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Matthew 5:17: Law and Prophets (Part 1)



Sermon on the Mount - Steve Gregg

In this study of Matthew 5:17, Steve Gregg explores the difficult passage in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says that righteousness must exceed that of the religious leaders of his society. Gregg reflects on the Jewish emphasis on keeping the law in order to be made righteous and suggests that Jesus was trying to demonstrate the impossibility of keeping the law perfectly. He also unpacks the meaning of Jesus' statement that he did not come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them. Gregg suggests that fulfilling the law means bringing spiritual realities foreshadowed by the ceremonial law into existence through Christ.

Transcript

We'll continue now our studies in the Sermon on the Mount, turning to Matthew chapter 5, and beginning on verse 17. I have very frequently indicated that I consider some things about this present passage to make it the more difficult, perhaps the most difficult passage in the Sermon on the Mount, from which to gain the exact meaning that Jesus intended. And the problems within it will be evidenced simply by our reading it, and we will intend to take this session discussing verses 17-20.

And in many ways it is an introduction to what follows for the remainder of this chapter, and possibly much of the sixth chapter as well. In Matthew 5.17, Jesus said, I do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Now Jesus had introduced his sermon by saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And he had wound up the series of Beatitudes with a similar promise to those

who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

The identical promise, actually not similar, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And now he says to them that in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, it must be that their righteousness will exceed the righteousness exhibited by the most respected religious leaders of their society, the scribes and the Pharisees. The Pharisees were not the most numerous of the parties in Israel.

The Sadducees outnumbered them. According to Josephus, there were only about 6,000 Pharisees in all of the Jewish society. But they did exert an influence disproportionate to their numbers, and they were considered by most to be the ones who were really devout.

The Sadducees were more numerous, but they were also more compromised and more involved with cooperation with the Romans, which did not make them popular with the Jewish populace generally. And for that reason, people looked up to the scribes and the Pharisees as the ones who really were toeing the line, holding out the pure religion of Israel against the encroachment of Roman and political and liberal and pagan influence. Now, the Pharisees, as a movement, were the descendants of a movement that arose in the days of the Maccabees or earlier.

But it was the case that before the days of the Maccabees, the Egyptian and Syrian domination of the land of Palestine had brought with it the Hellenization of the Jewish culture. A stadium was built in Jerusalem for running of games, and there were many things about the Greek culture that came into Jerusalem, and there were many who welcomed them. These would be called the Hellenizers.

And the Sadducees actually grew out of a movement that was sort of a Hellenizing movement back in the days of the Greek domination, and after that the Egyptian and Syrian domination, which was Greek, also by culture. And it was in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, of course, that Greek culture became enforced upon the Jews, and it became a capital offense to try to maintain any distinctive of Judaism. Antiochus Epiphanes actually made it illegal to keep Sabbath, to circumcise a child, to possess a copy of the scriptures, to keep the law in any way biblically.

And he sought to enforce a Hellenizing culture. Well, as a reaction to that movement, and even before Antiochus, these people existed, there were a group called the Hasidim who were the holy ones, the ones who really were absolutely not going to compromise their Judaism in the face of encroaching worldliness in their society. These people were willing to be slaughtered wholesale on the Sabbath because they would not lift a sword on the Sabbath to defend themselves.

They didn't believe that was what they should do, and this is how uncompromising they were. They are the ones that Daniel, I think, spoke of in Daniel chapter 11, when he

speaks of the crisis in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes and the Jews of that time. And he says of certain ones that those who are wise will teach others, you know, will teach the others the way of righteousness.

And he says that those who know their God shall be strong and do exploits. And this is a reference to the Hasidim and the revolt that arose from within their ranks, the Maccabean Revolt. And so these were the heroes, even biblically, I mean, not just traditionally, these were biblically the heroes of their era.

And the movement that had risen from that time had become very much, like movements do, corrupted. You know, most movements begin with some spiritual fervor and spiritual life and vitality. And if they continue a generation or two or three, they become so institutionalized pretty much, even if it hasn't become an institution per se.

But they become a thing where forms and routines are followed as the original founders of the movement had followed them. But not really as they had done so, because there's not the spirit and the zeal and the real sincerity and the movement of the Holy Spirit among them that there was among the original founders. And that was the case of the Pharisees.

They had grown out of that movement. But that movement had occurred 200 years earlier than Jesus' ministry time, and it had been largely corrupted in Jesus' estimation. And obviously we accept his estimation of things.

He indicated that the scribes and the Pharisees, who were regarded to be the holy ones, actually the word Pharisees means separated ones, that they were really the righteous people. But Jesus said to his disciples, their righteousness has to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, or else they would never inherit the kingdom of heaven. And obviously the whole sermon, the force of the sermon, is that one must enter.

One must strive to enter in the narrow gate, and one must come into the kingdom of heaven. And so the requirements for entrance are somewhat stringent, as it would appear. And this would almost seem to be in direct contrast with his opening statements from Roman law.

Blessed are the beggars in spirit. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Beggars who own nothing, beggars who have nothing spiritually to commend themselves.

And yet their righteousness has to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Well, of course, the only way that a human's righteousness could exceed that of the meticulous religionists, like the scribes and Pharisees, would be to have a divine righteousness. To have a righteousness that is given by God, which is why these people are the beggars.

They're the beggars in spirit. They know that they cannot be righteous. Even if they are scribes and Pharisees, they know they're not righteous.

And they know that they need to be given the righteousness of God as a gift, like a beggar with an outstretched hand. Now, Jesus, in the verses that follow, is going to talk about the law. And therefore, he introduces his attitude toward the law and his posture toward the law in this section that we're reading.

He is going to, in the verses that follow, verses 21 through the end of chapter 5, give six examples of the way the law had been taught and understood by the religious teachers and by those who heard them. And share what was inadequate about what had been said by these earlier teachers and by the current teachers of his day. Now, many Christians have misunderstood Jesus' approach to the law, I believe.

And even in reading the examples that he gives, you have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not murder, verse 21. But I say to you, verse 22. And in verse 27, you have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not commit adultery, the next verse.

But I say to you, and in verse 31, furthermore, it has been said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. It's from Deuteronomy 24, but I say to you. In verse 33, again, you have heard it was said to those of old, you shall not swear falsely.

You shall perform your oaths to the Lord, but I say to you. Now, in verse 38, you have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I say to you. In verse 43, you have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I say to you.

Now, in every case, Jesus quotes something that they had heard. And in all the cases, the thing they had heard was from the law, with the exception of a little embellishment at the end of the last quotation. You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

Well, it does say in the law, you shall love your neighbor. There's actually nothing there that specifically says you shall hate your enemy. There are certain enemies that you are supposed to treat mercilessly in certain campaigns, the Jews were.

But there is no statement that they were supposed to hate enemies there. So, that last little flourish there, and hate your enemy, was the only thing, among the things they had heard that he was critiquing, that was not in the law. All the other parts were in the law.

The first two statements, you should not murder and you should not commit adultery, were right from the Ten Commandments. The parts about divorce and oaths and an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and love your neighbor come from other places in the law. And all of them were there for law.

But Jesus, after saying, you've heard that it was said this, but I say to you, obviously there's some kind of a contrast. When he says, but, but is a word of contrast. He says, I say to you, and then, of course, he did say something to them that was very unfamiliar to them, very unconventional for the teaching on the subjects that he was speaking of.

Now, this has led some people to believe that Jesus came to do away with the law, because what he said was different than what they had heard about the law. They had heard the law expounded in the synagogues every week from ancient times, as James pointed out at the Jerusalem Council. Moses has those who teach him in the synagogues in every land from ancient times, every Sabbath.

