

The phrase, *‘the law or the prophets’* captures the entire Old Testament  
Do you find it curious that Jesus said: *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law”*?  
It presupposes that this was a question on the minds of those listening to Him  
The scribes and Pharisees were listening carefully in order to condemn Him while the average  
Jew was listening, hoping for change because the Law had become unbearably difficult  
Now, I want to take some time to help you understand why the Law had become oppressive

**PP** To 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews, the *Law* referred to 4 things: The *Ten Commandments*; first five books of the Bible, the *Pentateuch*, called The Five Rolls; the *whole of Scripture* (Old Testament); and finally, and commonly by the time of Jesus, the *oral* or the *scribal law*

In the time of Jesus, the last one had become most common use of the word '**Law**'

The Old Testament does not contain a great deal of rules and regulations, but rather broad principles applied to situations in life

To the scribes, experts in Jewish Law, these broad principles opened up too many ways to break the commands, which had caused so much suffering in exile for God's people

They began to create rules for every situation in life, so people would keep God's commands

The scribes made it their business to reduce these great principles God had laid down, to literally thousands upon thousands of rules and regulations, under 613 main headings

For example, one of the 10 Commandments was to keep the Sabbath holy, doing no work

But what exactly '*work*' was needed defining, and then rules crafted so it would be obeyed fully

The scribes reasoned that to carry a '*burden*' was work, but what was a burden?

So they defined an acceptable burden as 'food equal in weight to a dried fig, enough wine for mixing in a goblet, milk enough for one swallow, honey enough to put upon a wound, oil enough to anoint a small [body part], water enough to moisten an eye-salve, paper enough to write a custom-house notice upon, ink enough to write two letters of the alphabet, reed enough to make a pen'

Scribes debated endlessly whether a lamp could be moved on the Sabbath, or if a tailor sinned if he went out with a needle in his robe, or if a parent could lift a child on that day

Healing on the Sabbath was allowed when a life was in danger, or in ear, nose, throat pain, yet treatment could only be to keep the patient from becoming worse, not to help get better

A bandage could be put on a wound, but not ointment; wadding in the ear, but not if medicated

These are only a few examples, and they were taught from one generation to another in what became the *Oral* or *Scribal Law*, and the people were commanded to obey them

They were finally written and collected into a book called the Mishnah, two centuries after Christ

Then commentaries on the Mishnah were written called the Talmuds: Babylonian and Jerusalem

Now here is our point...this *Oral Law* reduced the Law of God to a legalistic system of external righteousness; and even worse, it was eventually considered more authoritative than the Scriptures and taught much more prevalently

When I was young, my job was to walk down the hill to my neighbor's house, to their outside spigot, and fill two 6 gallon jugs with water  
 Our neighbor had city water, but we had a well, but it tapped into sulfur water  
 Now what I was tempted to do, is what the scribes and Pharisees did with the Law  
 Those jugs were heavy, and it was all uphill back to our house, 125 yards or so  
 But if I just filled those jugs 2/3 of the way, it would lighten the load, make it more manageable  
 This is, in effect, what the scribes and Pharisees had done with the Law...they couldn't live it so they reduced it into an oblivion of rules and regulations, and taught the people that if they are to be righteous, they must keep them  
 The Law of God became a joyless duty rather than a guide to a life of joy, love and meaning

Jesus challenged this, ***“And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your PP tradition?”*** **Matthew 15:3**

So the people, so oppressed by this oral law, were listening attentively as Jesus preached  
***“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”*** **5:17**

**PP ‘Abolish’** means to nullify, repeal or destroy and Jesus insists that He won't do that to the OT  
 There are many today who believe that the Old Testament has little relevance to the Christian  
 Since we are under grace and not under Law, they see the OT as a nonbinding, historical book  
 But Jesus couldn't be clearer as He twice says he's not nullifying the Old Testament, and clarifies that He came to ***‘fulfill’*** them

**PP ‘fulfill’** does not mean to fill out, but to fill up; not add to, but complete, to accomplish  
 In this sermon, Jesus often will say, ***‘You have heard that it was said’***, and He is referencing the oral law's reducing of the Written Law of God

***‘But I say to you’*** is Him restoring, completing, clarifying the original purpose of the Law

He is fulfilling the Old Testament, which was, all along, about Him, pointing to Him, promising that He, the Messiah, the Mediator, the Redeemer would come

**PP “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me”** **John 5:39**

Jesus perfectly fulfilled all the OT prophecies about Him; He fulfilled all the demands of the Law in perfect obedience

In fulfilling the Law and the Prophets, which all spoke about Him, He was its fulfillment  
 Jesus came to fill up, complete the entire Law and prophets, and we need to see what that means  
 Righteousness cannot come by external conformity to God's Law, but by God's Law leading us to Jesus, Who can make us righteous and give us a new heart, alive to God

**PP “And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”** **Deuteronomy 30:6**

The Law and the prophets, the OT, is intended to lead people to Jesus, the Savior, and the power of the Law continues to do this today

***“For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”*** **5:18**

**PP ‘truly’** is the word amen, which appears in the same way in the Hebrew language, and it meant that the statement was absolutely true and reliable

In the Old Testament, it was said at the end of a statement, but Jesus often placed it at the beginning in order to get people's attention to prepare to listen

**PP** *'iota'* was no bigger than one of our apostrophes, while the *'dot'* was similar to the dot over the letter 'i'

In other words, not one part of the Law will pass away until all is accomplished  
He has come to fulfill it, for the entire Old Testament points to Him

**PP** *"For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him. That is why it is through Him that we utter our Amen to God for His glory."* 2 Corinthians 1:20

*"Therefore whoever relaxes 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."* 5:19

To understand what Jesus meant by *'the least of these commandments'* we should distinguish three parts to God's Law:

**PP a)** The Moral Law which is summarized in the Ten Commandments and all of their repeated teachings and extrapolations in the New Testament

Jesus obeyed the moral law completely and expects His disciples to do the same.

