

“Above and Beyond” (Matthew 5:17–20)

Do you remember the old *Star Trek* television series? It captured the imagination of an entire generation when it first came out. The crew of the starship USS Enterprise endeavored on a five-year mission—“to boldly go where no man has gone before.” “Go beyond!” That was the mission of the starship Enterprise and its crew. And each episode recounted their experiences as they boldly went forth.

Perhaps you’ve wished to live a Sci-Fi life. Work, school, church, and even your marriage and kids are a bit monotonous. There’s part of you that would like to embark on a Star Trek-like adventure. Yet, you realize this is fictitious. (It is fictitious, right?) Closer to our galaxy, have you ever longed to go beyond the natural realm? Do you aspire to live a supernatural life above your present circumstances? If so, the Bible has a definitive word for you. In Matthew 5:17–20, Jesus urges you and me to boldly go where we have never gone before. In these four verses, Jesus helps us understand how the commands of the Old Testament apply to our lives.¹ In short, Jesus says, “*We must go above and beyond.*”

1. Fulfill the Law through Jesus (5:17–18). In this first section, we are called to recognize that Jesus has fulfilled the Old Testament. In 5:17, Jesus begins by saying, “**Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets [the Old Testament²]; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.**” This verse is one of the most important verses in the Bible. For here Jesus explains one of the reasons that He came to earth—He came to fulfill the entire Old Testament.³ Jesus’ first words are: “Do not think.”⁴ Being the world’s greatest teacher, Jesus liked to clear up possible misunderstandings. Jesus is responding to the erroneous view that He came to “abolish” the Old Testament. Obviously, this is utter nonsense! The Old Testament was the Bible of the early church and it remains the only way that we can properly interpret the New Testament. Instead of abolishing the Old Testament, Jesus says, “I came” or “I have come”⁵ to point to His mission to fulfill the Old Testament.⁶ God’s Word was essential to the personal mission of Jesus’ life. Is this true for you as well? What role does God’s Word play in your goals, perspectives, and convictions? Do you run your life through the grid of the Scriptures?

Jesus states that He did not come to “abolish” the Old Testament. “Abolish” (*kataluo*) is a very strong word. In its other three usages in Matthew, the verb is used of demolishing a temple.⁷ Jesus says, “I didn’t come to demolish the Old Testament”; instead, I came to “fulfill” it.⁸ The question is, “What did Jesus mean by the word fulfill?” This is one of the most debated questions in the New Testament. Yet, three points flesh out Jesus’ meaning.⁹

- ***Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah.*** The word “fulfill” (*pleroo*) occurs numerous times in Matthew, and it normally means “to bring to its intended meaning.”¹⁰ “Fulfill” does not mean “to bring to an end.” Rather, it means, “to fill out, expand, or complete.”¹¹ Concerning the Old Testament, we could say that Jesus “filled it up” or “filled it full” with meaning.¹² Whether we study the furnishings of the temple, probe the messianic passages in the Psalms, or delve into the details of Isaiah 53, we see Jesus Christ. Just as the fetus is fulfilled in the adult human, so Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament.¹³ We could go so far as to say that the primary purpose of the Old Testament is to point to Christ.¹⁴ Therefore, Jesus does not contradict the Old Testament; He’s the culmination of it. The entire Old Testament points to Jesus and will be fulfilled in Him, down to the smallest detail.¹⁵

My wife, Lori, is an amazing artist. She will often pencil sketch various people and animals and then allow our children to color them in. Similarly, the Old Testament is the pencil sketch and Jesus is the portrait.¹⁶ When we color in the lines of the Old Testament, we can clearly and beautifully see Jesus. Have you sought to color in the pencil sketch of the Old Testament? Have you seen your Savior as you have read the Old Testament?

