nature that requires redemption when heroes fail, patriarchs lie, kings fall, prophets cower, disciples doubt, and covenant people become idolaters. These lenses prevent us from setting up characters in the Bible only as moral heroes to emulate, rather than as

flawed men and women who themselves needed the grace of God. Every text, seen in its redemptive context, is reflecting an aspect of humanity's fallen condition that requires the grace of God. Focus upon this fallen condition will inevitably cause readers to consider the divine solution characteristic of the grace that culminates in the provision of the Savior. (4) Finally, we understand how God's redemptive message appears in Scripture by those texts that are a result of Christ's work in our behalf. We are justified and sanctified as a result of Christ's atoning work and spiritual indwelling. Our prayers are heard as a result of his priestly intercession for us. Our wills are transformed as result of our union with him. We worship as a result of God's gracious provision for every aspect of our salvation. Ultimately, the reason to read Scripture with an eye to understanding how our actions and status are a result of grace is to keep straight the order of Scripture's imperatives and indicatives. The imperatives (what we are to do) are always a consequence of the indicatives (who we are by God's gracious provision); what we do is never a cause of who we are with respect to our eternal status in God's kingdom and family. We obey as a result of being God's beloved, not to cause God to love us. His grace toward us precedes, enables, and motivates our efforts toward holiness. A key example of imperatives flowing from indicatives occurs when God gives the Ten Commandments to his people. He does not make their obedience a condition of his love. He first declares, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Deut. 5: 6), and then he gives the commandments. He rescued his people before they obeyed. Their obedience was expected as a consequence of receiving God's deliverance, not as a condition for obtaining it. By understanding this consistent redemptive pattern in Scripture, we not only have a tool for understanding the Bible's structure, we have a way of seeing the grace of the gospel even in passages dominated by God's commands. The indicative/ imperative pattern of Scripture leads us next to consider why it is so important to see the grace message pervading Scripture and culminating in Christ. So far we have only considered how we can excavate grace from all of Scripture, but we have not discussed why this is so important. The reason is that grace not only underlies God's imperatives, it is also the ultimate power that enables us to live these standards, as we are transformed from the inside out." *Gospel Transformation Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), from the "Introduction" by Bryan Chapell, ix-xi.

²⁹ Timothy Keller writes, "Unless you see every story as really telling one story, unless you see every single story as pointing to Jesus, the Bible will be a crushing weight that might coerce and might reform you, but it will not be a transforming, joy-inflicting power." So when you read the Bible does it feel like a "crushing weight" or "joy-inflicting news"? Keller gives a helpful example of these possibilities by looking at how we interpret the story of David and Goliath.

"Is the story of David and Goliath all by itself, just as it is, good news? No. Do you know why? If you don't see it pointing as Peter says to the sufferings and glory of Christ, it's not good news. It's bad news...What it's saying is, 'You need to be courageous like David. You need to go out there, and you need to face the giants of your life. You need to summon up the faith, summon up the courage. There's the giant of failure. There's the giant of criticism. There's the giant of suffering. You can do it.'

Is that good news? Do you read that story and weep with joy? Is it a gospel? No, it's bad news if you just say, 'Now boys and girls, we've studied David and Goliath today in Sunday school. Go home and be like David.' The little kids aren't smart enough to realize they should sue their teacher for malpractice, and they're not smart enough to realize it would be better if they didn't know that story at all, because what they're going to do is they're going to say, 'Now I can do that,' but they can't...they're going to find, no, they can't because it wasn't good news. It didn't penetrate. It didn't melt their heart.

Here's the point. Unless I see David as first of all pointing to my real David, the true David, the true Champion, the One who went up against the ultimate giant of sin and the law and the death ... He didn't go at the risk of his life; he went at the cost of his life. Because of the victory he procured there, his victory is imputed to me. Why? What's so important about that? I will never deal with the giant of failure in my life unless I know God is absolutely for me no matter what. I will never deal with the giant of criticism and disapproval unless I know I have the approval of the only One who counts....I'll never be like little David unless I am melted with the good news, melted with the joy of seeing what the ultimate true and better David did for me. Do you see that? Not until I see what Peter says, not until I sense the joy that comes from what Peter says that this is really about the sufferings and glory of the Messiah has the Word gone in...

When Jesus says, "Every part of the Scripture is about me," until you see the Bible is not a compendium of instruction but it is a true story, then when you read the Bible, it'll be basically about you, what you must do. If you see the Bible as basically about him, what he has done, then you'll be able to do. Then you'll be able to be like Esther and you'll be able to be like David... Instead of the Bible becoming a compendium of instruction which will crush you into the ground, it's turning into a joy-inflicting story, and you're being changed by it. You will be able to handle the giant of criticism, and you will be able to handle the giant of suffering if you, first of all, see the ultimate giants, the only giants that could really bring you down, have been handled by him..." (Keller, "Born of the Gospel.")

Do you see, friends, what a difference it makes when you read the scriptures through the lens of the Gospel? When you read it as a Christian? When you see the individual stories as contributing to the bigger story of the sufferings and glories of the Messiah? Doesn't this make you want to pick up the Scriptures and read them like Jesus read them? To see how every page is fulfilled in Christ? If you do this, it will change your life. It will help you understand the Gospel more than ever. And the weight of Scripture will fuel your joy, instead of continually crushing you.