

Did Jesus Fulfill the Law?

Rod Reynolds

Question: Didn't Jesus fulfill all of the Law and all of the Feasts through His coming to earth, going to the cross, and being raised on the 3rd day? He has sat down at the right hand of God and continually makes intercession for us. He is our High Priest. Or am I not reading my Bible correctly?

Answer: Jesus fulfilled the law in the sense of perfect obedience to it, as he did not sin (Matthew 3:15; cf. Acts 13:22; Romans 2:27; Galatians 5:16; 6:2; 1 Peter 2:22).

Note that Paul was sent as a steward of the gospel, with the responsibility to "fulfill the word of God," in the same sense in which Christ fulfilled the law (Colossians 1:25). Robertson (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*) comments on the verse as follows: "to fill full or to give full scope to the Word of God." Paul prayed for the Christians in Thessalonica, that they would "fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power" (2 Thessalonians 1:11).

James wrote, "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well" (James 2:8; cf. Matthew 22:26-30). By "fulfill" the law, referring here to the commandments of God, he means keep it, obey it (James 2:10-12).

So when Jesus said "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17), he did not mean what some mistakenly suppose. A common idea is that in fulfilling the Law and the Prophets (the Bible, cf. Matthew 5:18; Luke 24:44; John 1:45), Jesus somehow did away with the commandments and our obligation to keep them.

Such convoluted reasoning is the precise opposite of Jesus' own teaching. He went on to say in the same context, "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19-20). The saints are described as "those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12). We are told of the New Jerusalem,

"Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14).

Jesus went on in the "sermon on the mount" to magnify the commandments, showing that they must be kept not only in the letter, but in the spiritual intent as well. He said not only are we not to murder, for example, but not to be angry without a cause, and to strive to be reconciled with those against whom we have sinned (Matthew 5:21-26; cf. 1 John 3:15). He said, "whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).

Jesus spoke of the "New Covenant" (Matthew 26:28), which had been written about by the prophets (Jeremiah 31:31). Under that covenant Jeremiah prophesied that the laws of God would be written in the heart and mind, not merely on tablets of stone (verse 33). Jesus had foretold of the destruction of the Temple, and an end to the physical Temple centered worship based on the law of the Levitical priesthood (Matthew 24:1-2, John 4:21, 23; cf. Hosea 3:4). He had prophesied that the Kingdom would be taken from the Jews and given to a "nation" -- the Church -- bearing the fruits thereof (Matthew 21:42-43; 1 Peter 2:6-10).

Paul understood that works are necessary to salvation. Paul said that in obedience to the command of Jesus Christ, he "... declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance" (Acts 26:20). He wrote to the Romans that God...

'will render to each one according to his deeds': eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness--indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified...) [Romans 2:6-13].

But he also understood that works apart from faith are of no value

(Galatians 2:11-17). Galatians 2:14, "live as Jews," means observing Jewish customs such as not eating with uncircumcised Gentiles in accordance with Jewish traditional law (cf. Acts 10:28; Galatians 2:11-13). It should be clearly understood that this was a Jewish Pharisaical law, or tradition, and is not a Biblical law.

Galatians 2:16 is commonly mistranslated, as in the New King James Version: "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified."

The usual mis-translation makes it seem to the English reader that faith and works of the law are unconnected, and virtually the opposite of one another, in Paul's teaching. The phrase translated "works of law but by faith in Christ" in the Greek text reads: "εργων νομου εαν μη δια πιστεως ιησου χριστου" (*ergon nomou ean me dia pisteos iesou christou*).

The correct translation of the phrase is "works of law except through faith of Jesus Christ." The Greek εαν μη (*ean me*) means "if not," or "except."

So Paul is telling us that we are not justified by our own works apart from faith in or of Christ, especially works founded on the laws or traditions of men (cf. Mark 7:1-13). But we are justified by works done through the faith of Jesus Christ living in us (cf. Romans 2:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; James 2:14-26; Revelation 2:13; 14:12). With this understood, we see that Paul's teaching agrees perfectly with James' statement, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only," pointing out that supposed "faith without works is dead" (James 2:20, 24). Compare Matthew 23:23. Romans 1:5; 15:18; 16:26. Through the genuine faith of Jesus Christ abiding in us the heart is changed (Galatians 2:20; cf. Romans 8:1-14).

Does this mean we "earn" salvation through commandment keeping? Absolutely not! Salvation cannot be earned, because it is a gift, but it is a gift that requires repentance and obedience (Acts 2:38-40; 3:19; 11:18; 26:20; Romans 6:22-23; 16:26; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Colossians 3:1-17; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 2:5; 3:19; 22:12).

Moreover, while Jesus did fulfill some of the prophecies of the Old Testament during his sojourn on earth, including his death and resurrection, he by no means fulfilled all of them. His fulfilling of

the "Law and the Prophets," in the sense of bringing to fruition all that is prophesied in the Scriptures, is still a work in progress. For example, the prophecies about Christ ruling all nations from his throne in Jerusalem await their fulfillment upon the second coming of Christ, a subject often referred to in the New Testament (Isaiah 2:1-4; 24:23; 66:10-18; 23-24; Daniel 7:27; Matthew 25:31-34; Revelation 11:15).

As far as the feasts of God proclaimed in Scripture are concerned, they all have prophetic significance, some of which has been fulfilled to one degree or another. But much of what is pictured by the feasts, which reflect God's plan of salvation for mankind, has yet to be fulfilled. Jesus through his death fulfilled what is pictured by the Passover, where the passover lamb was killed and its blood provided deliverance from death for those under its protection (Exodus 12:3-7, 13). Jesus is our passover (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The weekly Sabbath, in part, pictures the millennial "rest" of God's kingdom, which is yet future (Hebrews 4:1-13). As explained in our article about the Feast of Tabernacles, that feast also pictures the millennial kingdom of God ("Feast of Tabernacles Observance", *cogmessenger.org*). And the other feasts also have prophetic significance of their own as well.

We are not told to quit keeping any feast of God because it has been fulfilled. The New Testament Church was keeping Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given in a special manifestation of God's grace and power, as recorded in Acts 2. And they continued to keep it afterward (Acts 20:16; 1 Corinthians 16:8). The Church continued to keep the Passover as a memorial of Jesus' death (though without the animal sacrifice), as he instructed (Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-28; see chapters 9-10 of our free publication, [When Is the Biblical Passover](#) for more about the history of the Christian Passover). In the millennium, even as it is being fulfilled, the Feast of Tabernacles will be kept by all nations (Zechariah 14:16-19).

Yes, the Levitical priesthood was a type of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, and he is our intercessor at the right hand of the Father in heaven (Hebrews 1:3; 4:14-16; 8:1-13; 9:1-28). However, in due time he will come back to earth to restore it and rule it bodily, as prophesied (Acts 3:21; Revelation 19:15).

For more on this general subject, see our articles: [Applying God's Laws Under the New Covenant](#); [Were the Commandments "Nailed to the Cross"?](#)

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