- ***Jesus' death fulfilled the Old Testament Law.***¹⁷ The Law prescribed a system of sacrifices to deal with sin. For 1500 years, day after day, week after week, and especially year after year, the people brought their sacrifices. These offerings signified that sin brings punishment and only death and blood could release someone from that punishment. Those thousands of dead animals pointed forward to a sacrifice. That's why John the Baptizer exclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).¹⁸ Through Jesus' sinless life and sacrificial death, the penalty for sin has been paid. Christ provided a way of salvation that meets all Old Testament requirements and demands (Rom 3:21, 31).¹⁹ When you believe in Christ as your Savior, you have fulfilled the Law and will not suffer the eternal consequences of breaking the Law. If you have never placed your faith in Christ's death for your sins, please do so right now. The price has been paid; all you have to do is receive the provision God has made.
- ***Jesus' teaching fulfilled the Old Testament Law.*** In Deuteronomy 18:15–20, Moses prophesied that God would speak anew through a prophet like himself. The teaching of Jesus fleshes out and reveals the full depth of meaning in the Old Testament.²⁰ Jesus was the final Interpreter of and Authority over the Law and its meaning, as other passages in Matthew indicate. Jesus restated some of the Old Testament Laws (19:18–19), but some He modified (5:31–32). Some He intensified (5:21–22, 27–28), and others He changed significantly (5:33–37, 38–42, 43–47). Some Laws He abrogated entirely (Mark 7:15–19). Jesus was not advocating the continuation of the traditional Jewish approach of adherence to the Law. Nor was He advocating that the Law be dismissed altogether. He was proclaiming that the meaning of the Law must be interpreted in light of His coming and in light of the profound changes introduced by His teaching.²¹

At this juncture, perhaps you are nodding your head and uttering hearty amen's. "Yes, that's right brother, we are not under law but under grace!" Now before you get too excited, you must recognize that although we are not under the Old Testament Law that doesn't mean we are not under *any* law. I think about the young man who was tired of his parents' rules about curfews, grooming, and chores around the house. He said, "I can't wait until I'm old enough to get out of here so that I can join the Marines." Poor guy! He was about to trade one set of rules for a different and, in many ways, stricter set of rules.²² In Matt 5:21–48, we will see that Jesus fills up and intensifies the meaning of many of the Old Testament Laws.

Jesus life, death, and teaching completely fulfilled the Old Testament Law. Consequently, every aspect of the Old Testament must be seen, interpreted, and lived out in the light of Jesus Christ.²³ Think of a powerful searchlight scanning over the night sky. The way this light works is that a relatively small source of light is passed through a great lens, which magnifies it into a powerful radiance that spreads over the sky. Now, think of a laser beam. Here, the energy source is concentrated; its power source is transformed into a light of razor-sharp intensity. In Christ, the Law becomes both a searchlight and a laser. When the Law passes through the person and work of Christ, it is both focused and enlarged; its potential to illumine and guide us is both amplified and intensified.²⁴ In light of this, *we must go above and beyond.*

In 5:18, Jesus explains the duration of the Law when He declares, "**For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not²⁵ the smallest letter or stroke²⁶ shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.**"²⁷ The phrase, "For truly I say to you" or "I tell you the truth"²⁸ is an authoritative statement backed up by all that Jesus is.²⁹ When we want to emphasize a statement we often say, "Now mark my words." Jesus said that when it comes to the Bible, we can mark not only the words as true, but also every letter and even the smallest portions of letters. In other words, the Bible is binding, authoritative, and dependable. One implication of this is that to reject the Bible is to reject Jesus and accuse Him of being a liar! Many people who want to claim Jesus don't want to accept the Bible as His Word. But Jesus ruled out that option when He tied His life and ministry to the fulfillment of Scripture.³⁰

In 5:18, Jesus gives two lessons on the longevity and reliability of the Old Testament: one in astronomy and the other in penmanship.³¹ First, Jesus deals in astronomy. In this context “heaven” is describing the universe that God created. “Until heaven and earth pass away” is a vivid way of saying as long as this world lasts.³² The clause “until heaven and earth pass away” is qualified by the further clause “until all is accomplished.” Whatever was prophesied about in the Old Testament was temporary and would be fulfilled by Jesus Christ and His future kingdom.³³

