

Our Relationship to the Law

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It frankly involves a misunderstanding among many Believers as to how the Law of Moses relates to us. In other words, our relationship to the Law. And that's what we're going to be talking about today because I'm seeing Christians getting sucked into thinking that their relationship to the Law of Moses, particularly, things like the Ten Commandments, Sabbath laws, food laws and things like that, are binding.

And there is a belief that even those of us who are in Christ are still obligated to the rigors of the Law. And so my goal here this morning is to try to clear up some misunderstanding and also to equip you guys if somebody comes and talks to you about this issue, or they have questions perhaps, or they make statements to you about it; whether it's about Sabbath keeping or food laws or just the Ten Commandments and how we need to keep those things and so forth and so on.

I want you to know how to respond because there are some very fine sounding arguments related to this and if we're not particularly grounded in the Word of God— and particularly what Jesus did for us on the cross, there is for us, a vulnerability, in the body of Christ to be drawn in to these sorts of things.

So before we look at our first passage, and what I'm going to do here in a moment is I'm going to take a passage of Scripture that I think is one that a lot of Christians struggle with and even stumble over. But I want to begin by defining some terms because there are terms I'm going to be using repeatedly throughout this study and it's important that you guys know what I mean. So that we're on the same page, as it were, related to these and the first one is a term and we'll put these up on the screen for you.

Legalism

A dependence on morality or the keeping of rules to be acceptable to God.

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The first one is legalism. And that's one of those words that gets people's blood pressure up a little bit because nobody wants to be told they're legalistic. Nobody. Nobody wants to have you say to them, Well, you're just legalistic.

And frankly, there's even some misunderstanding related to what it means from the standpoint of Christians. But it is essentially a dependence on morality and works; in other words, things I do in order to be acceptable to God.

Now, I know that in the broader sense of legalism, it can be really any adherence to rules that are extreme. But we're not talking about a general definition of legalism. If somebody was absolutely— they never went more than even one mile an hour over the speed limit, you could say to them, Wow, you're pretty legalistic about obeying the speed limit.

And technically speaking in a general sense, that's an okay usage, but for Biblical purposes, it's always about doing things so that God will accept me. Okay. Are you with me? So legalism from a Biblical standpoint is what I do, what you do, so that God will accept you— so that He'll love you; so that He'll embrace you.

And the other thing that we're going to be referring to quite a bit is the Law of Moses. And, that is going to encompass really the whole Law that's given through Moses:

The Law of Moses

- The 10 Commandments
- The food laws
- Sabbath regulations
- etc...

The Ten Commandments, which includes, of course... there's elements of the food laws, Sabbath regulations, feasts, all that kind of stuff. It's all encompassed in the Law of Moses. So I wanted you to know it's not just limited to the Ten Commandments, which some people think that it is.

This is the point where I want to take you to a passage that I think that people often stumble over, and it's in the Gospel of Matthew. So turn there please, if you would, with me; Matthew chapter 5. And this is in the Sermon on the Mount. And there's a passage of Scripture here where Jesus speaks of the Law. And I have actually heard this passage quoted by individuals who feel obligated to keep the Law. And they actually use this as a proof text to explain and to undergird their belief in law keeping.

And we're going to begin in— skip down to verse 17. Matthew 5:17, and it goes like this. We're going to read through verse 20, Jesus is speaking here. He says, *“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, heaven and earth. Excuse me, 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.” (ESV)*

Can we pray for just a moment? Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the ministry of Your Word today. As we dig into this, as we unpack this passage of Scripture, please use this Lord to bring wisdom and freedom and grace and understanding. We ask it in Jesus’ Name. Amen.

In that few verses that we read there, there's actually quite a bit that Jesus is saying, but we're going to boil it down to three particular statements that I want to look at here this morning, and we're going to put each of those on the screen. The very first one is statement number one, the quotation from Jesus, where He said,

Statement #1:

“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.”

“Do not think that I've come to abolish the Law or the Prophets;...

It is truly amazing to me how many people will quote that part, and that part alone, as a proof text. I've seen this happening among Christians; among people whether online or face-to-face. Somebody will quote the beginning of this passage and say hey, listen to me, man. Jesus said, I have not come to abolish the Law, so... and they keep it; they stop it right there.

