

ST. SIMEON ANGLICAN CHURCH, OFF FUTA ROAD, AKURE

BIBLE STUDY, 18/06/2008

STUDY 10

THE PERMANENCE OF THE WORD OF GOD

Matthew 5:17 – 18

The law of the Old Testament was inspired by God through the prophets in order to guide the people to accomplish the will of God. Jesus Christ was not to abolish the old law, but to fulfil it and to give it the right interpretation. What the Old Testament needs is a new interpretation in the light of the teaching of the New Testament and in the function of Jesus for the attainment of salvation. The disciples of Christ should teach the law and practice it in order to be worthy of their mission. The new interpretation of the Law is "destined to set Christianity free from Judaism".

1. The law and the prophets

Matthew 5:17; Matthew 7:12; 11:12–13; Luke 16:16; Matthew 22:40; Psalm 119:136; 19:7–11; Romans 7:14,12; 12:2; I John 5:3; Psalm 119:36; Psalm 51:26; Deuteronomy 27:26; James 2:20; James 4:12; Isaiah 33:22; Amos 2:4; Hosea 4:6; Galatians 5:13–14

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets". The Old Testament Scriptures were comprehensively summarised under the title, "the law and the prophets" thus the first and widest meaning of our Lord's words is, Suppose not that My mission is to repudiate the authority of Holy Writ; rather is it to establish and enforce the same.

Exactly what did Christ here signify by "the law"? The whole Jewish law, which was threefold: ceremonial, judicial, and moral. The ceremonial described rules and ordinances to be observed in the worship of God; the judicial described ordinances for the government of the Jewish commonwealth and the punishment of offenders: the former was for the Jews only; the latter primarily for them, yet concerned all people in all times so far as it tended to establish the moral law. The moral law is contained in the ten commandments. While the entire Jewish law was comprehended by our Lord's expression "the law," yet it is clear that He alluded principally to the moral law, for the subsequent parts of the sermon refer directly and mainly to it.

In the old covenant God had given the law to Moses for man's benefit so that he could recognise the character of God and his own inability to enact such. The law was not intended to be a legalistic club to be used by religionists to beat mankind into conformity and slavery, but Jewish religion began to use the law for selfish and destructive purposes. The law is pure, spiritual, perfect, not grievous, holy and righteous and good, for it expresses the holy, righteous and good character of God. The wicked despises, forgets, forsakes, refuses to hear nor to walk in or casts away the law. Christians are not longer required to keep the ceremonial law, which has been made obsolete by the cross (Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:4). Christians, however, have never been excused from keeping the moral law of God. They obey them, not to merit salvation, but as a token of lives transformed by the grace of God. Christians, like Jesus, are not to be lawless. The law is the rule of life to Christians.

2. Christ and the law

Matthew 5:17; Isaiah 42:21; Matthew 7:12; Acts 13:22; Galatians 6:2; James 2:8; John 8:46; I Peter 2:22–23

Christ's preaching was so entirely different from that of the Pharisees and Sadducees (which was supposed to be based on the Old Testament), that the people were inclined to imagine His intention was to subvert the authority of God's Word and substitute His own in its place. Because Christ despised "the traditions of the elders," the religious leaders supposed Him to be a deceiver, going about to destroy the very foundations of religion. Because He threw far more emphasis upon great moral principles than upon ceremonial institutions, many were ready to imagine that He repudiated the entire Levitical system. Because He was the Proclaimer of grace and the Dispenser of mercy, the "Friend of publicans and sinners," the idea became current that He was opposed to the law.

For a long time past the view had more or less obtained that when the Messiah appeared He would introduce radical changes and entirely overthrow the ancient order of religion. Therefore did Christ here assure the people that so far from being antagonistic to the Old Testament Scriptures, He had come to fulfil them. From this verse 17 to the end of chapter 5, Christ treats of the most important subject of *the moral law*, showing its true meaning, which had been much corrupted by the Jewish teachers.

"*Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil*". The Saviour of souls is the *destroyer* of nothing but the *works of the devil*, of nothing that comes from God, much less of those excellent dictates which we have from Moses and the prophets. No, he came to *fulfil* them. "To destroy" the law is not to empty it of meaning, but is to rescind, dissolve or abrogate it. "To fulfil," is to perform what the law and the prophets required, to substantiate them, to make good what they demanded and announced and to rescue the law from the corrupt glosses of the Jews and to explain its higher meaning. First, Christ fulfilled the law by His *doctrine*: both by restoring to it its proper meaning and true use, and by revealing the right way in which the law may be fulfilled. Second, in His *person*: both by performing perfect and perpetual obedience unto its precepts, and by suffering its penalty, enduring death upon the Cross for His people. Third, *in men*: in the elect by imparting faith to their hearts, so that they lay hold of Christ who fulfilled it for them, and by giving them His own Spirit which imparts to them a love for the law and sets them on endeavouring to obey it; in the reprobate when He executes the curse of the law upon them.

3. The perpetuity of the word of God

Matthew 5:18; Luke 16:17; 21:33; Isaiah 40:6–8; I Peter 1:23–25; I Peter 2:2; Psalm 119:133,47,97,162; Titus 2:5; II Peter 3:9–10; Isaiah 34:4

For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. *Verily I say* is a unique form used by Jesus throughout His preaching to draw attention to the authority of His message. *Verily* means truly, certainly, or amen. It is used as a designation of authoritative teaching. *One jot or one tittle* refers to the minutest marks and letters of the Hebrew alphabet. He explained that even the smallest statement in the law must be fulfilled. A jot is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, called *yodh*. A tittle is

a small projection on the edge of certain Hebrew letters to distinguish them from one another. In saying "till heaven and earth pass away"—the most stable of all created objects—Christ affirmed the unchangeableness of the law. He made reference to the minutiest of the Hebrew alphabet, that not so much as its smallest part shall pass from the law—the "jot" being the tiniest letter, and the "tittle" the smallest curve of a letter. The word of God is perpetual and the moral law remains forever as a rule of obedience to every child of God.

We should learn from Christ's declaration of the immutability of the Law that, first, the Scriptures are the very Word of God, and therefore a sure resting place for our hearts. A Christian is subject to many doubts of the truth of God's promises in times of trial and temptation, but this should ever be remembered: not one jot or tittle can pass till all be accomplished. Second, that no part of the inspired Scriptures, still less any whole book of it, can be lost: neither man nor devil can destroy one jot of it. Third, this immutability of the law shall stand against them for ever. Fourth, Christ's setting His seal upon the inviolable authority of the law intimates its perfections: every part of it is needed by us, every sentence evidences its Divine authorship, every precept calls for our loving obedience.