

the fulfillment of the law matthew 5 17 20 meaning

The Fulfillment of the Law Matthew 5:17-20 Meaning: Understanding Jesus' Teaching on the Law

the fulfillment of the law matthew 5 17 20 meaning is a profound and often discussed topic among biblical scholars, theologians, and believers alike. These verses from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount carry significant weight in understanding how Jesus positioned Himself in relation to the Old Testament Law. For anyone seeking to grasp the relationship between the Mosaic Law and the teachings of Christ, diving into Matthew 5:17-20 offers rich insights into what Jesus meant by fulfilling the law, why He emphasized its importance, and how this shapes Christian living today.

Context of Matthew 5:17-20

Before unpacking the fulfillment of the law Matthew 5:17-20 meaning, it helps to consider the broader context. This passage is part of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus addresses a crowd with moral, spiritual, and ethical teachings. The audience was familiar with Jewish laws and traditions, and Jesus' words challenged common interpretations and practices of the day.

When Jesus 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" (Matthew 5:17, NIV), He immediately addresses a potential misconception. Some might have expected Him to discard the old laws, but instead, He clarifies that His mission is to complete or bring to fruition what the Law points to.

What Does "Fulfill" Mean in This Passage?

Understanding the word "fulfill" is central to grasping the meaning of these verses. The Greek word used here, **plēroō**, can mean to fill up, complete, or bring to its intended purpose. Thus, Jesus is not suggesting the Law is obsolete; rather, He is revealing its true intent and ultimate purpose.

The law, along with the Prophets, served as a guide for righteousness and a foreshadowing of God's redemptive plan. Jesus fulfills the law by embodying its principles perfectly, fulfilling the messianic prophecies, and clarifying the heart behind the commandments.

The Significance of Jesus' Fulfillment of the Law

To understand the fulfillment of the law Matthew 5:17-20 meaning, it is essential to explore why Jesus emphasized this point and what it implies for His followers.

Jesus as the Perfect Righteousness

One of the key aspects of Jesus fulfilling the law is His perfect obedience. Unlike anyone else, Jesus lived a sinless life, fully upholding the law's demands. This perfection was necessary because the law requires perfect righteousness, which no human can achieve on their own.

By fulfilling the law, Jesus becomes the ultimate standard and source of righteousness for believers. This idea connects with other New Testament teachings about grace and faith, where righteousness is credited to those who trust in Christ's work.

The Law's Moral and Ethical Standards Remain

Some people mistakenly believe that Jesus' fulfillment of the law means Christians are no longer bound by its moral and ethical principles. However, Jesus explicitly states that not one "jot" or "tittle" will pass from the law until everything is accomplished (Matthew 5:18). This means the law's moral core remains intact.

Jesus goes further in the subsequent verses (Matthew 5:21-48), deepening the meaning of commandments by addressing the spirit rather than just the letter of the law. For example, He teaches that anger equates to murder in the heart, and lust equates to adultery in the heart. This highlights a higher standard of righteousness that fulfills the law internally, not just externally.

Implications for Christian Living

Reflecting on the fulfillment of the law Matthew 5:17-20 meaning brings practical and spiritual implications for believers today.

Living by the Spirit of the Law

Jesus' teaching calls believers to embrace the spirit behind the commandments rather than merely following rules. This means cultivating love, mercy, and justice—not just outward conformity. The law's purpose is to guide us into a relationship with God, which Jesus fulfills by embodying perfect love and righteousness.

Living by the Spirit of the Law includes:

- Seeking genuine heart transformation over legalistic rule-keeping.
- Allowing Jesus' teachings to influence attitudes and motives.
- Prioritizing love for God and neighbor as the fulfillment of the law's commandments.

Understanding the Role of Grace and Faith

The fulfillment of the law also highlights the balance between law and grace. While the law reveals God's standards, it is through faith in Christ that believers receive grace and forgiveness when they fall short.

Paul's letters in the New Testament expand on this, explaining that believers are not justified by the law but through faith in Jesus, who fulfilled the law on their behalf. This grace empowers Christians to live righteous lives, not as a burden, but as a response to God's love.

Common Misinterpretations and Clarifications

Misunderstanding the fulfillment of the law Matthew 5:17-20 meaning can lead to confusion about the Christian faith and practice.

Does Jesus Abolish the Law?

The verses clearly state that Jesus does not come to abolish but to fulfill the law. Abolishing would mean nullifying or doing away with it, which contradicts Jesus' words that every part of the law will remain until all is accomplished.

Is the Old Testament Law Still Relevant?

Yes, especially the moral teachings. The ceremonial and civil laws specific to ancient Israel have a different status under the New Covenant, but the ethical principles rooted in the law continue to guide Christian conduct.

