

The Law Was Not Superseded by the Christian Dispensation

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Based on Christ's words, he did not become a human being and then die, to cover everyone's sins (Jn. 1:29), so that his Father's commands could be superseded. Nor did he become a sacrifice for sin, so that everyone could continue breaking God's law and commandments (Mt. 19:17),

Do not think that I (Christ) came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. ¹⁸For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot (the smallest letter) or one tittle (the smallest stroke in a Hebrew letter) will by no means pass from the law (which is not limited to the Pentateuch; cf. Jn. 10:34; 15:25) till all is fulfilled. ¹⁹Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so (as Satan did, and taught; cf. Gen. 3:4), shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them (as God's people do; cf. Rev. 12:17; 14:12), he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:17-19; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted).

Many claim Matthew 5:17 is saying that Christ fulfilled the law so that Christians do not have to. They often support this position by saying that it is impossible for anyone to keep God's law, and therefore He does not expect us to. However, if these two assertions are correct, why did the Apostle Paul contradict them? Central to a correct understanding of these issues is examining which law Jesus Christ fulfilled when he died to cover the sins of the world. First, we will examine Paul's rebuttal regarding the position that Christians do not have to keep God's law and commands,

What shall we say then? Shall we continue (living) in sin (cf. 1Jn. 3:4) that grace (God's forgiveness) may abound? ²Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin (symbolically at baptism) live any longer in it? ³Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we were buried (symbolically, when we were immersed in water) with him through baptism into death (our old sinful way of living was put to rest), that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory (power) of the Father, even so **we also should walk in newness of life** (Rom. 6:1-4; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Paul did express how difficult it is to obey every word of God (Rom. 7:15-24; cf. Mt. 4:4), but he also explained that when we sin we can be forgiven and our relationship with God is maintained,

Seeing then that we (those who have repented of sin and been baptized) have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession

(made at baptism). ¹⁵For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses (including our proclivity to sin), but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us **therefore come boldly to the throne of grace** (forgiveness), **that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need** (Heb. 4:14-16; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

As Jesus Christ proclaimed the will of his Father perfectly, his statement regarding God's position on forgiveness confirms that it is limitless,

Then Peter came to him (Christ) and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" ²²Jesus said to him, '**I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven**' (Mt. 18:21-22; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Yes, even God's people sin after their baptism, but they must continue to ask for forgiveness knowing that Almighty God is more than willing to remove any sin providing they repent of their transgressions (see study: David Never Sinned Except in the Matter of Uriah). This is not only a New Testament concept,

Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow (symbolically the sins are washed away leaving the sinner clean); though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. ¹⁹**If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land** (Isa. 1:18-19; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

So which law did Christ fulfill, and does that mean there is no spiritual aspect to this law? Paul stated that God's law is spiritual and therefore, even if a physical aspect of God's law is fulfilled, it does not mean the law is no longer applicable (Rom. 7:14). Also, when and why was this law introduced?

The law that Christ fulfilled had to do with a sacrifice for sin, and this was pictured symbolically through the shed blood of animals that God declared as "clean." These animals were temporary substitutes that would no longer be necessary after Christ's death on a stake,

And according to the law almost all things are purged (cleansed) with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission (forgiveness for sin) (Heb. 9:22; cf. Lev. 5:7; 11-13; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Included with the animal sacrifices, were various ceremonies and ordinances that would also be fulfilled by Christ's death,

It (the Temple system) was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him (the sinner) who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience – ¹⁰concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of *reformation* (SGD 1357; *straighten thoroughly*). ¹¹But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this (physical) creation. ¹²Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood he entered the Most Holy Place (Almighty God's presence) once for all, having obtained eternal redemption (forgiveness of sins by Christ's shed blood). ¹³For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies (sets apart) for the purifying

(cleansing) of the flesh, ¹⁴how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the (assistance of Almighty God's) eternal Spirit offered himself without spot (blemish; i.e. sinless) to God, purge (cleanse) your conscience from dead works (sins) to serve the Living God? ¹⁵And for this reason he (Christ) is the mediator of the new covenant, by means of (his) death, for the redemption (forgiveness) of the transgressions (sins) under the first covenant, that those who are called (to repentance; cf. Rom. 2:4b; Ac. 11:18) may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (everlasting life) (Heb. 9:9-15; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Therefore, the "law" that Christ fulfilled by his sacrifice was associated with the temple system, which administered the animal sacrifices, washings, food and drink offerings, etc. This aspect of God's law continued to function for forty years after Christ's death and resurrection. After Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 CE, the Levitical priesthood no longer had the authority to administer any of God's laws pertaining to the animal sacrificial system. The writer of Hebrews confirmed this truth,

Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law) what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? ¹²For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law (Heb. 7:11-12).