After gazing at the universe through a telescope, Christ examines the Law’s penmanship with a microscope.³⁴ Jesus argues that “not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” This statement by Christ provides us with one of the strongest affirmations in the Bible of the inerrancy of Scripture. Since Jesus is referring to the Old Testament, it is likely that in this penmanship lesson He is reflecting on the Hebrew language. The “smallest letter” of the Hebrew alphabet is the letter *yodh*.³⁵ It is about the size of an apostrophe. The “stroke” refers to a *serif*, a minute distinguishing mark at the end of a Hebrew letter. In English, this would be akin to the tiny stroke that distinguishes a capital *O* and a capital *Q*. Jesus is saying that every dot or comma in the Bible is inspired by God. Furthermore, Christ’s lesson about letters is His emphatic way of saying that the Law and all its teachings will continue. What Jesus does and teaches complies with the Old Testament; but more, He completes the Old Testament.³⁶ Those who have believed in Christ have through Him met all the requirements of the Law.³⁷ Therefore, if we want to live a supernatural life, *we must go above and beyond*. This can only occur when we depend on the perfect righteousness of Christ.

[The Law was fulfilled in Jesus. Now we are exhorted to *practically* experience this fulfillment in our own individual lives.]

2. Follow the commandments of Jesus (5:19–20). Jesus moves from talking about the Law and the Prophets to talking about the kingdom. The way that we can live an “above and beyond life” is by believing in Christ and then seeking to obey Him. In 5:19, Jesus says, **“Whoever then³⁸ annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he [or she] shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”**³⁹ There are several observations that are worth noting in this verse. First, the word “whoever” is a general all-encompassing term that applies to every disciple.⁴⁰ This means that you and I must grapple with this verse. Second, Jesus’ use of the phrase “these commandments” does not refer to the Old Testament commandments (5:17–18). Rather, this is referring to the commandments found in the Sermon on the Mount.⁴¹ Jesus has already mentioned a few (5:13–14), and in 5:21–48, He gives six examples of how His commands “fulfill” the Law.⁴² (We will look at these commandments as we progress in our series.) Third, Jesus distinguishes between disciples in His eternal kingdom.⁴³ The kingdom of heaven is not going to be a classless society. Some people will be greater than others. Some will be called “great,” and others will be called “least.”⁴⁴ This means that some individuals will have a higher standing than others. Everyone will not be equal.⁴⁵ But please notice that disobedient disciples are still in the kingdom of heaven. Even those who break Jesus’ commandments and teach others to do the same have the free gift of eternal life that cannot be lost. This is dependent, however, upon placing one’s faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Fourth, heavenly distinctions are determined by our view of the Scriptures. Our attitude toward the Scriptures brings smallness or greatness, honor or disgrace. We have two equations here: Disobedience + Deception = Dishonor and Obedience + Instruction = Honor. Specifically, how well you obey and teach the Scriptures determines your reward in the kingdom.⁴⁶ Finally, Jesus is the one who calls His disciples “great” or “least.”⁴⁷ Part of the reward of faithfulness is one’s eventual reputation. Our reputation, our name, what we’re “called” will be a part of our eternal reward. Jesus Himself will be the one who specifies that certain persons in the kingdom are great—and that is part of the point. You and I should live in such a way that God will regard us as great subjects of His kingdom. *We must live above and beyond*.

So let me ask you: What value do you place on God's Word? How much of a "stickler" are you in your obedience to the Word? Greatness in Christ's kingdom depends on maintaining a high view of Scripture. Your view of Scripture is the single greatest predictor of your spiritual health. If you love God's Word and are applying it in your life, you are likely to be sound in every other area of your life. John Wesley (1703–1791), the founder of Methodism, said, "I am a Bible-bigot. I follow it in all things, both great and small."⁴⁸ Like Wesley, are you a Bible-bigot or are you a cafeteria Christian—picking and choosing what entrees appeal to you? I challenge you today to become an even greater man or woman of the Word. Here are some ideas to consider as you pursue this goal.⁴⁹