The moral law reveals the nature and will of God, and it still applies today

**PP b)** The Ceremonial Laws governed Israel's religious ceremonies, their worship of God  
It guided the sacrificial system and purity laws for the priests and people as well as their worship  
It forbade certain foods, tattoos, profane actions

**PP** The ceremonial laws were a *"...a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."* Colossians 2:17

His death ripped the temple's curtain, making the way to God through His body and blood

**PP c)** The Judicial or Civil Laws which governed the Israel as a nation under God

Cities of refuge, guidelines for waging war, regulations for debt and more make up these laws  
They regulated and guarded the community of Israel, pointing forward to Christ the King who would set up in the church age a spiritual kingdom in which He would govern

We are not to stone adulterers, but rather to lovingly enforce church discipline so that they will repent and be restored to full fellowship

The second two-the ceremonial and civil-were fulfilled in Christ and no longer relevant in their original form for the church today

Eating pork, getting tattoos are permissible as long as the motive is the glory of God

Friends, the Law that endures for us today is the Moral Law, once written on enduring stone, now written by the Holy Spirit on the hearts of the disciples of Jesus Christ

The moral law undergirded every part, for all the Law revealed the character and will of God  
Jesus gives us a warning that we must not relax even a part of the Moral Law, that we must not be like the scribes and Pharisees

The Rabbis counted 613 Commandments in the Pentateuch

248 affirmative laws of what God wants us to do, and 365 negative laws of what He doesn't

They divided these into heavy and light laws, meaning absolutely binding and less binding, which they considered the least of the commands

**PP** *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.”* **Matthew 23:23**

It's easier to divide my herbs, give 10% of them to God, then show mercy to a leper or adulterer  
They were scrupulous about the letter of the law but let go the spirit of the law

**PP** *“For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”* **Romans 13:9-10**

There will be a loss of reward for any who waters down the Moral Law as if living under grace renders them unimportant

But Jesus issued another warning, this time for the multitude listening: *“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”* **5:20**

And this was and is the purpose of the law, to lead us to Jesus Christ for our righteousness

The Law was a mirror that revealed the revealed God's moral perfection and perfect will

But then the Law turned to us, and shows how far short we fall from God's holiness, how we have broken His will over and over

The scribes saw it, and their response was to reduce the Law and work harder to obey it

Let me show you a modern Jewish perspective that reveals why Jesus condemned them

**PP** *“We Children of Israel are righteous. For the Torah says so. Of course, we must uphold the Torah, or otherwise we might cease to be righteous. But as long as we keep the Torah, we are righteous...In Judaism, it is entirely up to you. If you do good, you will get good.”*

This was the mindset of the Jews, that they were righteous by virtue of being chosen, and living obedient to the oral law maintained, recovered and increased that righteousness

The wealthy young man of Matthew 19 thought he had kept all the law, was he righteous?

He had reduced the Law to an external, legalistic form but was unwilling to sell his possessions for the poor and follow Jesus, he kept the letter of the Law but let go the spirit...love!

The young man went away sorrowful, and the disciples exclaimed, ‘Who then can be saved?’

**PP** *“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”* **Matthew 19:26**

And all the multitude listening to the sermon would have said the same...if the scribes and Pharisees aren't righteous enough to enter heaven, who on earth can be?

Keeping the law cannot justify, or make anyone right before God

**PP** The NLT says it well: *“For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.”* **Romans 3:20**

The Law reveals that God is holy, that we are sinful, and nothing we can do will change that

The Law clicks on our moral back account, and shows us not only that we have no moral currency to purchase righteousness, but that we are in unfathomable debt

But you might say, I'm not Jewish, I've never read Old Testament Law, how would I know this?

The Bible responds, *“For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law*

**PP** *requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts”* **Romans 2:14-15**

**PP** *“This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile”*      **Romans 3:22 (NIV)**

Salvation has never been by obeying the Law of God, it is a gracious act of God!

Let me end our time by clearly showing you how a person is made righteous

The Moral Law of God is the standard of God’s holy perfection and perfect will for all of us, and it is written on every person’s heart, bearing witness that all have sinned and fallen short

It moves us to cry uncle, to tap out, and turn to Jesus in helpless surrender, the only One Who ever kept the Law perfectly, and the One of Whom the Law pointed

To believe in Jesus, is to trust that He will save you, to yield and surrender your life to Him in a willingness to come under His commands

At the moment of your faith in Jesus, He wipes out your spiritual debt and streams into your account His own perfect righteousness which can never be exhausted

He gives you a new heart and sends His Helper, the Holy Spirit to live in it, helping you to love God and love others, thus obeying all the Moral Law, which is summed up in love

**PP** *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*      **Matthew 22:35-40**

Amen?

Pray