And they had heard this, that Jesus came teaching something different from what they'd heard. And the very points where the differences lay could be illustrated with reference to things they'd heard from the law and what Jesus had to say about the same subject. And since there is, in fact, a contrast there, many have thought in Jesus' day, and even since then, even Christians have often thought that Jesus had come to really nullify the law, to essentially disagree with the law, to stand against the law.

And that's something that Jesus needed to clarify right from the beginning. You see, verses 17 through 20 are an introduction to a six-point sermon, as it were, that falls within this larger sermon. Introductions are good.

It's good to have introductions and not just particulars, because the introduction states a principle which covers our proper understanding of all the particulars. If Jesus had not stated the words in verses 17 through 20 and only began with verse 21 and given particulars, we would be less capable of understanding those verses that give the particulars, because we wouldn't know exactly whether he was coming with one approach or a different approach to the law. Was he coming to abrogate the law? Was he coming to do away with the law? Well, he was not, and that's what he states in principle at the beginning.

Now, there's several things about this introduction. Almost everything about it is difficult. He says, Do not think that I came to destroy the law and the prophets.

I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. Here we have at least two things difficult. One is, what does he mean by destroy? The other is, what does he mean by fulfill? Neither is self-evident.

Both words are capable of a variety of possible interpretations, as the commentators over the centuries have demonstrated. And then there's difficulty in verse 18. For surely, I say to you, not, it says, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law until all is fulfilled.

Now, this statement is difficult in another sense. It's a difficultly structured sentence. It is

a statement that has as its core the point, not one jot or one tittle will, or put it another way, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law.

That's the essential core of the statement. But it is modified by two clauses, which both begin with the word until. In other words, both of them seem to speak of a specific duration of the validity of the statement.

The statement is true until. The problem is, you don't usually have one statement modified by two untils, by two duration clauses. And to make it worse, it does not appear as if these two duration clauses are synonymous in their meaning, although they must be.

He says, until heaven and earth pass away, such and such, until all be fulfilled. It's certainly in the structure of the sentence, peculiar as it is, gives the impression that heaven and earth passing away must be the same time, that all the things are fulfilled. Because the statement is true until heaven and earth pass away, and until all are fulfilled.

Which would give the impression that all is not fulfilled until heaven and earth passes away. No, I mean, that may be in fact the very meaning. We'll have to consider that.

But it is a confusing or a difficult statement. Then he has verses 19 and 20. 19 is particularly curious.

Because he indicates that people can be great or less than great in the kingdom of heaven. Depending on their legal observance of even the least things in the law. And by the least things in the law, he seems to be talking about the same thing as what he means by a jot or a tittle.

Not a jot or a tittle, not the smallest detail of the law will pass until the proper time. And until then, until it does pass, a person who violates even the smallest particular of the law and teaches others to do so, is going to be held in low esteem in the kingdom of heaven. Now even this is not clear whether it means that the person in question is in the kingdom of heaven but holding a low rank.

Or whether it is persons in the kingdom of heaven who are looking at him as one who is outside and holding him in low esteem. It says he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. It sounds like he is in the kingdom of heaven.

Although it is possible that those who are in the kingdom of heaven are the ones who will be calling him the least. And that has been suggested by some. And then of course, probably the problem that was the greatest for the disciples here, and it originally is in verse 20.

I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and

pharisees. Well how can that be? How can righteousness exceed that of them? These people were full time law keepers. It's evident that this passage begins to address the issues of righteous living.

And I want to make that clear because some people say well the only way that our righteousness can exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees is if it is imputed righteousness. Imputed means it has nothing to do with the way you really live. It has to do with the way God thinks about you.

It says if God counts you righteous even though you are not anything like that. And this is a very strongly held evangelical emphasis that we are not saved by our works. We are saved by the imputed righteousness of Christ.

And that this imputation of righteousness comes through faith. And for many evangelicals that is the end of the story about righteousness. It's a very simple, very simple story.

We are not righteous. Christ is righteous. If we believe in him he counts us as if we were righteous.

End of story. And sometimes if you go beyond that and try to talk about the need to live a righteous life some will think that you're compromising the gospel, that you're a secret Judaizer, that you're a legalist, a works oriented heretic or whatever. Because you're saying well righteousness, God also expects you to do something about it.

God also expects you to live righteous. After all it says in 1 John, he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. Doeth righteousness, people have to do righteousness.

And doing righteousness has to do with what you do and not necessarily just believing and being imputed righteous. Now I would not take anything away from the doctrine which I believe is biblical of justification by faith. And I do believe that we are imputed righteous before God the moment we, well like the publican who didn't even lift his head to God but he just beat his breast and said God be merciful to me a sinner.

Jesus said that man went home justified. I believe we're justified before we've changed one bit. I believe that as soon as we have a genuine saving faith in Christ that we are imputed righteous.

But that's not the end of the story. Many people apparently feel that Christianity is just about going to heaven. And the one thing that debars our interest in heaven is the guilt problem.

We've sinned and there's a bit of a grudge there God holds but we can take care of that if we believe in Jesus. That removes the grudge, that removes the wall, the obstacle is

removed because God now counts us righteous and now we can go to heaven. And for many Christians that's all the gospel is, it's a story about how to get to heaven.

And if you talk about how to live a Christian life they get nervous. For one thing many people don't have any intention of living a Christian life but would like to go to heaven anyway. Another is that even if they would like to live a Christian life they feel they can't do it.

And they want to go to heaven anyway. And for these, one of these reasons or the other, many people just get really nervous when you talk about the need to live a righteous life. Even more righteous than that of the scribes and Pharisees.

And yet Jesus I believe is talking about that. Now let me tell you the approach of some that I do not agree with on this. Those who take the approach I've been kind of referring to, those who feel that we must only talk about imputed righteousness.

We must only talk about believing and being counted righteous because beyond that we get into prideful works, man centered religion or whatever. Legalism. Those who hold that view think that when Jesus went on to talk about you have heard you shall not murder but I say to you and you have heard you shall not commit adultery but I say to you and so forth.

That Jesus was not actually teaching a way that he intended people to live. That he was simply trying to show us how impossible it is for us to measure up to God's standards so that we must fall back on the grace of God and cry out for mercy. That Jesus was not actually setting out any standards for actual conduct.

But that what Jesus was doing was trying to as it were deflate the self confidence of the Pharisee who thought that because he had never murdered anyone. Or even of the disciples who were maybe a little too Pharisaical at that point in their lives too like most Jews were. That they thought this is they never killed anyone or slept with their neighbor's wife or whatever.

That they were righteous before God. They kept the law and that there is the theory that all Jesus was really doing is to say no you may have made it to that first base there but there is second, third and fourth base too. And when God said don't commit murder you may have gotten that far you may have never murdered anyone but you're also not supposed to be angry with your brother.

And besides that if you don't make it right with your brother when you've got a grudge against him then you can't offer your praise and worship to God. And if you think that because you haven't slept with your neighbor's wife you're a keeper of the law let me just say if you've had lust in your heart for your neighbor's wife then you're guilty of the law. And that what Jesus is actually trying to do according to some is simply to show how

impossible it is for anyone to keep the law.

And if someone thinks they're keeping it they're taking a much too surface approach to the whole subject. And once they are informed of what the law really requires they will throw up their hands in despair and say well then no one can keep the law. And Jesus would say well that's exactly my point you can't keep the law therefore you just have to believe and be imputed righteous.

