



TRUTH IN LOVE

Shedding Light on the Word of God

PASSING ON THE LAW

Matthew 5:18

*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.*

In Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus is teaching about His view of the law. Previously, in Matthew 5:17, Jesus denied accusations that He had come to do away with the law and the Prophets. Now, in 5:18, He reveals that His purpose is not to do away with the law, but to fulfill it. His statement in 5:18 shows that He has the highest regard for the Hebrew Scriptures in their entirety—down the least and smallest stroke of a pen. Christ’s regard for the Bible matched (and surpassed) that of the most meticulous and conscientious Bible teachers of His day.

THE LONGEVITY OF THE LAW

First, He talked about the longevity of the law. Jesus taught that the law will be in effect **till heaven and earth pass away**. Many Christians today believe that Christ has done away with the law, and therefore, it doesn’t really apply for believers today in the church age. However, as Jesus taught in Matthew 5:17, He did not come to destroy (i.e., abolish, do away) with the law and the prophets, but to fulfill (i.e., establish, bring more significance to) the law. Those who argue that Christ, through His life, death, and resurrection, has done away with the law, must deal with His statement here that the law serves a purpose *till heaven and earth pass away*. Since heaven and earth will not pass away until the end of the Millennium when God creates a new heaven and a new earth (Matt 24:35; 2 Pet 3:7-12; Rev 21:1),¹ the law must still be in effect today in some way or fashion.

THE LETTERS OF THE LAW

Jesus goes on to state the importance and permanence of every letter of the Bible, even the smallest stroke of a pen. He states that **one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law**.

The *jot* refers to the Hebrew letter *yodh* (י), with its Greek equivalent, the *iota* (ι). The *tittle* refers to the littlest stroke or dot of the pen (*kepaia*, lit., “horn” or “projection”).² Since most of the Hebrew vowel and punctuation markings were added after Christ lived, He is probably referring to the ornamentation marks of Hebrew script. On many of the letters, there are little “horns” or “projections.” The *yodh* above, for example, has a “horn” coming up off the top of the letter (You may need a magnifying glass to see it!). Other Hebrew letters have similar ornamentation marks, which are critical for reading Hebrew. For example, *hait* (ה) and *tahv* (ת) are two different letters in Hebrew, and the primary difference between the two is the “projection” on the lower left corner of the *tahv*.

So Christ’s statement affirms the law; not only every letter, but also every little piece of every letter. In English, it would be like Christ stating the importance of the dot on every i and the cross on every t. Every part of the law will have a purpose until the end of the world—down to the smallest little piece (cf. an identical statement in Luke 16:17).

With these words, there must have been an audible sigh of relief from the Scribes and Pharisees in the audience. In the beginning of this verse, Christ had said that the law would pass away when the heavens and earth passed away. They did not like this. But by affirming every stroke of the pen in the law, Christ agreed with the Scribal teachings of His day. They taught that when Sarai’s name was changed to Sarah (thereby losing a *yodh*), the *yodh* cried out from generation to generation, protesting its removal from Scripture, until Moses returned it to Scripture by changing Hoshea’s name to Joshua (which begins with a *yodh*; Num 13:16). “So you see,” the teachers would say, “not even the smallest letter can pass from the law.”³

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW

So, if Christ has stated that the law would only pass away when the heavens and earth pass away (which hasn’t happened yet), and He has affirmed the importance of every part of the law, down to the least stroke of a pen, are believers in Christ “under the law” today? The simple answer is “no” and the reason is because of what Christ says in the last part of v 18, where He claims that the law would be **fulfilled**.

In Matthew, the term *fulfilled* is extremely significant, and often refers to how Christ is completing, or bringing greater significance to a particular Old Testament passage or concept.⁴ To fulfill the law does not mean He is doing away

¹ It is important to note that though the Mosaic law will pass away with the heavens and the earth, the words and instructions of Christ will not ever pass away (Matt 24:35). The law of Christ, unlike the Mosaic law, is eternal.

² Geoffrey W. Bromiley, “Dot” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:985.

³ Craig Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 178.

⁴ Gerhard Delling, “*plēroō*” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* ed. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), IV:293-297.

with it in the sense that it no longer has any importance or significance for the followers of Jesus Christ. To the contrary, by fulfilling the law, Christ is giving *greater* significance to the law for those who believe in Him and follow Him on the path of discipleship.

Granted, this is a difficult concept for us to grasp today, especially since we have been repeatedly told that as members of the church, we are no longer under the Law, but under grace (cf. Rom 6:14-15; Gal 5:18). But we must realize that there is a difference between being freed from the Law, and learning from the Law. There is a difference between being under the Law, and discovering truths and principles for practical daily living from the Law.

So next time you read Leviticus (and I hope you do read it!), don't simply disregard it all as an ancient and obsolete system of law that is irrelevant for Christians in church-age. When studying Hebrew Scriptures, we ask, "What does this passage have to say about the person and work of God?" Whatever it says about God is transcendent and timeless. Second, ask "What does this passage say about the human condition?" And finally, ask, "What does this say about how humans can relate to a holy God and to one another? Recognize that there are truths and principles in Leviticus (and the rest of the law) for you as well, and pray that God would reveal these truths to you so you can know more about Him, and how to live your life by faith, in the Spirit, and in the truth of His *entire* Word.

Family & Ministry Update

by Wendy

January was a joyful month for us as we celebrated Selah's third birthday. By the time it was actually her big day, she had finally decided that it was okay to turn three—up until then, she wanted to stay two. I am excited for what this next year will bring; how she will grow and the new things she will learn.

We also received more snow in January. The girls really enjoyed bundling up in all their winter clothes and going outside to make snowmen. One day we were also able to make two one-foot snowmen. The girls decorated them with raisins and pots.



We got more snow and the girls made tiny snowmen.

Now that it is February, we get to spend our days making lots of Valentine's crafts. Taylor loves to make them, and Selah loves to play with all the materials for making them. However, when it comes to Valentine's cards, both girls could make fifty or more, and still not get bored. When the girls are done with Valentine's Cards, we'll move on to food because if there is anything better than decorating cards, it is decorating cookies, cakes, candy, and biscotti. So, if you're in the area, stop by for a treat. I promise...we'll have plenty!

May your Valentine's Day be filled to overflowing with love from your Heavenly Father so that you can share His love with others.

From Jeremy: My work and classes are going well. Thank you for your prayers. Learning Hebrew is a challenge, and takes up more homework time than all my other classes combined.

As it turns out, for those of you in Montana, I am *not* speaking Hamilton since they are only having pastoral candidates come, and I am not a candidate.

Also, I recently added an "RSS feed" to my website, and you can add it to your own personalized website on if you have one. I am continuing to speak 2-3 times per month, and the audio will be posted on the Podcast, while the text is posted on the RSS feed. I've started a series on Spiritual Warfare from Ephesians 6:10-20, which you don't want to miss.



Selah turned three this month.



This either means "Touchdown" or "I love you THIS much!"