If Jesus said He didn't come to abolish the Law— well, you know what that means. That means we need to keep the Law. That means that we are obligated to the Law. And then they begin to spiel from there.

Now, if you're just talking to somebody and you don't have a Bible open at the moment, and they're just quoting some of these things, you're going, Well, yeah, that's what it says in the Bible. And they just carry you down a path of explaining this thing in such a way as to bring you under the Law.

And I want to look a little bit more deeply at this, which is frankly what we often don't do. So if you look at that statement that's there on the screen, "*Do not think that I've come to abolish the Law and the Prophets;*" you'll notice that Jesus says what He did not come to do, and then He says what He came to do. Right?

What did He not come to do? He didn't "*come to abolish the Law and the Prophets.*" And the word abolish is just what you would expect it to mean. It means to destroy or to throw down, literally in the Greek.

Here's what Jesus said He did come to do: He said, I have come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. And that is an important thing to remember, to understand, because it does get misquoted.

I actually read online where a gal was arguing from this statement, using it as a proof text that we need to keep the Law. And she said, you know what Jesus said? He said, I've not "*come to abolish the Law or the Prophets,*" but to uphold them. That sounds really good, doesn't it? But that's not what Jesus said. He didn't say: I've come to uphold them. He said, I've come to fulfill them. Okay.

So, you've got to be careful and if you don't, if you're not tracking... When somebody talks to you and it just doesn't sound right, the best thing for you to do is say, do you have a Bible here that we can look at or can I grab mine? Let's read that together.

Because often if you just start reading through it slowly you're going to be able to deal with some of these things. You're going to be able to expose some of them. Jesus said, I have come to fulfill. And that is such an important word for you and I to think about and understand. The Greek means to make full or to complete. I have come to make full the Law and the Prophets. I have come to complete the Law and the Prophets. Right?

The question you and I have to ask is this: What did He mean by that? See it's one thing to say, or for us to quote, what the Bible really truly does say, which is, I have come to fulfill. But what does that mean? What does it mean when Jesus says, I have come to fulfill...?

Well, let me start by telling you what it doesn't mean. Fulfill does not mean end. Jesus did not say, I've come to end the Law. He didn't. That's not encompassed in the definition of that word fulfill. What's interesting about that word; it's the exact same word that is used in the New Testament when it speaks of Old

Testament prophecies being fulfilled. Let me give you an example, put it up on the screen here for you. From John 19,

John 19:24 (ESV)

This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, “They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, “They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.”

This was to fulfill. Same word. Same Greek word that Jesus is recorded as using there in Matthew chapter 5 when He says, I have come to fulfill. So when Jesus fulfilled the Law, He's basically telling us He's the fulfillment. He is the fulfillment of the Law.

There are several Bible passages that show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law. I want to show you just one from Colossians chapter 2 on the screen. By the way, I'm going to be showing you lots of scriptures on the screen so get used to looking up there. It says,

Colossians 2:16-17 (ESV)

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

Therefore (Paul writing here to the church in Colossae) *let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink*, (that's the food laws related to the Law) *or with regard to a festival* (that's regarding the feast and festivals of the Law) *or a new moon or a Sabbath*. (related to Sabbath regulations. He says, don't let people judge you about questions about those. Look what he says here) *These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*

I want you to notice regarding the food regulations, regarding the annual festivals and feasts, regarding the Sabbath observances. Paul says, and we're going to highlight this first section in the verse, he says, “*These are a shadow of the things to come,...*”

Colossians 2:16-17 (ESV)

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

What is a shadow? Well, obviously that's a figurative word that's used to describe not the real thing, but just a piece, a pointer, a shadow. Right? If I were to hear you walking and then I see your shadow approaching before I actually see you, I would know that you're coming, and it would point to the fact that you're coming. But that shadow isn't you. It's just a pointer, right? It's telling me, it's alerting me about the real thing that is upcoming.

So what is the real thing that God wants us to see? That's where we highlight the other part of this verse. It says,

Colossians 2:16-17 (ESV)

*Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, **but the substance belongs to Christ.***

“but the substance (the substance, the real part that God wants us to see) belongs to Christ.”