This is how many evangelicals understand what Jesus is saying here. I would say however that if that was Jesus intention there is no indicator in the sermon that would have given the disciples the idea that that was his intention. He would have indeed left them with the despondency.

He would have left them with the frustration the hopelessness because he doesn't ever come out at the end and say therefore since all of this is impossible just believe. Now Jesus does teach that we're justified by faith but he also teaches that we are expected to live a righteous life more righteous than that of the scribes and Pharisees. Now the problem I think is that righteousness and every Jew knew this is somehow related to the keeping of God's standards which stands for in the law.

The law of Moses. The Jews that had these laws for about 1400 years and had in varying degrees had a degree of loyalty to them of course in most times in history. Sometimes in history they even forgot what they were but then at other times there were some trying to keep them.

In Jesus' day because of the movement of the Hasidim going into the Pharisee movement there was an emphasis among some on keeping the law and that was what made a person righteous was keeping the law. And therefore in order to talk to his disciples and to us about what righteousness requires what being right in your behavior as well as in your standing with God means. It requires that we understand how the law relates to this whole subject because the law was considered and rightly so as the standard of righteous conduct.

It still is. Paul says in Romans 8.4 that the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit. Romans 8.4 the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in us.

We still fulfill the law we still define righteousness in terms of the law. But the question is how is the law applied as a definition of righteousness for us. And that I believe is what Jesus begins to address at this point because the Jews certainly had one idea that the law was well they had a very externalizing approach to the law.

There was not the emphasis among the Pharisees that there actually was in the Old Testament especially in the Psalms and the Prophets upon the need to have an obedient

heart. The need to have purity of heart as Jesus had spoken in verse 8 of Matthew 5 the pure in heart they shall see God. Well the idea of purity of heart is not strictly a New Testament concept it's found in the Old Testament too.

But the Pharisees did not lay emphasis on that side and it was one of those things in every age religious movements have their strong emphasis and generally there's some thing maybe very clear to an outsider looking in from another age but almost invisible to those within the movement at the time. Some neglected obvious point and the neglected thing in Pharisaic religion was in terms of the heart and the spirituality. And what I understand Jesus to be saying is that and I'm going to tell you specifically point by point what I think he's saying in verses 17 through 20 but in the passage that it is introducing the passage that follows.

I believe that he is saying a couple of things that the disciples righteousness with regard to keeping the law has to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees in terms of its depth not in terms of its quantity but in terms of its quality. One could not really do more righteous things than the scribes and Pharisees were doing if we define what they were doing as righteous things. If the outward keeping of the law kept a man righteous then it would be impossible to ask any man to do more.

But what Jesus is saying is your righteousness has to exceed theirs in terms of depth of sincerity and so forth. You see the six illustrations and the six points he makes afterwards you've heard it was said this but I say this. Jesus does not change anything in what they've heard.

When he says you've heard that it was said do not commit murder he doesn't turn around and say but I say go ahead commit murder. He didn't change that. He didn't say you've heard that it was said you should not be adultery but I said you don't matter go ahead committed adultery.

He didn't say you've heard that it was said keep your oaths but I'm saying go ahead and break your oaths don't make any difference. See Jesus is not violating the law he is not really taking anything away from it here. Even where he said you've heard that it was said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth but I say to you.

He doesn't say I say to you this rule of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is no longer a good standard. It's a fine standard for the magistrates and that's what it was intended for but it's not a good standard for personal conduct with your neighbor. In terms of your own relationship someone offends you you can turn the other cheek you don't have to strike him back.

Now if he took you to court because you struck him then the court would be just and say well I guess he should strike you back. I mean that's what the courts have to have some standards here and eye for an eye tooth for a tooth that's a good standard. Jesus did not

take anything away from that he added to it and what he added was not really new.

He didn't really add something that had never been stated before. Almost everything Jesus said in his teaching on the law just as almost everything he said in the Beatitudes is found earlier usually in the Psalms and the Prophets. And sometimes even in the law itself of the Old Testament.

But Jesus does bring out of the law the emphasis that was lacking in his day and clarifies that their thinking about the law was totally inadequate. The Pharisees their righteousness was merely an outward keeping of the law but the disciples had to exceed that in depth. It had to be from the heart it had to go deeper than just outward behavior and the illustrations Jesus gives you the six illustrations at the end of this chapter.

I believe point out the spirituality of the law the need for it to be a spiritual thing. You're not just concerned about not violating your neighbor's wife physically but spiritually you're you're trying to abstain from adultery inwardly in your spiritual life in your spiritual heart. That you're not only avoiding killing the person you're angry at but choose the spiritual side your control over your anger.

The control of your spirit as the old as Proverbs 6 of the man who's hasty to wrath is contrasted with the man who has a rule over his spirit to not be angry is a spiritual thing. And so Jesus is bringing out that the law is not merely ritual and outward. It is spiritual and one must exceed the Pharisees in this very aspect of their law keeping they must do it from the heart and in the spirit.

Jesus said to the woman the well those who worship God must worship him in the spirit and in truth. And in the latter in Luke chapters I mean Matthew chapter 6 after he has given these six illustrations at the end of chapter 5 he gives three illustrations. About when you do your alms and when you pray and when you fast.

Don't be like the hypocrites do and he gives them you know this teaching about the need to be private and be more or less secretive when you're doing things that might otherwise get you positive attention and positive marks in the eyes of others. So that you are not overly tempted to do such things for those strokes that you do them with the right heart you do them sincerely not like the hypocrite. So you've got in the passage that follows this introduction six illustrations of one kind and three of another.

The six illustrations are you've heard that it was said but I say to you the three that come in the beginning of chapter 6 are when you do such and such don't do it like the hypocrites do. And it gives specific instructions in these cases. Now I consider that this whole section these six illustrations at the end of chapter 5 and the three at the beginning of chapter 6 are an unpacking of Jesus general statements to the woman at the well in John 4. God is looking for people who worship him in spirit and in truth.

I take in spirit to mean not external not ritual but spiritual from the heart. And in truth I take to mean not hypocritical but in reality genuine. And so Jesus tells in the first six illustrations what it means to worship and to serve God in spirit.

That you're not just keeping the outward shell and form of the law it's a spiritual thing it's the inward thing it's truly from the heart. Whereas in this three illustrations at the beginning of chapter 6 he tells what it means to do it in truth as opposed to in hypocrisy in reality and genuinely and sincerely. So of course these things are very similar to each other but this is the way that the law is to be kept and when a person does it that way they will be living a righteous life.

And they will be doing so in a way that exceeds the way that the scribes and Pharisees were doing it. Who didn't worship in spirit or in truth but only in ritual and in form. Now having given you the bigger picture of what I think this section is introducing let me talk about the particular problems that I identified earlier.

In verse 17 Jesus said do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. Now I already mentioned that there's problems knowing what is meant by destroy and there's problems knowing what is meant by fulfill.

Let me first of all talk about the possible meanings of destroy. Essentially there's I think three ways that people have understood this. Of course he's not talking about physical destruction.

He's not talking about the concept of taking the scrolls and burning them or something like that. Like the Ephesians did with their magic books when Paul preached to them and they burned all their books. He says I'm not going to destroy the law.

He's not talking about a physical destroying of the physical books. He's using this in some way figuratively. It either means abrogate.

To abrogate the law would be simply to say okay that's over no more of that. You know the laws were enforced for a while but they've come to an end no more need for them. Send them off and we'll just do without them from now on.

That would be an abrogation of the law. Or destroy the law could mean to violate the law. Like to break the law.