- **Throw away your "Read through the Bible in a Year" programs.** Before you label me a heretic, please recognize the need for baby steps. Many Christians bite off more than they can chew and end up feeling like failures. As a result, they give up on Bible reading because it doesn't seem to work for their schedules. But who says you need to read the Bible through in a year? Since it took 1600 years to write, what's the big hurry? Why not take two years to read the Bible instead of one? Why not spend four months on the Psalms and three months on Proverbs? Today, spend a bit of time in God's Word. Shoot for five minutes, six days a week. Honestly, that is better than reading thirty minutes on one day of the week. Just take baby steps and see if your appetite grows. The Psalmist declares that God's Word is "sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb" (Ps 19:10). Sure sounds better than a plateful of broccoli, doesn't it?
- **Read the Bible in an understandable version.** The *New American Standard Bible Update* that I preach from is designed for those with a twelfth-grade reading level. Admittedly, it is blocky, choppy, and at times awkwardly translated. However, when it comes to studying and preaching the Word, accuracy trumps readability. But when you are reading the Bible, it may be helpful to choose a version that isn't so difficult to read. I would recommend the *New Living Translation*, *New International Version*, *Contemporary English Version*, and *Today's English Version*. These Bibles are designed for those who have a reading level of approximately seventh-grade. They are fluid and easy to follow. If you have used a more literal version, these other versions can be a welcomed breath of fresh air that will bring the familiar Scriptures to life once again.
- **Read the Bible observantly.** Perhaps you like detective and crime shows like I do. If so, when you read the Bible, look for clues that will help you see Jesus anew and afresh. Strive to grasp details that most people would not detect. When you read a passage, ask yourself "who, what, when, where, why, and how" questions. This will bring a new level of excitement to your Bible reading. Don't just read a chapter a day to keep the devil away; read to discover. I have found that the best Bible students I know are the ones that ask the best questions. Take your time and simply pour over the Scriptures like a detective searching out clues and looking for evidence.
- **Learn to interpret the Bible correctly.** There are several fundamental rules to apply in Bible study. (1) Pay careful attention to the context. (2) Look up key words. (3) Compare the passage you are studying with other Scriptures. (4) Consult scholars and other Bible students. Use commentaries and learn from other men and women in the church. Test your interpretations out on other believers to be sure that you're not on the verge of starting your own cult of one.
- **Make application the goal of your Bible study.** You would never think about eating without chewing. Reading the Bible without applying is like eating without chewing. We must always ask this question: How does the biblical truth that I have studied impact my life? Remember, the goal of Bible study is not just to inform, but to transform. These five suggestions will help you progress in your love for God's Word. My prayer for you is that in your Bible study you *go above and beyond*.

Jesus concludes this passage in 5:20 with the key to the Sermon on the Mount: **“For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses⁵⁰ that of the scribes and Pharisees,⁵¹ you will not⁵² enter the kingdom of heaven.”** Stop and feel the weight of these words. This statement is a shocker! During Jesus’ ministry on earth, the scribes and Pharisees were considered to be the most holy and righteous people on earth.⁵³ They were clergy, the professional do-gooders. So Jesus’ declaration is like saying, “Unless you are a greater philanthropist than Mother Theresa and a greater evangelist than Billy Graham and a greater social reformer than Martin Luther King and a greater prophet than Muhammad and more peaceable than Gandhi and wiser than Confucius and more holy than the Pope, you’re not getting into heaven, period.” Whew! What do you do with that?

We must recognize that the scribes and Pharisees prayed, fasted, tithed, and lived according to the rules. They were pretty good at obeying the external requirements of God’s Law, but they didn’t meet the punch line of the Sermon on the Mount.⁵⁴ That comes in 5:48: “Therefore, you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” This takes the statement of 5:20 to its logical conclusion. God requires perfection—not relative perfection, where the standard is other people. The standard is God Himself—the kind of moral perfection that God Himself exhibits. This demand for perfection includes our internal thoughts, motives, and attitudes. This is where the scribes and Pharisees failed. They thought that religious performance made them acceptable to God. Yet, Jesus says that when we stand before God, we’ve got to do better than that. Jesus is not talking about beating the scribes and Pharisees at their own game, but about a different type of righteousness altogether.⁵⁵ Entering into the kingdom has nothing to do with keeping the rules like the scribes and Pharisees.⁵⁶ It has to do with Jesus Christ *fulfilling* the rules for you. No person apart from Christ can produce the righteousness that God commands. In kind, it is His kind; in degree, it is what mathematicians would call “the nth degree.” It is beyond calculation! Without God’s kind of righteousness, no one will enter the kingdom of heaven.⁵⁷ We are sinners in need of a perfect Savior.

