

Appendix C: The Interpretation of Matthew 5:17

What did Jesus mean when He declared in Matthew 5:17? – **“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.”** Unfortunately, the answer to that question has been distorted and misapplied by the advocates of Dominion Theology. They believe that Jesus’ purpose in coming to fulfill the Law, authorizes them to impose the Mosaic Law upon society as a whole, in every nation on earth. As always, the context of what Christ said is important. Jesus is confronting a misconception about His earthly ministry, which in turn, becomes a rebuke to the self-righteous hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). These religionists had added human traditions to the Old Testament by means of numerous and detailed external requirements. These traditions served the purpose of invalidating the Word of God, rather than enhancing and interpreting it. Jesus, Himself, makes that clear in Matthew 15:6. So the confusion surrounding His rebuke in Matthew 5:20, caused some to think that Jesus was “throwing out the baby with the bath water.” He wasn’t.

His desire was to abolish (“tear down”) the traditions of men, in order to set the stage for His fulfillment (“completion”), of the purpose of God. His birth, life, death and resurrection accomplished that fulfillment. Notice how Jesus had to remind His disciples of what He said in Matthew 5:17, when He confronted them on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:44 –

“Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’”

This fulfillment paved the way for a new and better covenant which in turn created a similar misunderstanding in regard to the Law of God. In the early stages of the Church Age under the New Covenant, as justification through faith was boldly proclaimed by the apostles and prophets, some viewed this as an attempt to nullify the Law. Paul’s clarification of the very same confusion which Jesus faced, is initially provided for us in Romans 3:31 –

**“Do we then nullify the Law through faith?
May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.”**

Due to Christ’s redemptive work, an individual could now be judicially declared by God to be “not guilty” of any sin, and “perfectly righteous” in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). As a result, justification has commonly been described as freedom from the **penalty** of sin. In addition, for those who have entered into this freedom from the penalty of sin, the potential now exists for experiencing freedom from the **power** of sin. How? Due to Christ’s redemptive work, the Law of God has been internalized in everyone who puts their trust in Him; enabling them to obey the moral law of God in a far more effective manner through the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is what Paul means by “establishing the Law” because of Christ’s “fulfillment of the Law.” He confirms this New Covenant truth in Romans 8:2-4 with such profound clarity, so as to be overwhelming:

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”