Breaking is a metaphor also. We don't really break anything. I mean when you physically break something it's broken it's destroyed.

But he didn't come to break the law or destroy it or shatter it or violate it in that sense. And a third opinion is that he meant he did not come to invalidate the law. To make it something that or to declare it something that has no validity.

To destroy its dignity and its respect in the minds of those who are hearing Jesus. He didn't come to invalidate the law. Now these are three different possible meanings and I don't believe he meant all of them.

Sometimes the easy route is to say well he meant all of this. He didn't mean he didn't come to abrogate or to violate or to invalidate the law. And that may be the easy route because then we don't have to make the choice between hard options.

But they are different ideas. Now for Jesus to say I did not come to abrogate the law. Meaning I didn't come to bring it to its end.

And dismiss it as something no longer needed. That statement would be true in one sense and not in another depending on what he means by the law. And I guess maybe that's where we need to start is what's meant by the law.

Because the word is used a variety of ways in scripture. When we think of the law we may think of it as the Ten Commandments. Some people think of it that way.

Seventh-day Adventist for example will quote this verse and say what Jesus said. He didn't come to destroy the law. And obviously the fourth commandment is to keep the seventh-day holy.

And therefore Jesus wants us to keep the seventh-day holy as the law requires. And they are essentially thinking of the Ten Commandments as the law. Because they don't believe in keeping animal sacrifices for example which is also in the law.

But that's in a different part of the law. They would say well some parts of the law of course we don't keep anymore. But the Ten Commandments those are permanent.

And sometimes they would equate those with the moral law. There are some who would say the Ten Commandments are the moral law. And because they were inscribed in stone they are obviously permanent.

As opposed to all the other laws in the law of Moses they were not inscribed in stone. They are not permanent. And they are not moral law.

They are ceremonial law. But this dichotomy is artificial it seems to me. I mean it's a clever one and it almost sounds right.

But it doesn't quite ring true. Because many of the laws that were not written in stone were in fact moral in nature. There are laws of course one could say they are simply expansions on some of the Ten Commandments.

But you know the laws about bestiality and about homosexuality and so forth are not ceremonial laws. Those are moral laws. Someone might say well that is simply an expansion on the law that says you should not commit adultery.

But that's not necessarily true. I mean the only thing that they have in common with adultery is that they are sexual acts. But adultery is forbidden upon other bases than simply being a sexual act.

It has to do with faithfulness and violation of covenant and things like that. And if a person is unmarried and involved in homosexuality and bestiality that person is not necessarily involved in something akin to adultery in the essence of what adultery means. And it is not certain that those laws in the Old Testament that forbid such sexual perversions are simply the offshoot of the law you should not commit adultery.

Because adultery is not in itself a sexual perversion. It is simply an act of injustice and unfaithfulness to covenant. When a person is attracted to some of the same sex or to an animal that is perversion.

That is twisted immorality of another sort. What I'm saying is there are laws that are not in the Ten Commandments that are moral in nature. And there is even a law in the Ten Commandments that is very arguably non-moral in nature.

That is ceremonial. And of course I'm referring to the Sabbath law. And in saying that the Sabbath law is arguably not a moral law but a ceremonial law I would come at it from two ways.

One is that it is self-evidently of the same class as those laws that require the observance of a monthly new moon or of a festival, that there are holy days. If there is a holy day once a year or once a month or once a week, it's a holy day nonetheless. And holy days are holy days.

At least one might think this way. Not all would necessarily agree. Some would say no, the weekly Sabbath, that's the Lord's Sabbath.

Everything else, all the monthly and yearly holy days. Those were temporary, but the Sabbath is permanent. Well, a person may affirm that if they wish, and I could not insist that they must change their mind.

But I would say that the average person without any agenda would probably say, well, I mean, what's the difference? A holy day kept once a week, a holy day kept once a month, a holy day kept once a year. Holy day. Either a day is holier than another day or it's not.

And there's a certain arbitrariness about holy days. Because God could have said, well, let's make this an eight-day week. If he'd wanted to.

He didn't, but he could have. I mean, if there's something about a law that is not innately called for by the necessities of God's own character, then I consider that to be in the ceremonial class. You see, God could not in his own character allow murder or adultery

or stealing or bearing false witness or any other injustice or unfaithfulness because it's against his character.

But for him to say, well, you have three festival weeks during the year, but I'm going to change that to five. That wouldn't violate anything innate in his character. You see, his decision how many days, what days they would be, how long the celebration would be, how they would be celebrated, those are more or less arbitrary because they, I mean, they're not entirely arbitrary because they were designed to portray spiritual realities that are perhaps unchangeable.

But they are not in themselves expressions of God's own moral nature. They are, they have more to do with ceremonial type character, I think. That's my opinion.

But in addition to that, I mean, there's another reason why I would say the Sabbath seems to be a ceremonial law, not a moral law, is because both Jesus and Paul lumped the Sabbath together with other ceremonial laws as if it was in the same class. Let me real quickly turn you to Matthew 12, well-known story of the Pharisees criticizing Jesus' disciples because they plucked a grain on the Sabbath and rubbed it in their hands and ate it, which was regarded to be a form of labor, a form of harvesting and threshing of wheat and that kind of labor that should not be done on the Sabbath. And when they criticized Jesus and his disciples for doing this in verses one and two, Jesus responded in verse three and said to them, Or have you never read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God and ate the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath, the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, meaning they work, they offer sacrifices, they do the same thing on Sabbath they do every other day.

That's profaning the Sabbath in a sense, and are blameless. Now, what is Jesus referring to here? The disciples have just been criticized for breaking Sabbath. There are some, for instance, Seventh-day Adventists and other persons who feel that the Sabbath is still in force have often been known to say, well, the disciples really didn't break the Sabbath, they just broke the Pharisees' interpretation of the Sabbath, and so Jesus defended them.

He would not have defended them had they really broken the actual Sabbath in a way that God would be offended by, but all that they did was offend the Phariseic traditions about Sabbath. After all, it was the Phariseic traditions, not the Bible, that tells us what degree of harvesting is labor. I mean, the Pharisees, the rabbis, had all these different designations for what constitutes labor and what does not.

And so some would say, well, the reason Jesus defended his disciples is not because it was okay to break the Sabbath, but because they were not in fact breaking the Sabbath in the sight of God, they were breaking it in the sight only of the traditionalists. Now, that

is an approach that could be taken. In fact, for many years I thought that was the correct approach, because you often find Jesus doing just that, pointing out that the traditionalists are just following traditions and not what God says.

But that doesn't appear to be what Jesus is, the basis of Jesus' defense here. Jesus could have done that. Jesus could have said, well, listen, you guys, my disciples have not violated any scriptural mandate here.

Your traditions can say whatever they want to say, but my disciples have not violated the Sabbath. He did not in any way defend them along those lines. He defended them along the lines of plenty of other cases where ceremonial law is broken in the interest of a higher concern.

And the cases he gives are cases where ceremonial law is actually broken. David eats the shewbread. That's a breach of law.

He didn't just breach some traditional idea of what was wrong. He broke the actual command of the Old Testament. It was for the priests only.

And therefore David seemed to have violated a ceremonial law. Why? Because he was hungry. Interesting parallel here.

The disciples were hungry. They broke a ceremonial law is what seems to be implied by Jesus' argument. And then he gives the example of the priests.

They offer animal sacrifice on the Sabbath. Well, here you've got one ceremonial law being broken by another ceremonial law, offering sacrifices as ceremonial on the Sabbath as ceremonial. But here we find that even some ceremonies overrule other ceremonies.