Now, again, this is just one example in Colossians where the apostle Paul brings out the fact that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of aspects of the Law. And so what we gain from this is, what I want to advance for you this morning as four points of fulfillment. And that's what we'll put up on the screen for those of you taking notes. First one is:

Four Points of Fulfillment

- Jesus fulfilled the teachings of the Law and the Prophets in that He brought forth their full meaning.

Jesus fulfilled the teachings of the Law and the prophets in that He brought forth their full meaning. The word fulfilled also means opened up and completed.

The Jews did not understand the full meaning of passages in the Law. They heard things like, “*You shall not commit adultery...*” (Exodus 20:14, Matthew 5:27) But Jesus explained to them that it was more than just physically having an extramarital relationship.

Jesus said, “*You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you if you*” even lust in your heart for someone, you have already committed adultery. (Matthew 5:28)

You see, Jesus gave clarity. He brought dimension and dynamic to the Word, to the teachings of the Old Testament. He brought fulfillment. He filled them out and helped us to understand what they really meant.

Then Jesus, the next point on here is Jesus fulfilled the predictions of the Law and the Prophets, in the end that He is the One they predicted. He is the Promised One. He is the reality behind the shadows. Right? They all point to Him. They all point to Jesus. He is The One.

Four Points of Fulfillment

- Jesus fulfilled the teachings of the Law and the Prophets in that He brought forth their full meaning.

Okay thirdly, Jesus fulfilled the moral requirements of the Law and the Prophets in that He fully obeyed them. And He obviously clarified their meaning as well, which we've already mentioned. But He fulfilled the moral requirements in that He lived a perfect life related to the Law. You guys get that? Jesus lived perfectly as it relates to the Law. He fulfilled the Law. He lived— He kept the Law. Jesus kept the Law. He never disobeyed anything related to the Law. You and I do it daily, but He never did. And in that sense, He fulfilled the requirements, the moral requirements of the Law. And then lastly, and this is one of the most beautiful things.

Four Points of Fulfillment

- Jesus fulfilled the teachings of the Law and the Prophets in that He brought forth their full meaning.
- Jesus fulfilled the legal demands of the Law and the Prophets by His death on the cross, taking the penalty we deserved.

Jesus fulfilled the legal demands of the Law and the Prophets by His death on the cross because that's where He took our penalty.

You guys know what the legal demands of the Law is, right? It's death. Isn't that what Paul said? The wages of sin is what? It's death. (Romans 6:23) Okay? So the Law is legally required to pass a sentence of death on you and me. It's legally required. Because we've disobeyed, we've violated the Law. Jesus came and fulfilled that demand of the Law by dying for us.

And of course, He was qualified to die for us because He never violated the Law in the first place. And that's what made Him qualified. If I wanted to die for you, God would say, sorry Paul, you can't do that. You're disqualified on the

basis that you've broken My Law and if you're going to die for anybody, you'd have to die for yourself. And of course, once you die for yourself, you won't live at all.

Well, Jesus could die for us. And then He had the power to raise Himself from the dead and thus live again, causing us to have that same promise. So you can see how Jesus fulfilled these four points of Biblical fulfillment. And that is, of course, why Paul wrote what he did to the Romans. In Romans chapter 10, when he said,

Romans 10:4 (ESV)

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

That word, end, interesting in the Greek; it means, to set out for a definite goal, a definite point. I looked it up in my Greek dictionary. The word end, to set out for a goal, a particular goal.

Jesus set out for the goal of fulfillment of all that the Law demanded and He reached it. He reached His goal. So that's why Paul says, "...*Christ is the end...*" The completion, the fulfillment of the Law. Right? "...*for righteousness.*" All right?

The second statement we're looking at from Matthew chapter 5 is this section where Jesus says,

Statement #2

"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."

"Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same and so forth will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them..."

And again, this is pointed to by individuals who are into Law keeping and they'll say, hey, Jesus said it right here. He said it right here. It's just as clear as day. If you relax one of the least of these commandments.... Right? That's wrong. You can't do that. So Sabbath keeping— you've got to keep the Sabbath.