Because the entire sacrificial system pre-figured the ultimate sacrifice for sin, Jesus Christ, it was no longer necessary following his death and resurrection. The validity of this system, which included circumcision, was hotly debated in the early church of God. Some Jewish converts still believed that the animal sacrificial system needed to be observed. They also taught that circumcision had to be upheld for anyone wishing to be part of the early church. These teachings were very divisive and Paul worked diligently to refute those who were promoting these beliefs. This is why Paul spoke about the law "having a shadow of the good things to come." He was addressing the law of sacrifice which was a temporary measure that pointed to the only sacrifice that would make it possible for mankind to have a change of heart, and a willingness to obey God,

For the law (of animal sacrifice), having a shadow of the good things to come (as a result of Christ's sacrifice), and not the very image of the things (because they are spiritually discerned), **can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.** ²For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers once purged (cleansed of their sin), would have no more consciousness of sins. ³But **in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.** ⁴For **it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins** (Heb. 10:1-4; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Therefore when any of God's servants spoke about the law being changed, they were addressing the temple system of worship which was given to ancient Israel as a temporary means of dealing with sins. However, the final solution for removing sin could only come with Christ's sacrifice,

Therefore, when he (Christ) came into the world, he said: Sacrifice and offering You (Almighty God) did not desire, but a body You have prepared for me (Christ). ⁶In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You (Almighty God) had no pleasure. ⁷Then I (Christ) said, 'Behold, I have come – in the volume of the book (numerous Biblical prophecies) it is written of me (Christ) – to do Your will, O God' (Heb. 10:5-7; Ed. notes in parentheses).

With this background, the scriptures that some people use to claim that God's law was superseded can be examined,

The law and the prophets were until John (began preaching repentance of sin; cf. Mt. 3:1-12; 4:17). Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it (Lk. 16:16; Ed. note in parenthesis).

This last scripture does not say that God's law and commandments are no longer applicable. Instead it is stating that God's law, including the animal sacrificial system and His prophets, foretold the coming of Jesus Christ, and this would culminate in John's ministry,

For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John (Mt. 11:13).

If God's law and commandments were meant to end with John's ministry then why did he preach repentance of sin? There would be no need to repent of sin if the law was going to be removed (cf. 1Jn. 3:4). To confirm that God's law and commandments are still in effect, the very next verse in the book of Luke reinforced this truth,

And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle (smallest stroke in a Hebrew letter) of the law to fail (Lk. 16:17; Ed. note in parenthesis).

The context of the next scripture, used by some to claim that Christ did away with his Father's law and commandments, is dealing with circumcision. Every male child during the First Covenant period was commanded to be circumcised when they were eight days old (Lev. 12:3). The blood of circumcision was the means through which any male could remain in fellowship with Almighty God (cf. Gen. 17:14). In like manner, no one can have fellowship with God during the Second Covenant without Christ's shed blood being applied to cover their sins. Therefore, it is only by Christ's blood that anyone today can have fellowship with God. Circumcision of the flesh is no longer the means through which an individual maintains their relationship with God. However, the law of circumcision still applies because Christians are to have a circumcised heart or attitude (cf. Rom. 2:28-29),

For he (Christ) himself is our peace, who has made both (Jew and Gentile) one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us, ¹⁵having abolished in his flesh (through Christ's death on behalf of sinners) the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances (regarding circumcision), so as to create in himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and that he might reconcile them both (Jew and Gentile) to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity (that used to exist between the nation of Israel and the Gentiles) (Eph. 2:14-16; Ed. notes in parentheses).

It is interesting that this last section of scripture is taken out of context by some people so they can make the false claim that Christ did away with his Father's law and commandments. Just a few verses earlier, Paul made it very clear that circumcision was the subject being discussed,

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what

is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands – ¹²that at that time (during the First Covenant period) you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope (of forgiveness for sin) and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:11-13; cf. Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11; Ed. notes in parentheses).

The last scripture, used by those who wish to disobey God's law and commandments, is describing the death penalty which is an integral part of God's law for those who commit a capital offense. If this context is avoided, it is easy to twist scripture to suit a "pet theory,"

But now we have been delivered from the law (regarding the death sentence for capital offenses; cf. Rom. 6:23), having died (symbolically at baptism) to what we were held by (our past sins), so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter (Rom. 7:6; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Therefore those, who have repented of their past sins and begun living a new life of trust and obedience toward every word of God (Mt. 4:4), no longer need to fear everlasting death which was the law during the First Covenant for anyone who committed a capital offense. This freedom from the death penalty was made possible by Christ's death on behalf of every sinner who repents (Ac. 2:38).

In conclusion, there is no contradiction between the scriptures that some use to claim that Christ did away with his Father's law and commandments. Instead, Christ fulfilled certain aspects of God's law regarding animal sacrifice, circumcision, and various washings and ceremonies that were part of the temple system. However, the spiritual aspect of these laws is still in effect as the final scripture confirms,

I (Paul) beseech (urge) you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you **present your bodies a living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service (Rom. 12:1; Ed. note in parentheses; emphasis added).

The law of sacrifice means that everyone, who claims to know God, will cease disobeying His commands and seek to do those things that are in accordance with His word no matter how hard it may be at times (Heb. 12:1).

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor. 11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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