The point seems to be that Sabbath, as far as Jesus is concerned, is similar in character to eating the shewbread if you're not allowed to do it under the law. It seems to be a violation of ceremonial law. But Jesus' point is not to hold the same status and weight with God as some other issues do.

And he points that out in verse 7. Matthew 12 says, but if you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless. See, I desire mercy, not sacrifice. That's Hosea 6, 6 he's quoting.

What does that mean? God says, I desire mercy and not sacrifice. Well, what is sacrifice? Sacrifice is quintessential ceremonial law. What is mercy? Mercy is love.

Mercy is God's character. Mercy is moral in nature. And Jesus says, the reason you're criticizing my disciples is because you have not learned that God prefers love and mercy over and allows even it to preempt ceremony.

And by the way, when Hosea said that God desires mercy and not sacrifice, he was not saying that sacrifice was not a valid law. One only needs to read the first eight chapters of Leviticus to know that sacrifices were commanded by God. But they were ceremonial in their character, and therefore there were times when out of mercy, God would allow one to go without a sacrifice.

So that is apparently what Jesus is arguing here. He seems to, in his very discussion of his disciples' transgression, equate it with what David did when he transgressed, but for exactly the same reason that they did. He was hungry, and apparently critics should be more concerned about seeing a hungry man fed than seeing a ceremonial law go unbroken.

In Colossians chapter 2, a well-known passage always brought up in these discussions about Sabbath, I point out that in verse 16, Paul said, Therefore, let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival, or a new moon, or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substances of Christ. Now, the thing to observe here is that Paul lists a number of things which he says are shadows, and which you should not be concerned if anyone judges you about them. The first thing on the list is dietary laws, and the second thing on the list are holy days.

Food or drink, followed by holy days, festivals, new moons, Sabbaths. Once again, festivals are yearly, new moons monthly, Sabbaths weekly. All the holy days in the calendar, and Paul says those things were all shadows.

That doesn't mean that there's no value in them, it doesn't mean that there's anything wrong with keeping them, but it does mean that they're not the kind of thing that is binding in the sense of being able to judge each other about it, it's just not that much, there's not an obligation there. If there was, then you could make judgments about it. Now, again, the Seventh-day Adventists and persons of similar persuasion will say often about this passage that the Sabbath commutator is not the Lord's Sabbath.

It's not referring to the seventh-day Sabbath. This is a reference, they say, to the special Sabbaths that were associated with the festival observances, because under the law you'll find that a festival week, whether it's Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles, it was seven or eight days long, and the beginning, the first day and the last day of the week, no matter what weekday it fell upon, the first day of the festival week and the last day of the festival week were treated as if they were Sabbaths. No work was to be done and holy convocations were to be held on them, and for that reason they resembled the Sabbath.

And so they're saying, well, all that Paul is referring to here is those special days at the beginning and end of each festival week, which were treated like Sabbaths, and that's what he means by Sabbaths. He doesn't say the Sabbath. He says Sabbaths.

And that argument usually works for them in these discussions, but I don't see it as a valid argument, for the simple reason that you will never find in the Old Testament the word Sabbath used of anything except the seventh day. It is true that certain days of the festival weeks were, it said no work should be done and you should have holy convocations, but those days were never spoken of as Sabbaths. Sabbath is a technical term for the seventh day of the week.

And if Paul was using it differently, he was innovating a use of the word that is not known elsewhere in Scripture. It is much more likely, it seems to me, that he is saying festivals, new moon Sabbaths, in order to say holy days, whether annually, monthly, or weekly observed. All the holy days.

And in so doing, and equating them along with the meat and drink ordinances, he is saying Sabbath is one of those ceremonial laws, just like Jesus indicated it was when he was talking about his disciples eating grain on the Sabbath. It seems to me that those who say, do you remember where we got off on this branch of discussion? I was discussing the suggestion made by many that the Ten Commandments are moral law, and all the other laws are non-moral ceremonial laws. But that just isn't true, it doesn't hold true.

It appears to me that according to Jesus and Paul, and common sense to tell you the truth, if we could trust that ever, that the Sabbath, one of the Ten Commandments, is a ritual ceremonial law, not a moral law. And that some of the laws that are not found in the Ten Commandments are indeed moral in nature. And therefore, it's too simple to say, well, when Jesus said, I did not come to destroy the law, he was talking about the Ten Commandments, the moral law.

That doesn't seem to work. Another way the law might be understood would mean to be all the laws, the Ten Commandments and all the other little laws that were given, several hundred of them, in the books of Moses. And that all of these laws, Jesus is saying he's not coming to destroy.

Now the word law does sometimes mean that, just whatever law God gives is the law. But that's not always necessarily the case, and I don't think it is here. I think there's an indicator in Jesus' words that tells us how he means the law.

He says the law as an alternative to the prophets. I did not come to destroy the law or the prophets. In putting the word law in this kind of juxtaposition with the word prophets, he seems to be using the word law as the Jews would use the word Torah, which means law, meaning the five books of Moses, basically the authority of Moses' writings.

This would include Genesis, which doesn't contain laws per se, and there's other things in the Torah as well that are not specifically laws, although laws are a principal feature, a principal part of the Torah. The whole Torah, even those parts that don't contain

legislation, are considered to be the Torah, the law. And to the Jew, the Old Testament scriptures were often spoken of as the law and the prophets, and Jesus seems to have that usage in mind by saying, I didn't come to destroy the law or the prophets.

In other words, I didn't come to destroy, whatever he means by destroy, I didn't come to destroy the Old Testament revelation. I've not come as an opponent to this, as some kind of a rebel, throwing this out and saying, no, that's all wrong, here's what I've got instead. Now, I'm going to proceed from the assumption that I've just made, that because he said the law or the prophets and spoke of both in this way, that he means the law as the whole revelation of Moses.

And one might say the authority of Moses and the authority of the prophets, which are found in scripture, the Old Testament scripture. I didn't come to destroy the scriptures. I did not come, now we need to discuss what destroy means.

I mentioned it could mean abrogate. Some people think it means to abrogate, but certainly there are things in the Old Testament that have been, and some things that have not been abrogated. So Jesus could not just make a statement truthfully that he didn't come to abrogate anything in the scriptures.

Not one jot or one tittle, because some things are gone and simply are not coming back. Now, Christians are not all in full agreement as to which things are gone and which things are remaining. I mean, for example, I mentioned a number of Christians feel that the Sabbath is something that's retained.

Some would say the whole Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath. There are some who would retain this or that other feature of even the ceremonial law as a good practice, tithing, for example, or something. But what part are we talking about here? He said not one jot or one tittle will pass until it's all fulfilled.

We can certainly say that there are parts that all would agree have passed, like the animal sacrifices. By the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., by the providence of God, the end of the sacrificial system was announced with a huge exclamation point. That system is gone.

That system is over. And what is the temple system? But the system of ceremonial law, it would seem to me, given in scripture. Now, it is not just the New Testament and those rebellious writers like Paul and the writer of Hebrews who tell us that the Old Covenant law has passed.

The Old Testament itself said so. And what the writer of Hebrews says, he bases on the Old Testament, as does Jesus. But in Jeremiah chapter 3, there is a prediction of the coming Messianic age.

And the prophet says this at the beginning of verse 14. Jeremiah 3, 14. Return, O

backsliding children, says the Lord, for I am married to you.

I will take you one from a city and two from a family. I will bring you to Zion. In other words, a remnant.

Not all, but a few from this family, a few from this city. And we'll come to, I believe, the spiritual Zion. And I will give you shepherds according to my heart, be they elders, leaders, and so forth, of the church, the apostles, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.