The food laws— you have to keep the food laws. And on and on and on they go, Says it right here, so this one really tweaks people's heads.

Well, you've got to understand something about the people Jesus was talking to, the Jews. They were pros at relaxing the Law. I mean, they had spent centuries working around the rigors of the Law to suit their lifestyle. And so Jesus is reminding them in this statement that there are no— there's no allowance here to relax the Law because that's what they were doing.

They found all kinds of loopholes. (Pastor Paul imitates what ancient Jews might have said) Oh, but you can do this and you can do that; don't worry; you can.... So and Jesus condemned the religious leaders on several occasions saying, You know what? You guys have just introduced to the people a bunch of rules that are made up by men and you've actually violated the Law of God.

They were constantly doing this. But listen, this is very important. Here's why none of the Law can be relaxed. Here's why none of it is ever going to fade away. The Law is a reflection of the holiness of God. And the holiness of God isn't going anywhere. And since the Law is a reflection of His holiness, the Law isn't going anywhere.

The Law will always be the Law. The demands of the Law will always be the demands of the Law. The righteous standards of the Law will always be the righteous standards of the Law. Nothing's going to fade. Nothing's going to be minimized. You can't minimize the Law any more than you can minimize the holiness of God. Now that doesn't mean Jesus didn't fulfill the Law for us, but the Law remains the same. It does not change because God does not change. It is unchanging, it is eternal, because God is unchanging and eternal. Final statement from Matthew chapter 5, verse 17. Statement number 3:

Statement #3

“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

And once again, the people who get tangled into rule keeping will point to verses like this and say, See, Jesus said, hey man, you're righteousness— you need to follow the Law, and you need to do it better than the Pharisees... which is pretty amazing because if they had lived back during the time of the Pharisees, their minds would have been blown because the Pharisees were on

the top of the righteous food chain as it relates to Israel and the keeping of the Law. I mean, nobody did it better than them— they kept the Law and then some.

They also violated aspects of the Law, but in the people's eyes, these guys were perfect. And yet Jesus comes along and says, Oh by the way, the righteousness of the Pharisees, the scribes? Not good enough. You need to have a better righteousness. The people must have thought to themselves, Okay, then I'm out. Because there's no way that I can do better than these guys. But, Jesus actually revealed in other places why the righteousness of the Pharisees and the scribes wasn't good enough.

And you know what? You know what that reason was? It's because it was just external. It was all outward. Let me show you this passage from Matthew chapter 23. Look what it says. It says,

Matthew 23:27-28 (ESV)

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

See, that's why the righteousness of the religious leaders wasn't good enough. It was an external show of righteousness. And what God demands is internal righteousness.

Now you might be thinking to yourself, Well, I'm still out because I'm not good enough to be a Pharisee; I can't even keep the outward thing very long... but the inward righteousness? Man, I'm busted. My heart is just not, I know my heart is not always right before God. I sin, I have thoughts I know that are impure. I deal with jealousy. I deal with anger. I deal with all kinds of things that just constantly disqualify me.

Well, you know what, it doesn't matter whether you keep rules or not, everybody's disqualified. Even if you do keep rules and if you keep them perfectly, you're still disqualified. You know why? Because keeping rules can't change what's going on in here (Pastor Paul points to his heart) It only makes it

appear to look good out here. But in here, in the heart, that stuff can't be changed by rules and regulations.

I want to quote one of my favorite passages out of the NIV from Colossians chapter 2. Check this out. Paul writes and says,

Colossians 2:20, 23 (NIV84)

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belong to it, do you submit to its rules? Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belong to (the world) it, do you submit to its rules? Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but (look at this last phrase) they lack any value in restraining (the flesh, which he refers to there, or the NIV refers to as) sensual indulgence.

In other words, rules cannot restrain the flesh. Okay? We can make it appear like we've whipped it into shape, but the heart hasn't changed. And that's what God looks at.

He cares about and looks at the heart. Right? Now that is exactly why Paul gives this conclusion about Law keeping from Romans chapter 3.

Romans 3:20 (ESV)

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight...

For by works of the Law, no human being will be justified in His sight...

This is one of those verses that people who are into legalism. They don't quote this or if they do, they misquote it. "...by works of the Law, (by keeping rules) no human being will (ever) be justified..." Ever.