A.J. Jacobs, the agnostic senior editor of *Esquire* magazine, decided to spend an entire year trying to be completely obedient to every command in the Bible. In 2007, he wrote a book entitled *The Year of Living Biblically*. He says, “One thing I learned was how much I sinned. That was a little disturbing, but once you start to pay attention to the amount that you lie and gossip and covet and even steal—I was taken aback and that was a real eye-opener.”⁵⁸ These are profound words from an agnostic. As believers we too must be reminded that we need Jesus to solve our sin problem. This recognition ought to compel us to live our lives in response to His grace.

One summer a family went on an Alaskan cruise. The family enjoyed the vacation a great deal, but the dad came home with one observation in particular that really impressed him. He said the flowers in Alaska are huge! The pansies, day lilies, and impatiens all had flowers that were just immense. Even the dandelions stood two feet above the grass with flowers that were six inches across. He wondered what kind of fertilizer the Alaskans were using, but when he inquired they said “none.” Why then, he asked, are the flowers so big? The answer came back: Nearly twenty hours of sunlight! With that much exposure to sunlight, anything would grow bigger and stronger. The same principle applies if I want to grow in Christ. If I want to get bigger in love, stronger in patience, stand taller in selflessness, shine brighter in godliness, I need to spend more time in the S–O–N—the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Law for you and me. Now He asks us to follow His commands. He makes it possible for us to live a supernatural, *above and beyond* life.

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Scripture References

Matthew 5:17–20

Matthew 5:21–48

Matthew 22:34–40

Romans 7:1–6

Romans 8:1–17

Galatians 2:15–21

Galatians 5:16–26

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus' teaching "fulfill" the Law and the Prophets (5:17)? What is my view of the Old Testament? Do I regularly read from the Old Testament? Why or why not? Can I see Jesus in the pages of the Old Testament? If so, where has He been especially obvious to me?
2. Are there any errors in Scripture (5:18)? Why or why not? How do I personally reconcile "apparent contradictories" in the Bible? When skeptics ask me about these supposed inconsistencies, how have I responded?
3. Do I value the Scriptures like Jesus does? How can I grow in my love and appreciation for God's Word? What has worked for me in the past? Have I talked to anyone about my lack of Bible reading? Who can help me grow to be a true man or woman of the Word?
4. When have I been guilty of breaking God's Law and even encouraging others to do the same (5:19)? What were the consequences of my disobedience? Am I aspiring to be called "great in the kingdom of heaven?" Why or why not? Does it concern me that I could be called "least" and forfeit the rewards that could be mine?
5. What or who am I trusting in for eternal life (5:20)? How would I tell my coworker, neighbor, classmate, friend, or family member how to enter the kingdom of heaven? Is my gospel presentation crystal clear in my own mind? Is it true to the Scriptures?

Notes

¹ Carson describes Matt 5:17–20 as “among the most difficult verses in all the Bible.” D.A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5–7* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 36. Wilkins notes that Matt 5:17–20 “provides the key to interpreting the Sermon on the Mount and is in many ways the key to understanding Jesus’ inauguration of the kingdom, and by extension, the understanding of Matthew’s purpose for writing his Gospel.” Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 227.

² The phrase “the Law and the Prophets” refers to two of the three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible, the third being “the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). “The Law and the Prophets” was evidently the most common way Jews referred to the OT then (cf. Matt 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 16:16; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; 28:23; Rom 3:21). The phrase “the Law and Prophets” forms an inclusio with Matt 7:12 where the phrase repeated again. See also R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*. New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 181; David L. Turner, *Matthew*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 162.

³ Later in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus declares, “I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (9:13b).

⁴ The Greek phrase *me nomisete* (“Do not think”) is only used elsewhere in Matt 10:34. Cf. the similar phrase *me dokeite* in John 5:45.

⁵ See NET, ESV, NIV.

⁶ See Matt 9:13; 10:34–35; 20:28 (cf. 11:19). France notes that contrary to popular opinion, Matthew does not use this phrase as a reference to Jesus’ eternality like John does in his gospel. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 184.

⁷ See Matt 24:2; 26:61; 27:40. BDAG s.v. *kataluo* 3 defines the word as “to end the effect or validity of something, put an end to.”

⁸ It is important to note that the contrast is not between “abolish” and “observe,” but between “abolish” and “fulfill.” Jesus did not claim that He came to observe the Law or to keep the Law; rather He came to *fulfill* it.

