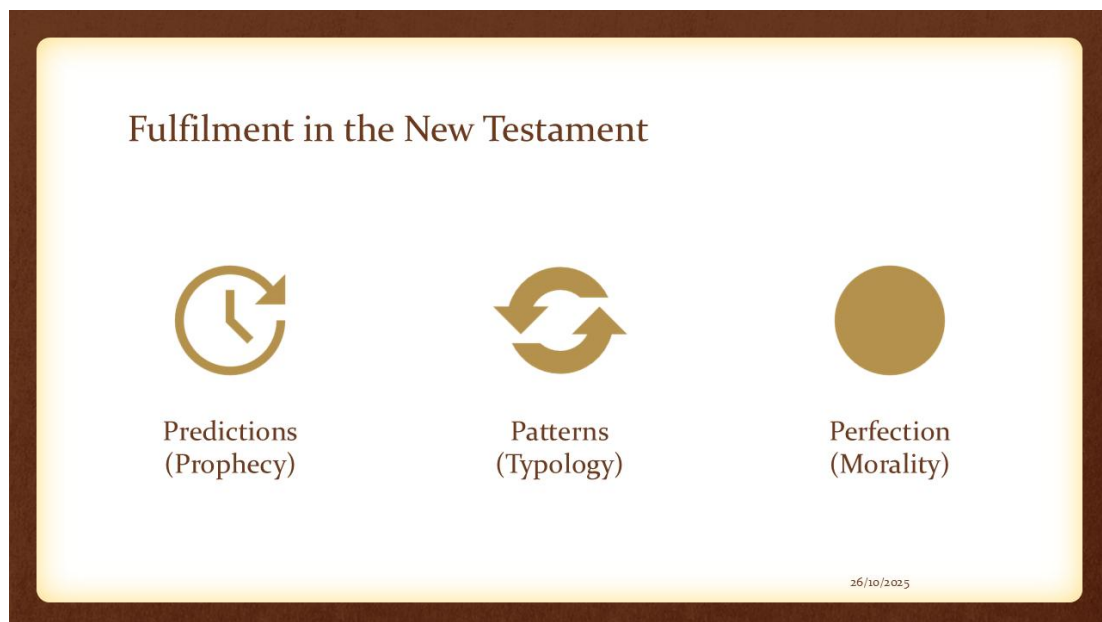


5:17-20 - The Enduring Purpose of the Law, and the Need for Greater Righteousness

Christians have often struggled with the question of Old Testament law. What should we do with it? Ignore it or obey it? Those who read through the Old Testament will sometimes find God's laws strange, impractical, or even wrong (from our cultural perspective).

In this passage, Jesus wants to make clear to his disciples that his teaching is not making a break from the law that came before. The law matters! But he clarifies that he is also not continuing with the status quo. He is moving forward beyond the law and its teaching. The people noted that he was not just repeating the law and explaining it like the scribes did, but he was teaching with "authority" (7:28-29)

In other words, Jesus did not come to "abolish" (set aside) the law, but to "fulfil" it. Remember, that "fulfil" is an important New Testament concept. Matthew has already shown us how Jesus "fulfilled" Old Testament prophecy (predictions about him), typology (patterns from Israel), and laws (righteousness in his baptism and temptation). Now, in the words of Jesus, he is telling us that all of the Old Testament (the law and the prophets) will be fulfilled in Christ (and his people, the Church).



This includes all of the Jewish law (e.g. the 10 commandments). But this challenges us to ask, when and how are the Old Testament laws fulfilled? Have they been fulfilled and made irrelevant, or do we need to keep them waiting for their fulfilment?

In one sense, the life of Christ fulfils the obligations of the Jewish law completely. Jesus was the perfect Jewish man. He practiced the requirements of the law, including the

Jewish sabbath, food laws, and sacrifices. Matthew has already pointed us to this in the words of Jesus, "it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness" (3:15).

In another sense, the "fulfilment" of the Old Testament law is seen in the new "Christian" community, which Jesus has described as "salt" and "light" in the world (5:13-16). Christians are to "more fully fill" the requirements of the law, by going beyond the letter, and embodying the spirit (cf. Romans 7:6).

5:21-48 Examples of Greater Righteousness

Jesus will now give six examples that help us to understand what the "fuller" meaning of the law is. Some have suggested he is replacing or adding to the law, but it might be better to see that Jesus is drawing out the truth of the law in a more forceful way. True righteousness goes beyond the rigid requirements of rule keeping and challenges our hearts to embrace the force and intention of the law.

5:21-26 On Murder and Anger

5:27-30 On Adultery and Lust

5:31-32 On Divorce and Adultery

5:33-37 On Oaths and Faithfulness

5:38-42 On Vengeance and Forbearance

5:43-48 On Hate and Love

Activity

Activity

- In groups
 - pick one of the following old testament predictions, patterns, and laws.
 - Discuss "how can these be these fulfilled?" There may be more than one answer.
 - Remember to think about the life of Christ, the life of a Christian, and the coming again of Christ.
1. The Serpent (Genesis 3:14-15)
 2. The Sacrifices (Exodus 12:1-13)
 3. The Sabbath (Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11)
 4. The Food Laws (Leviticus 11:1-12)

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