

No.3 'What does Jesus think about Scriptures?'

Before carefully reading our set passage, have a look at how Jesus is speaking; he speaks one way in verses 3-12, another in 13-16, and another in 17-20. *What do you notice about this, and how is this relevant?*

Read Matthew 5: 17-20 & Read Deuteronomy 30: 15-20 we focus on the Matthew passage.

What do you understand Jesus is referring to by 'the Law or the Prophets?' Can you think why some of his audience might have expected him to be rejecting some or all? Is acceptance any different today? Notice that Jesus says he has come (he is on a mission) neither to abolish or abrogate them, nor even just to endorse them in a dead and literalistic way, but to fulfil them. In the Old Testament, all the great biblical doctrines are there; yet it was only a partial revelation. Jesus fulfilled it all in the sense of bringing it all to completion by his person, his teaching and work.' (J Stott)



The attitude of Jesus to the Old Testament was not one of destruction and of discontinuity, but rather of a constructive, organic continuity. He summed up his position in a single word, not abolition but 'fulfilment. *How do you get on with the Old Testament? Apart from the Psalms, do you find any help, guidance, or inspiration from the Old Testament?*

What is Jesus driving at when he says, 'your righteousness needs to surpass that of the Pharisees?' You can almost hear his audience cry out 'Surely that's not possible!' The Pharisees say, "there are 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions in our scriptures, and we keep all of them." The Pharisees were content with external and formal obedience, but the righteousness Jesus is promoting far surpasses pharisaic righteousness in kind rather than degree. It is deeper, being of the heart. Remember Jeremiah's prophecy 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.' (Jeremiah 31: 33) Jesus said the first commandment was 'to love the Lord your God with all your heart ...' (Matt 22: 37) The righteousness which is pleasing to Him is an inward righteousness of mind and motive.

Jesus had already announced (to John the Baptist – Matt 3: 15) that he intended to 'fulfil all righteousness', 'he has in fact nothing to add to the commandments of God except this, that he keeps them' (D Bonhoeffer). Jesus rejects the superficial interpretation of the law given by the Pharisees – he himself provides the true interpretation. His purpose is not to change the law, still less to annul it, but 'to reveal the full depth of meaning that it was intended to hold' (Thielicke). Note the vital connection between the law of God and the Kingdom of God (v 19-20). Because Jesus has come not to abolish but to fulfil, therefore greatness in the Kingdom of God will be measured by conformity to it. Note also, personal obedience is not enough; Christian disciples must also teach to others the permanently binding nature of the law's commandments (Stott). *The challenge to us all – how do you match up to these standards?*

Prayer Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! (1 Corinth 15:57)