⁹ Dockery & Garland provide their own points by suggesting that Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets in three ways: by living in perfect obedience to them, by recapturing their divine purpose, and by completing their promises. David S. Dockery & David E. Garland, *Seeking the Kingdom* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1992), 42.

¹⁰ Fulfillment is one of the dominant themes in Matthew’s gospel. The word “fulfill” (*pleroo*) is the key term chosen by Matthew to depict the impact of Jesus’ coming on the OT (Matt 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 3:15; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35, 48; 21:4; 23:32; 26:54, 56; 27:9). In addition to 5:17 Matthew uses it fifteen times in comparison with Mark’s two and Luke’s nine uses. Ten occurrences in Matthew come in the introductions to the distinctive Matthean formula quotations (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9), two in more general statements regarding Jesus’ fulfilling of the Scriptures (26:54, 56), one in the reason given for Jesus’ baptism (3:15), and two others have no theological significance (13:48; 23:32).

¹¹ Matthew would have likely chosen to use the Greek word *teleo* if he had “completion” in mind.

¹² See also Charles H. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Character Formation and Ethical Decision Making in Matthew 5–7* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 61.

¹³ Haddon W. Robinson, *What Jesus Said About Successful Living* (Grand Rapids: RBC, 1991), 108.

¹⁴ See Rom 6:14; 7:4; 10:4; 1 Cor 9:20; Gal 5:18; Eph 2:15.

¹⁵ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 182.

¹⁶ Robinson, *What Jesus Said About Successful Living*, 120–121.

¹⁷ *Contra* Blomberg who concludes Jesus meant that He came to fulfill the moral Law (the Ten Commandments) but that He abolished Israel’s civil and ceremonial Laws. However, there is no basis for this distinction in this text nor in any other NT text. Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*. New American Commentary series (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 103–105.

¹⁸ Robinson, *What Jesus Said About Successful Living*, 108.

¹⁹ With reference to the three “categories” of Law, we can confidently say (1) Christ fulfilled the Ten Commandments by living a perfect and sinless life. Thus, when a man or woman trusts in Christ, Christ’s righteousness is imputed to that individual so we have justification. We have Christ’s righteousness so the Law can’t condemn us (Rom 8:1; 7:1–6; Rom 5:1; 4:4–8). (2) Christ fulfilled the ceremonial ordinances, the shadows and types of His person and work, by dying on the cross for us and in our place. This showed that God was also perfect justice and sin must be judged, but God provided His Son, the precious Lamb of God. The penalty that the Law exercised was paid. Again there is no condemnation because the believer is “in Christ” (Col 2:14; Rom 3:24–25). (3) Christ also fulfilled the Social Law, but now He replaces it with a new way of life fitting to our new salvation. He gives provision for the inner man—the indwelling Holy Spirit—who enables us to experience true sanctification so that we may experience also the righteousness of the Law (Rom 8:2–4).

