

JESUS AND THE LAW

Contributed by Jim Jordal
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By Jim
Jordal

"Don't think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill. For most assuredly, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not even one smallest letter or one tiny pen stroke shall in any way pass away from the law, until all things are accomplished. Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and teach others to do so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.
Matt. 5:17-20 WEB

We no longer argue over whether Christians are under God's law; we just live as if the issue were irrelevant. But the question is as important now as any other time in history because our very survival as a nation depends upon reviving the power of the law's requirements for national justice, righteousness, mercy, and truth.

During his short time among men, Jesus taught that human relationships to the law would be perverted by misled teachers in both directions. Some would pursue the Pharisaical position that law, even that relating to sacrifices and offerings, still existed and that perfect observation of it was the source of personal salvation. Others would claim that Christ did away with all law through his great sacrifice, and that we are now totally free from God's legal demands. In the passage above Jesus reveals both views as he attempts to clarify the issue.

His first comment mentions that the law will pass away only when it is accomplished, or fulfilled. His death on Calvary fulfilled the law's requirements for sacrificial offerings and ceremonial observations. So that portion of law is no longer in effect for Christians. But that leaves the remainder of the law concerning justice, righteousness, mercy, and truth still in effect, and pronounces loss of status in the Kingdom to come for those who ignore or minimize the law. On the other hand, great reward in the future Kingdom accrues

to those who both “do and teach” the promised but yet unfulfilled law.

One source

of considerable error in Christian circles is to confuse laws intended for personal interaction in society with those laws intended for the nation as it wends its way toward Christ’s Kingdom. There is a vast difference between personal and national law. For example, when Jesus taught people to “turn the other cheek” after being struck by an attacker, he was speaking of personal response to a threatening interpersonal situation, not to an attack by one nation upon another. To carry the analysis a bit further, had we applied the turn- the- other- cheek doctrine to national affairs, we would never have responded militarily to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, or the invasion of Poland by Germany, both events having great future consequences.

Jesus

terminated this lesson by adding the imperative that “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter the Kingdom of God.” The righteousness of the Pharisees was characterized through observance of the principles of the Torah (first 5 books of our Bible) and also many religious principles from the prophets and rabbinical teaching. This learning was supplemented by rituals, legalisms, and other formalities including many holidays. So it became salvation through law rather than the Christian concept of salvation through grace. Pharisaical observance of the law obviously had many benefits, including a more orderly and supportive government and society; but it did not provide salvation as Jesus was soon to teach and the disciples to observe and model.

But the fact

that Christian salvation is a gift of God through the sacrifice of his Son in no way allows us to evade and ignore the many legal prescriptions found in the Mosaic Law, the Jubilee observances, and the simple teachings of Christ.

Political

libertarians seem to joy in the absence of law since they see law as mainly a coercive attempt to maintain power over the people. But without our God-given legal system, faulty as it is, we would dwell in a chaotic world, cringing in fear from the violence that would ensue. So thanks be to God for the law!