



### *Fulfill the Law* - Matthew 5:17-20

Humanity has been working out just what our relationship to the law is since the beginning. In the Garden of Eden, when things ought to have been far simpler, there was just one law, and humanity still did not handle keeping that simple law well enough. When Jesus came on the scene His disciples naturally wondered how His teachings would relate to their prior understanding of the place of the law in their lives.

17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Since, Mount Sinai and the presentation of the 10 Commandments, God’s chosen people had been in part defined by their relationship to God’s law. Was Jesus going to break with a traditional understanding of the law? Was He going to abolish the law in some way? Jesus’ simple answer was a no. Christ did not come to abolish the law, but rather to fulfill it, and here in the midst of an otherwise law-filled passage is a hint at the nature of the gospel in our lives.

While Jesus goes on to stress how the power and demands of the law, both in general and for each individual, have not changed, He does point to how these demands would be met. If we miss this, we run the risk of seeing Jesus’ statement about the need for one’s righteousness to “exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees” (Matthew 5: 20) as an impossible demand. However, recalling that Jesus began this section of His sermon by talking about His fulfilling the law, we can know where that righteousness is to have its source. The law still demands perfect righteousness, but no longer from us. Instead, that perfect righteousness is credited to us from Christ Himself as the one who fulfills the law on our behalf. The law is not done away with. It remains in full power, but its judgment has been handed down to another. Our sin has been exchanged for Christ’s righteousness.

### *Thoughts for Reflection*

Why do you suppose Jesus stressed that the law was not abolished and yet was to be fulfilled by Him?