Are you trying to be a good person? Are you trying to keep rules and regulations? Are you trying to be acceptable to God? In other words, are you on a performance track? It's not going to work.

It can't work. You can't be good enough. Okay? No one will ever be good enough by keeping rules or keeping regulations. Paul doesn't stop there. He goes on to tell you how you can be good enough. And aren't you glad about that? Look at the next couple of verses.

Romans 3:21-22 (ESV)

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it — the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

But now (Paul writes, I want to tell you about this) *the righteousness of God* (that) *has been...* (revealed and it's been revealed) *apart from law*, (apart from rules) *although the Law and the Prophets* (actually) *bear witness to it* — (they talk about it. He says, this) *...righteousness of God*, (it comes) *through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*

And you know what? That statement that he makes there at the end of that passage; it's so vital that you and I understand it. And this is where, again, people who get involved in rule keeping get so tangled up. They don't get it that I am righteous through faith; not through works, not through being good. God declares me righteous by putting my faith in what? The finished work of Jesus on the cross. He did it. He was good enough. He was victorious. He conquered. He won the victory. Right?

When I put my faith in what He did, that faith is imputed to me as righteous standing before the Father. I am righteous. If somebody comes up to me and asks me, Hey Pastor Paul, are you righteous before God? I'll say, Yes, I am. Not of myself, but because of Him. Right? That's the point. Yes, I am righteous before God.

Am I self-righteous? Pfft! I have no claim to self-righteousness! There is no such thing as self-righteousness! It doesn't exist! People accuse Christians all the time of being self-righteous. Self-righteousness doesn't exist in the Bible! There's no such thing.

There's only God righteousness, and that's a gift that is given because my faith is put in Him and what He accomplished: Jesus, I believe that You died for me on the cross. I believe that You conquered my penalty on the cross. You bore it. You suffered for me. I believe it.

(Pastor Paul spreads his hands in blessing, as Jesus might do.) He says, You are righteous My son; I give you My righteousness. What a blessing! I don't deserve that righteousness. Do you? None of us do.

People keep telling me, Oh, Pastor Paul, I just feel so unworthy. I keep telling them, It's because you are. That's why you feel that way. You are unworthy. We're all unworthy. We should get t-shirts made up, right? I'm unworthy. And then on the back, it can say something like, But Jesus has won the victory! Or something like that.

So the question is this: We're sitting here talking about faith, putting your faith in Jesus and what He did on the cross. So what does that do violence to the Law? Some people think so. People thought that's what Paul preached.

He preached that this faith business— they were saying this (Pastor Paul imitates what Paul's detractors might have said.) The apostle Paul! May I tell you? He's going around telling people to have faith. You know what he's doing to the Law? He's dragging it in the mud! He's diminishing the righteous requirements of the Law, which we are commanded to uphold! That's what this apostle Paul's doing!

Paul asks this question, look at Romans 3:31. This is really important. He says,

Romans 3:31 (ESV)

Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Do we then overthrow the Law by this faith? (in other words, do we do violence to it?) ...On the contrary, we uphold the law.

We— guys, get this: We uphold the Law, we're keeping the Law by faith. So somebody says to me, pastor Paul, do you keep the Sabbath? And I know what they mean. What they're asking me is, Do you do it just like it was commanded in the Old Testament? In other words, you know what they're asking me? Do you keep the shadow? And you and I come back and we say, No, I'm keeping the real thing.

Jesus Christ is my Sabbath rest. I am resting in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. I am not working for my salvation. I'm resting in what He did. And resting is what the Sabbath was all about. It's what it pointed to. It was a shadow of the things to come. The reality is Jesus.

So are you keeping the Sabbath? Yes, I am. Seven days a week. Right? And all the other laws that people can foist upon you. Are you keeping...? Are you and I doing violence to the Law with this faith? No, we're not. We're upholding the Law.

We are upholding the Law... by faith in Jesus Christ. Isn't that good news? Listen, this is freedom you guys. This is freedom from bondage. This is freedom from legalism and being on a performance track with God. God loves you. He loves you. And by faith, you are righteous in the sight of God. What a blessing that is!