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- ²⁰ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*. Word Biblical Commentary series (Dallas: Word, 1993), 106.
- ²¹ See J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 323. For similar views on Matt 5:17–48 see D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), Electronic ed; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 104–106.
- ²² Robert Jeffress, *Grace Gone Wild! Getting a Grip on God's Amazing Gift* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2005), 47.
- ²³ Thomas Long, *Matthew*. Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997), 53.
- ²⁴ Long, *Matthew*, 53.
- ²⁵ This phrase includes the Greek double negative *ou me* (“certainly not”).
- ²⁶ Many people are more familiar with the rendering of the KJV and NKJV, which translates “smallest letter or stroke” as “one jot or one tittle.” However, “jot and tittle” have faded out of English use.
- ²⁷ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 229, states, “This has implications for understanding Jesus’ view of the inspiration of Scripture, which extends to the actual words, even letters and parts of letters. This is in accord with a ‘verbal plenary’ view of inspiration; that is, the very words, and all of the words, of Scripture are inspired. Scripture does not simply contain the Word of God; the words of Scripture are the very Word of God.”
- ²⁸ See NET, NIV.
- ²⁹ This phrase is used a total of thirty-one times in Matthew’s gospel; thirteen times in Mark; six times and Luke; and twenty-five times in John.
- ³⁰ Tony Evans, *The Transforming Word* (Chicago: Moody, 2004), 20.
- ³¹ Robinson, *What Jesus Said About Successful Living*, 105.
- ³² This interpretation is confirmed by Jesus’ phraseology in Matt 24:34–35 where the phrases “until heaven and earth pass away” and “until all is accomplished” are synonymous.
- ³³ The Law was both temporary (Gal 3:19; Eph 2:15; Heb 7:12) and eternal (Matt 5:18; Rom 3:31; 8:4). As a covenant system with Israel, it ended at the cross when the temple veil was torn in two and a new priesthood was established; as a set of moral and spiritual principles, it is eternal.
- ³⁴ Robinson, *What Jesus Said About Successful Living*, 105.
- ³⁵ The word for “smallest letter” is the Greek word *iota* (pronounced yota), which is the name of the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet. It is like our small “i” but with no dot over it. We have taken this word over into English to represent a very small thing, as when we say, “It doesn’t make one iota of difference.”
- ³⁶ Dockery & Garland, *Seeking the Kingdom*, 41.
- ³⁷ Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*. Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 118.
- ³⁸ The conjunction *oun* (“therefore, then”) is excluded by the NIV, but is emphatic in the ESV, HSB, and NRSV. (“Therefore” is the first word in these English versions).
- ³⁹ Paul agrees with Jesus’ words when he calls the Law “holy...righteous...good” (Rom 7:7, 12). He also says to Timothy that “the Law is good, if one uses it Lawfully” (1 Tim 1:8).
- ⁴⁰ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 105 and Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 62 states that the context suggests that this verse is primarily intended for Jesus—disciples—teachers of God’s Word.
- ⁴¹ Carson, *Sermon on the Mount*, 38.
- ⁴² Wilkins, *Matthew*, 236. Two very interesting verses that support this view are found in Matthew’s gospel: Matt 11:12 “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.” Jesus is saying “From John the Baptist on, the kingdom of heaven advances (cf. Luke 16:16f). Matt 13:52: And Jesus said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old.”
- ⁴³ *Contra* Wilkins, *Matthew*, 230, who writes, “‘Least’ and ‘great’ are ways to acknowledge in this present life those who have been faithful in word and deed to the revealed will of God as it is taught by Jesus.”
- ⁴⁴ We see this kind of comparison of least and greatest two other times in Matthew: Matt 11:11: “Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” Matt 18:4: “Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”
- ⁴⁵ The idea of gradations of privilege or dishonor in the kingdom occurs elsewhere in the synoptic Gospels (Matt 20:20–28; cf. Luke 12:47–48).
- ⁴⁶ Notice that there will be people in the kingdom whose view of Scripture will not be the same before they enter the kingdom. All will be righteous, but their obedience to and attitude toward Scripture will vary.
- ⁴⁷ Michael Eaton, *The Way that Leads to Life* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1999), 61.

⁴⁸ Preaching Today citation: John Wesley in his Journal. *Christianity Today*, Vol. 40, no. 7.

⁴⁹ Robert Jeffress, *Guilt-Free Living* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1995), 192–204.

⁵⁰ The word “surpass” (*perisseuo*) refers to a *quality* of righteousness over a quantity of righteousness.

⁵¹ The two religious groups mentioned are often paired in the Gospels (eleven times in Matthew).

⁵² Again (cf. 5:18), this phrase includes the Greek double negative *ou me* (“certainly not”).

⁵³ Glasscock, *Matthew*, 119 notes that “scribes were the religious scholars of the time. Their primary function was to copy and preserve the Scriptures. The scribes were also expositors of the Law, often called Lawyers, and normally members of the party of Pharisees. The Pharisees were a religious party somewhat like the Democrat or Republican Party in the American political system.”

⁵⁴ Jesus rebuked the scribes and the Pharisees for “majoring on the minors while minoring on the majors” (see Matt 23). Dockery & Garland, *Seeking the Kingdom*, 43–44.

⁵⁵ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 189.

⁵⁶ The phrase “enter the kingdom” occurs seven other times in the NT (Matt 7:21; 18:3; 19:23, 24; Mark 9:47; John 3:5; Acts 14:22). The condition for entering in every case is faith alone.

⁵⁷ John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 97.

⁵⁸ A.J. Jacobs, *The Year of Living Biblically* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007). See <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/discussion/2007/10/04/DI2007100401575.html>