Does Fulfillment Mean Completion or Replacement?

Fulfillment means completion—Jesus completes the law's purpose. The law pointed forward to Him, and in His life, death, and resurrection, the law's demands and prophecies find their ultimate meaning. This fulfillment does not replace the law with something

arbitrary but transforms how the law is understood and applied.

Historical and Theological Perspectives

Throughout history, theologians have wrestled with the meaning of Jesus' fulfillment of the law. Early Church Fathers emphasized Jesus as the culmination of God's revelation, while Reformation leaders stressed justification by faith through Christ's fulfillment of the law.

Modern scholarship often highlights the continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments, encouraging believers to see Jesus as the key to unlocking the law's true significance.

How This Passage Shapes Christian Ethics

Matthew 5:17-20 sets the foundation for Christian ethics by affirming that God's moral standards remain authoritative but are now understood through the person and work of Jesus. This calls Christians to a higher righteousness that exceeds mere external compliance.

Practical Advice for Applying This Teaching

To live out the fulfillment of the law, it helps to:

1. Study Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount carefully to understand the heart of God's law.
2. Reflect on personal attitudes and motivations, not just actions.
3. Rely on the Holy Spirit to empower righteous living that aligns with Christ's example.
4. Engage with a community of faith for accountability and encouragement in pursuing God's standards.

Exploring the fulfillment of the law Matthew 5:17-20 meaning opens a window into the transformative power of Jesus' message. It invites believers to move beyond legalism and embrace a faith that is both rooted in God's holy law and energized by His grace. This balance continues to inspire and challenge Christians to live lives that honor God deeply and authentically.

Frequently Asked Questions

What does Jesus mean by 'fulfillment of the law' in Matthew 5:17?

In Matthew 5:17, Jesus explains that He has come not to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them, meaning He completes and brings to full meaning the Old Testament laws and prophecies through His teachings, life, death, and resurrection.

How does Matthew 5:18 emphasize the importance of the law?

Matthew 5:18 stresses that not even the smallest letter or stroke of the law will disappear until everything is accomplished, highlighting the enduring authority and significance of God's law until its ultimate fulfillment.

Why does Jesus say that righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees in Matthew 5:20?

Jesus states that unless one's righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, they will not enter the kingdom of heaven, indicating that external adherence is insufficient and a deeper, heartfelt obedience to God's law is required.

How does the fulfillment of the law relate to Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount?

The fulfillment of the law in the Sermon on the Mount shows Jesus deepening the understanding of the law by addressing the spirit behind the commandments, emphasizing internal attitudes and intentions rather than mere external compliance.

Does fulfilling the law mean that Christians are no longer bound by Old Testament laws?

Fulfilling the law means that Jesus completes its purpose and reveals its true meaning; Christians are called to uphold the moral principles of the law through love and grace, though ceremonial and civil laws specific to Israel are fulfilled in Christ and not binding for all believers.

What is the significance of Jesus not coming to abolish but to fulfill the law?

Jesus affirming that He did not come to abolish but to fulfill the law shows continuity between the Old and New Testaments, validating the law's authority while revealing its deeper purpose fulfilled in Him, bridging God's covenant with His people.

How can believers today apply the concept of the law's fulfillment in their lives?

Believers can apply this by seeking to understand the heart and principles behind God's commands, living out righteousness that goes beyond legalism, and following Jesus' example of love, mercy, and obedience to God's will.

What role does Jesus' fulfillment of the law play in Christian salvation?

Jesus' fulfillment of the law is central to salvation because He perfectly obeyed the law on behalf of humanity, and through His sacrifice, believers are justified and reconciled with God, receiving grace rather than condemnation under the law.

How does Matthew 5:17-20 challenge traditional views of the law in Jesus' time?

These verses challenge the traditional view by asserting that the law remains valid and authoritative, but its true righteousness is revealed through Jesus, calling for a deeper, sincere obedience rather than superficial or legalistic observance.

Additional Resources

The Fulfillment of the Law Matthew 5:17-20 Meaning: An Analytical Exploration

the fulfillment of the law matthew 5 17 20 meaning is a pivotal theme within Christian theology, often cited as a foundational passage that connects the teachings of Jesus with the Old Testament laws. These verses, part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, have sparked extensive debate among theologians, scholars, and believers regarding the role of Mosaic Law in the Christian faith. Understanding this passage requires an examination of its linguistic nuances, historical context, and theological implications, which collectively illuminate how Jesus positioned His mission in relation to the law.

Contextual Background of Matthew 5:17-20

The passage occurs early in the Sermon on the Mount, a collection of Jesus' teachings recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus states, "Do not think that I have come

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