Then it shall come to pass when you are multiplied and increased in the land. In those days, says the Lord, that they shall say no more. The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord.

It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall that be done any more at all. What? The Ark of the Covenant? Why not? What's wrong with the Ark of the Covenant? Has it suffered some distinct indignity that it has to be scrapped? No, it just happens to be the emblem of the whole covenantal system that is replaced. The Ark of the Covenant was the center of the tabernacle worship and all of its ceremonial trappings.

Now, I'm going beyond what is actually said, and therefore a person is not obligated to follow me here, but I think what he's saying is the reason the Ark of the Covenant will be no more is because there's going to be a new covenant. And that Ark, which was so essential as a part of the old covenant ceremony, it just is not, it's passé, it's not going to be needed any more. It's going to have passed.

And so Jeremiah seems to say that the Old Testament tabernacle system, with its center as the Ark of the Covenant, is going to be no more in the Messianic Age. That Messianic Age is also predicted by Jeremiah in Jeremiah 31. At verse 31 he says, Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I'll make a new covenant with the house of Israel, with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will put my law in their minds.

I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they'll all know me.

From the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity and their sin, and I will remember no more. Now, this passage is quoted twice in the book of Hebrews and is alluded to certainly by Jesus in the upper room when he said, This cup is the new covenant in my blood. And new covenant, of course, echoes

Jeremiah's words.

There will be a new covenant. And Jesus established the new covenant in the upper room with his disciples. The writer of Hebrews, in the 8th chapter and the 13th verse, after devoting fully half of chapter 8 of Hebrews to a quotation of this passage from Jeremiah, the author just adds this little caveat at the end of the chapter of Hebrews.

He says, Now, in speaking of a new covenant, he has made the first one obsolete. And he says, And that which is obsolete is growing old and about ready to vanish. So, the writer of Hebrews understood Jeremiah to be predicting not only a new covenant, but the end of the old covenant arrangement.

And therefore, Jesus did indeed bring about the end of at least some things, if not all, in the old covenant. And the way we know this is simply this, that Jesus said, Not one jot or one tittle of the law shall pass until all is fulfilled. Well, has anything passed? The temple's gone.

The law of the Levites, the sacrifices, the Ark of the Covenant, it's all gone. It's gone. It's passed.

Now, Jesus didn't just say the majority of it will not pass until all is fulfilled. He said, Not a bit of it will pass. Not the slightest feature of it will pass until all is fulfilled.

And yet, some has passed. It would appear, unless it continues in another form, which is something we have to consider. But as far as the physical, ceremonial law, that whole system has passed and has been replaced.

And therefore, in some sense, I think we could argue it has been fulfilled and fulfilled its purpose. Now, therefore, I do not accept the interpretation of Jesus saying, I did not come to destroy the law. I don't accept him saying, I did not come to abrogate the law.

Because part of it is indeed abrogated, if not all. I don't believe all of it is, in one sense, that this gets into spiritual stuff. But that's what Jesus gets into.

And that's what we'll have to look at. Another possibility that has been suggested, when Jesus said, I didn't come to destroy the law, some think he means, I didn't come to violate the law or break the law. But that, frankly, I think we can put that one aside as not his principle.

Meaning, because it simply doesn't, in making that statement, it doesn't prepare you for what comes afterwards. About one jot or tittle will pass until I'll be fulfilled. That statement wouldn't in any way, his statement, I didn't come to break the law, doesn't really seem to introduce the rest of the sentence and the rest of the paragraph.

It would seem to be a stand-alone statement, which might be true, but wouldn't have

any relationship to anything else in the passage, as far as I can tell. Another possibility is that he said, I did not come to destroy the law, means I did not come to invalidate the law. See, I don't believe that destroy means abrogate.

Because he said, I did not come to destroy, but he did come, indeed, to abrogate some things, the sacrificial system among them. When he said, I did not come to destroy, I don't think he meant, I did not come to violate the law, although he didn't violate it. I don't think that makes any sense in the discussion.

But if he meant, I did not come to invalidate the law or the prophets, that is, I did not come to invalidate the Old Testament, but I came to fulfill it, that would be a very, I think, meaningful and appropriate meaning to assign to these words, in view of what follows. And I'm going to assume that to be the correct meaning in my discussion, that he did not come to invalidate the law. By the way, Paul said something very much like that in Romans chapter 3, in the transition between chapter 3 and 4 in Romans, because Paul, in chapter 3, at the end of Romans 3, is talking about there is a righteousness now apart from the law, verse 21.

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the law and the prophets. Now, this has so many echoes of the Sermon on the Mount in it, that I can't help but think that Paul is thinking of this statement of Jesus. There is a righteousness, remember? Your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

Well, there is a righteousness of God apart from the law. Now, it does not render the law invalid, far from it. It was anticipated by the law and the prophets.

It was witnessed by the law and the prophets. It is a fulfillment of the law and the prophets. And in verse 31, Romans 3.31, he says, Do we then make void the law through faith? What do you mean make void the law through faith? Well, it depends.

Let's read on. Certainly not. On the contrary, we establish the law.

Now, though Paul uses different words, it is certainly similar to that of Jesus. I didn't come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. Paul says, we don't come to make the law void, but to establish it.

It sounds as if it is Paul's, you know, paraphrase of Jesus' remarks. Now, by the way, there are many who would understand Romans 3.31 very differently than I do. Because when he says, we don't make void the law, we establish it, some would say, well, there you go.

You've got to keep the Sabbath, you've got to do all these other things, because Paul didn't come to make it void, he came to establish it. But I think they misunderstand his meaning, judging by how he follows that up in chapter 4, verse 1. Because he says, what

then shall we say? That Abraham, our father, has found according to the flesh. For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something of which to boast, but not before God.

What does the Scripture say? What? The law. Abraham believed God, this is Genesis 15.6, it's in the law. And it was accounted to him for righteousness.

Now, to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace, but as debt. Then he says, but to him who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. Just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from his works, and gives a quote from Psalm 32.

Now, notice he gives Abraham and David as examples here. David belongs to that part of the Scripture called the prophets, because the books of Samuel that tell the story of David, the Jews called those the early prophets. Samuel and Kings are the early prophets.

And then what we typically call the prophetic books, they're called the latter prophets. But the story of David belongs to that class of Scripture called the prophets, by the Jewish mind. And the story of Abraham belongs to that class called the law.

Genesis, part of the Torah. Now, Paul said in Romans 3.21 that the law, the righteousness he's talking about, is witnessed by the law and the prophets. He gives an example of it.

The law, for example, in Genesis 15.6, establishes this principle of righteousness by faith in the case of Abraham. The prophets, that is Samuel, or in particular the Psalms, which is written at the time that Samuel is discussing, in David's lifetime. It also establishes this principle in David.

So, in Abraham we have a man from the law, that is the Torah. In David, a man from the prophets, the prophetic writings. And, of course, we could even be more particular and say, and from the Psalms as well, since he's quoting a Psalm.

There is the whole Old Testament, the law and the prophets, bears witness to this and we are establishing it. Now, when he says in verse 31 of Romans 3, do we make void the law through faith? Certainly not. On the contrary, we establish the law.

He's not saying we observe the law in the sense of keeping the ceremonial requirements. What he's saying is we establish the very thing the law said. What did the law say? Well, let's look at it.

Look at Abraham. Look at David. What does it say? It says he was a kind of righteous by faith.

