

3

The Importance of Obeying God's Law

Matthew 5:17-20

John Wesley once wrote in his journal, "I am a Bible-bigot. I follow it in all things, both great and small."*

GROUP DISCUSSION. Do you agree with John Wesley? Should *everything* the Bible says still be followed today? Why or why not?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. If the Old Testament did not exist, what would be missing in your knowledge of God?

So far Jesus has spoken of the character of Christians. He has also emphasized the influence we will have in the world if we exhibit this character and if our character bears fruit in "good deeds." In Matthew 5:17-20 he proceeds to further define this character and these good deeds in terms of righteousness. This passage is of great importance not only for its definition of Christian righteousness but also for the light it throws on the relation between the New Testament and the Old Testament, between the gospel and the law. *Read Matthew 5:17-20.*

*Quoted in *Christianity Today* 40, no. 7.

1. This passage naturally divides into two parts, verses 17-18 and verses 19-20. What does each part emphasize?

2. Why might some people have thought that Jesus came to abolish the Law and the Prophets (v. 17)?

3. The Law and the Prophets (the Old Testament) consist of doctrine, prophecy and ethical precepts. In what sense has Jesus fulfilled each of these (v. 17)?

4. How does Jesus emphasize his high view of Old Testament Scripture (vv. 17-18)?

How can Jesus' words strengthen our confidence in Scripture?

5. What portions of the Bible have you tended to skip over or neglect?

How can you make studying these a higher priority?

6. How will our response to the Law determine our status in the kingdom of heaven (v. 19)?

7. The Pharisees and teachers of the law were zealous about observing the Law. How can our righteousness possibly surpass theirs (v. 20)?

8. Jesus states that only those who have this surpassing righteousness will enter the kingdom of heaven (v. 20). How can this be harmonized with his statement about the poor in spirit (those who admit their spiritual bankruptcy) entering the kingdom (5:3)?

9. Some people claim that Jesus abolished the law for the Christian and that we are only responsible for obeying the “law of love.” Respond to this view in light of Jesus’ words in this passage.

10. How should you study and apply the Old Testament law today?

Pray that you will receive new spiritual insight as you continue to study the Bible.

Now or Later

Take time to evaluate your life according to the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20:1-17. Which of these have you been able to keep, and which do you struggle with? Spend time with God in confession and receive his forgiveness.