

## Matthew 5:17-20

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Do you enjoy reading or watching crime mysteries? They can be intriguing, looking at the clues, which may appear unattached, contradictory and often puzzling, and trying to work out what really happened and who do the clues point to.

In the Sherlock Holmes books, there were always puzzling clues scattered throughout each book, but it was not until the last chapter that Dr Watson was told how elementary it was, as each clue of the puzzle was assembled by Sherlock Holmes and the offender arrested.

But what would happen if you lost the last chapter of each book? Imagine the frustration of persevering through book after book without any solutions. Unsolved puzzle after unsolved puzzle, with thousands of clues swirling around.

For Christians, sometimes the Old Testament can be like that. They remember bits of the Old Testament. They have places like the Garden of Eden and Jerusalem; people like Abraham, David, Solomon, and Isaiah; the exodus from Egypt under Moses; the laws given on Mt Sinai; and other major stories, like Daniel in the lions' den, Joshua at the battle of Jericho etc.

But then there are those harsh laws, like who is to be killed for what offences, what foods they can or cannot eat, no mixing of different types of threads in one cloth etc. Let alone the more barbaric bits such as animal sacrifices, and the killing of 1000s.

It all seems out-dated and some go even so far as to say that the God of the Old Testament is ordinary at best, but vengeful and racist and blood-thirsty at worst.

They prefer the softer, gentler, more loving approach of Jesus in the New Testament.

To them, the clues in the Old Testament point to nothing except to be gotten rid of. There seems to be no reason to read it, let alone believe it, for it makes no sense for us now and it only makes us want to hate and kill.

Yet Jesus didn't have that view of the Old Testament. In Matthew 5:17-18 he said "*Do not think that I've come to abolish the law or the prophets; I've come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.*"

He affirmed the continuing relevance and nature of the Old Testament. Do not remove even a letter or a

stroke of a letter from it. He did not come to abolish the law or the prophets.

So if a Christian says that we do not need the Old Testament, because we follow Jesus, then that Christian is in conflict with Jesus himself.

Jesus said he came to fulfil the Law and the prophets, not abolish it, so if any Christian says that the god of the Old Testament is not the true God, or is not consistent with the god we find in the New Testament, then that Christian is in conflict with Jesus.

So does that mean we have to obey the Old Testament Law? Should we rebuild the Jerusalem temple, and make animal sacrifices? Should we kill all witches, stone to death any adulterer, refuse to eat bacon, have the next eldest brother marry his childless widowed sister-in-law and never buy poly-cotton clothing etc?

Certainly verse 19 may tend to push us that way. He said *Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.*

It is good to see that most of you are objecting in your heads. Yes he said that, but does it mean what I've just said?

The clue I missed, was the word fulfil. He came not to abolish but to fulfil. This tiny little clue matches with the rest of the obvious teaching in the New Testament, even right from the start of Matthew's gospel. If you read Matthew's gospel constantly Matthew says words such as *and so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet.*

The final chapter of each Sherlock Holmes book has been found. All the clues of how we are to understand the Old Testament point directly to Jesus. Not just the prophecies, but also the law. He didn't come to abolish or remove the Old Testament, but to fulfil it. and that means we enter into a new arrangement because he has fulfilled the Old Testament.

A long time ago I asked Dot to marry me. When we got engaged, she still lived with her parents, and I lived with mine. We had a clear understanding of what behaviour we believed to be ok, and what was not ok for an engaged couple. We yearned for the day we would marry.

Imagine if I said at my wedding "Well we tried being engaged, but that failed. So we're going to try

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marriage instead!" It is a stupid statement which I did not make. But if anyone had suggested that to me at the time, I might have replied "Do not think that I have come to abolish the engagement, I have come not to abolish but to fulfil."

The engagement was a time of preparation for the wedding. Our behaviour and hopes were geared towards what was coming. Once married, we didn't live like an engaged couple anymore. I didn't have to drop her back to her parent's home every evening. New conditions applied.

Was the engagement time wrong? No. But we moved on from that.

So how should we read the Old Testament now? As we read it, we can see what happened, and we can look at the laws they had, and how they were to relate to others. But in all of that, we should also find the clues for how it points to Jesus. As those clues become clear in the light of what Jesus did, we will be blessed and understand Jesus in a deeper and with greater colour and texture. Some of the conditions from the past will be the same, just as I had to be faithful to Dot while engaged, and I have to be faithful to her now. However many will be different.

Jesus will proceed in the Sermon on the Mount to show some of the differences that he makes. But before he said those, he looked to the people everyone admired as being the most fussy about the law and prophets. He spoke about the people who tried the most to keep the law, even down to the smallest letter or stroke of a letter. He pointed to those who were considered very righteous. In Matthew 5:20 he said: *For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

What he was proposing was different to being a Pharisee. The consequences of his fulfilment would mean that those who do enter the kingdom of heaven will far surpass the righteousness, the godliness, the godly lifestyles and behaviours of the Pharisees.

What would this include... I seem to have lost the last chapter of this sermon, so you will have to come back next week to see.