And, therefore, Paul says our teaching of justification by faith is a very establishment of the principles taught in the law itself. In the case of Abraham, who is in the Torah. And, so, I don't think that Paul is even addressing the question in verse 31 of whether we keep the law of Moses or not.

That's not his issue. The issue is whether the teaching of justification by faith is contrary in principle to the teaching of the law. No, the teaching of the law is established by it.

And, therefore, what I understand Paul to be saying, and if I would then come back to what Jesus said and see Paul is in some way expounding on it, Jesus' meaning would apparently be, I didn't come to invalidate the law or to declare it wrong in any way. I came to fulfill it, to establish it, to agree with it fully, to bring its fullness. The word fulfill it, again, has more than one possible meaning.

How do you fulfill the law? Well, in one sense, you fulfill it by keeping it. So that Paul says, as I mentioned earlier, Romans 8, 4, the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in us. That means because we keep them.

We keep the righteousness of the law in our behavior. But remember, not all things in the law have to do with righteousness per se. I believe that there are moral issues that the law enunciates and that those moral issues are forever binding because they are based upon God's own unchanging character.

And, therefore, the righteous things that the law requires, we do fulfill them by doing them. We don't kill, we don't commit adultery, we do all we know to do to keep those things in the spirit and in truth as well. But fulfill the law could also mean to fill it full, as if the law is seen by the Pharisees and by the Jews in general of Jesus' day as a shell, merely.

It's an outward shell lacking the inward part. It's like a vessel that's cleaned on the outside, but inwardly no cleaning has been done. It's all an outward shell.

It's like a whitewash on a sepulcher. The sepulcher is full of uncleanness because dead bodies would render a person unclean by contact, but the tomb doesn't advertise itself as an unclean thing. It's all whitewashed and pretty.

It looks nice, it looks pure, but it's defiling to the contact. And the law therefore is like an outward shell only. The righteousness of the law to the Pharisee was an outward behavior, but Jesus, I believe, is saying, I came to fulfill it, fill it full, that is, fill it up.

You've got this external container of moral behavior, but you don't have morality in your heart. You don't have purity of heart. You don't have holiness of heart.

You don't have spirituality. That's the inward part, and that's what I've come to bring. I've come to fill the container, to fulfill it.

Now, how does Jesus do that? You can see we're going to need both sessions to deal with this passage. But we've got them. We'll use them.

It's worth it. How does Jesus bring the fulfillment of the law? Well, in my understanding, and which is fallible, but it has come from a great deal of consideration, I can say that much for it, but I personally believe that laws of different sorts are fulfilled in different ways. And there is a class of laws that I've referred to earlier as the ceremonial laws.

I believe that they are fulfilled in the same way that prophecy is fulfilled because they were prophetic in their purpose. They foreshadowed something later than their own time. They look forward to something more permanent and more substantial than what they themselves were.

I mean, the most obvious and the most demonstrable from the New Testament would be, say, the Passover, for example, or other animal sacrifices, that when an animal was sacrificed, it was a type and a shadow of Christ. When the Passover was slain, it was a type of Christ. Our Passover was slain for us.

In other words, as God prescribed this kind of ceremonial observance, he did so as it were the same as if he told Ezekiel, lay on your side for 40 days and then lay on the other side for 390 days. It is a prescription of behavior, but the purpose of it is to depict something. It is prophetic.

It is a prophetic action dictated by God. And a prophetic action, just like a prophetic oracle or utterance, is fulfilled by the events that it anticipated occurring. When Jesus said, all these things, this generation will not pass before all these things are fulfilled, and then these things happened, they fulfilled it.

They were fulfilled. When the event occurs that was anticipated by the prophecy, we call that the fulfillment. And the ceremonial law, in my understanding, was to a very large extent a ceremonial symbolic anticipation of this very fulfillment, filling the fullness of it.

For example, I give you my own thoughts. These have biblical basis, but I wouldn't say that the biblical basis is airtight and indisputable. But I personally believe that tithing and Sabbath keeping have something in common, in that each of them devotes to God a small portion of a larger entity that we now understand wholly belongs to God.

Giving one day out of seven is an acknowledgment that God has a claim on our time. Giving one-tenth out of our possessions is an acknowledgment that God has a claim on our possessions. When you come to the New Testament, I believe the teaching is made clear that God has a claim on every moment of every day and every penny, all our possessions and all of our time.

It was emblematically suggested by the offering of a single day per week and a single-tenth of the whole in the law. Now, by the way, I will acknowledge that both Sabbath

keeping and tithing were observed. We don't know that they were regularly observed, but they were observed on occasion prior to the law, given in the law.

God required the Jews to rest on the seventh day when it came to gathering the manna, and that was in Exodus 16, before the law was given. And he also, we don't know that he required it, but both Jacob and Abraham paid tithes on at least one occasion each. We don't know that these were normal practices.

But the law actually took these things up and made them a regular prescribed duty for a purpose, I believe. The fulfillment is that we give all of our time and all of our money to God. Every day becomes a holy day.

Every penny becomes God's penny. Now, when it comes to things like clean and unclean animals, it's an interesting thing. I believe that the issues of clean and unclean animals were spiritual issues, in that they were a type of something spiritual that Jesus would bring about, a cleansing of certain persons, as opposed to others who were not believers.

Paul seems to understand it that way. First of all, when Paul quotes the Old Testament scripture, you should not muzzle the ox that treads out the corn. To the Jew, that was just a statement about oxen.

To Paul, Paul quotes it and says in 1 Corinthians 9, does God care about oxen, or does he say this about us? He says this is about laborers, God's laborers. The oxen, which happen to be a clean animal, and a servant animal. And these were the servants of God.

Should not be muzzled. But then he gives another one, in 2 Corinthians 6, where he says you should not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, which is an echo, I believe, of the scripture in Deuteronomy. It says don't plow with an ox and an ass together.

You don't put a clean and an unclean animal under the same yoke. You don't yoke the clean and the unclean together. An ass is an unclean animal, an ox is a clean animal.

Symbolically, Paul understood that to mean a believer and an unbeliever. You don't yoke yourself, a believer, together with an unbeliever. And that, I believe, he understood as a spiritual fulfillment of that ceremonial law, as it were.

And there's nothing innately immoral about putting a donkey and an ox under a yoke, nor is there anything innately immoral about putting a muzzle on an ox. If God had left those instructions out, which he could easily have done without violating anything in his basic nature, no violence would have been done to the universe. Whereas there would be great violence done to the universe if God had said thou shalt bear false witness.

I mean, that would throw a whole moral universe out of whack. But you see, these ceremonies were for spiritual purposes. Now, what was a clean animal? A clean animal was one that could be eaten and or sacrificed.

How was it determined to be clean? Well, we can't give all the things about birds and fish and things like that right now, but the principal animal sacrifice were mammals, and they had to have two characteristics. They had to chew the cud, and they had to have a cloven hoof. I won't go into it now, but I believe that those are both symbolic of spiritual traits.

I'll let you sort it out. I've done that for my own satisfaction, but I don't have time to do it all for you. But I mean, I believe that the characteristics of clean or unclean animals were symbolic, and that the consumption of them or non-consumption of them, the sacrificing of them or not sacrificing of them, had to do with whether a person, I mean, it foreshadowed a spiritual, whether a person was clean, clean enough for God's consumption, clean enough to be offered up as a spiritual sacrifice unto God or not.

There are certain qualifications. And all of that, I believe, and by the way, I realize that there have been observed hygienic values in keeping some of the ceremonial law. That's been observed by book-length treatments.

But I think that's incidental to their real purpose. I don't think that the real reason that God gave ceremonial law is to teach us how to be healthier and live longer, though that might be secondary. I believe they were foreshadowing.

As Paul said, these were a shadow for the time present, but the substances of Christ. And I believe if you go through the sacrificial system, the festival laws, the laws of clean and unclean, I think they all have spiritual value. Another example of clean and unclean laws having spiritual value.

I believe leprosy serves as a model of sin, as a type of sin. Not that the leper is sinful any more than a woman on her period is sinful. It's a state of ceremonial uncleanness, but it has no moral stigma attached to it.

But it had ceremonial stigma, because it ceremonially, spiritually, it represents, it stands for a moral state. It symbolizes a moral state. And one can look at the ceremony for the cleansing of a leper in Leviticus, or you can look at the story of Naaman the Syrian and his cleansing by dipping in the River Jordan and so forth, and you can see many ways in which leprosy serves as a parallel of sin, and its cleansing as a symbol of salvation.

And while I can't go through everything in the ceremonial law, what I'm saying is I believe that those spiritual realities that were foreshadowed in the ceremonial law came into existence in Christ. That Christ is the one who cleansed. Christ is the one who brought the atoning and the Passover sacrifice and so forth.

That Jesus is that which was anticipated by these things, and therefore in his very career fulfilled them. Now, that's one way in which law can be fulfilled. The ceremonial law, since it is, I believe, by nature prophetic, is fulfilled just the same way a prophecy is

fulfilled.

What about the laws that we would say embody a moral principle? Laws that simply could never be done away with because they are simply descriptive of the character of God himself. Well, how are those fulfilled? How are moral laws fulfilled? Did Jesus bring a fulfillment of those in any way? Well, yes, he did. And we know that Jesus said when he was asked once what the great commandment is, he said, well, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, this is the great commandment.

There's another like it, which is to love your neighbors yourself. And then he said, on these two hang all the law and all the prophets. Now, of those two, other passages of scripture make similar statements, but limit it down to the second one, love your neighbors yourself.

Twice Paul said that if you love your neighbors yourself, you fulfill the law. And he doesn't mean the ceremonial law there, I don't believe. I believe he means that you fulfill the moral law by loving your neighbors yourself.

If you look at Romans 13, Romans 13, verses 8 through 10, Paul said, Oh, no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, you shall not commit adultery, a moral law. You shall not murder, a moral law also.

You shall not steal. You should not bear false witness. You should not covet, all of them moral laws.

And if there's any other commandments, I presume he means of the same sort, moral laws, are all summed up in this saying, namely, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.

Now, if you think I go too far by saying he's only speaking about moral law, when he says if there is any other commandment, I would say that although he does not limit himself to other commandments, he doesn't say moral commandment. The examples he gives are moral commandments. And it is simply true that if you love someone, you won't do those things that are immoral against them.

And the things that are immoral are immoral for the simple reason that they are unloving. The reason it's wrong to commit adultery is it's an unloving act. The reason it's wrong to steal or to bear false witness or to kill is because it's an unloving act.

That's what makes it an immoral act. It's unloving. It's not like God.

But there's nothing particularly unloving about eating a slab of pork. It may not be very healthful or good for you. And in a day when it was forbidden, it might well be that it was an act of impiety toward God, too.

The prophets, Isaiah particularly near the end of his book, complains that the Jews are eating unclean meat as an act of impiety and so forth. But it's not in itself an act of impiety toward your neighbor or a lack of love toward your neighbor. It's not moral in that sense, I believe.

Anyway, what I'm saying is that the laws that we see as moral, all of them really, in the Ten Commandments except for the Sabbath, would innately be called for by love. If you loved God and you had no commandments from God at all, you would innately revere him. You would innately not use his name lightly.

You would innately not put other gods before him. If you loved people, you would innately honor your parents. You would innately not kill, commit adultery, steal or bear false witness or covet what they have.

Because your love would keep you. You wouldn't even need commandments to tell you not to do it. However, there's nothing in the Sabbath law that you would innately know to do just because you loved God or loved your neighbor.

That's why, again, it stands in a different category. Love is morality. Love is righteousness.

And if you do love, in the biblical sense of the word, then you do righteousness. Now, of course, if God commands us to keep the Sabbath and we know it, then it would be a matter of love for God that we keep it. But you see, that's the only thing within the Ten Commandments that is, in a sense, arbitrary.

God could have said, keep the third day holy or keep the last four days holy. He could have done something like that. It is that there's a certain arbitrariness to it that God had to just kind of assign it because there was nothing innately about that practice that love itself would call for without being specially instructed.

Whereas love would automatically prevent you from breaking any of the other laws if you loved your neighbor and if you loved God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength. So, Paul indicates, as Jesus did, that love for your neighbor is essentially the fulfilling of the law. And he said it again.

I won't turn to every place where he said it, but he said it also in Galatians chapter 5 that, you know, love your neighbors yourself and you'll thus fulfill the law. But Jesus said the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount in a little different words. If you look at Matthew chapter 7, which is still within the sermon, Matthew 7, 12, Jesus said, therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them.

That's just another way of saying love your neighbor as you love yourself, right? I mean, what do you want done to yourself? Do that to other people, to your neighbor. Love your neighbor the way you love yourself. What does he say? This is the law and the prophets.

The same thing Paul said. This is the law and the prophets. If you love your neighbor yourself, that fulfills the law and the prophets.

That is it. Now, when Jesus said, I didn't come to destroy or whatever he means by that, the law and the prophets came to fulfill it. He came to bring in an order where the things that the law and the prophets anticipated and required would be done spiritually.

That the clean and unclean aspects of ceremonial law would be brought into a spiritual reality in people through the atoning work of Christ. And that the moral aspects of the law would be fulfilled by those who walk not according to flesh, but according to the spirit. As I've already quoted more than twice today, Romans 8, 4. That the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in us.

Who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. Walking in the spirit produces what? More than any other one thing. What does walking in the spirit produce? Love.

The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Paul said in Romans 5. And of course he said in Galatians 5, the fruit of the spirit is love. The spirit produces love. And love produces moral righteous behavior that conforms to the righteous requirements of the law.

But what I understand Paul's meaning to me, the righteous requirements of the law, is that has to do with the moral purity and moral goodness and behavior. The loving behavior that the law calls for toward God and toward man. But if we understood Jesus to say, I did not come to abrogate the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them, or to perpetuate them.

See, here's the thing, fulfill is the flip side of destroy. Whatever is meant by destroy, the flip side of it is fulfill. So if he said I didn't come to abrogate the law, he'd have to say, fulfill means I came to perpetuate the law.

You know, the opposite of abrogating would be perpetuating or continuing it. If he said I didn't come to violate the law, then the opposite would be I came to break the law. Or to keep the law, excuse me.

To keep it, not to break it. But if he's saying I didn't come to invalidate the law, which is what I personally think he meant, then he would be saying I came therefore to validate it. To validate it by its fulfillment.

By bringing about the thing that it forever anticipated until now. That I am the thing the law was always trying to tell you about, as well as the prophets. The law and the prophets, he makes a statement about.

Now, we need to deal with the remaining verses. I've done the whole time trying to understand what's meant by destroy and fulfill here in verse 17. But we need to deal

with verse 18 and its particular difficulties, as well as 19.

I think 20, I've already mentioned, I think that righteousness exceeding that of the scribes and Pharisees. I think the exceeding has to be in terms of depth, not breadth. I don't think it's in terms of quantity, but in terms of quality.

But verses 18 and 19 still require some serious consideration. We'll take a break here and come back to them when we can give it an unhurried treatment.