

The Fake News Spread About Jesus

Matthew 5:17-20

Dr. Michael Helms

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When Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden, they had one command or law to follow, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). I think we all know how that turned out.

Later when the Hebrews became a people and began living communally, there was a need for more laws. The people turned to Moses to help them live in community peaceably with each other.

Three different kinds of laws emerged: civic law, ceremonial law, and moral law. The people were supposed to follow all of them. These are recorded in the Bible. However, the fact that all of these laws are in the Bible does not mean that we are supposed to follow or obey these laws today.

Just a few weeks ago, Congress voted to change the tax laws of our country and the President signed the tax bill into law. The laws that we abided by last year will not be the same as the ones we abide by this year. This is an example of changing civic law.

The Israelites had civil laws they were expected to live by under Moses that do not apply to us today. They have changed.

For example, the Civic Law of Moses allowed those convicted of crimes in court to be beaten, up to forty lashes. (Deut. 25:2) A man had to marry his brother's widow and have children by her to carry on the family name. (Deut. 25:6) An Israelite could not charge another Israelite interest. (Deut. 25:19) It was legal to own a slave. (Deut. 23:13) A man could divorce a woman if he found anything indecent about her. (Deut 24:1). You could be put to death for committing adultery with your neighbor's wife, along with the adulteress. (Lev. 20:10) A man could be put to death for lying with his daughter-in-law or with another man. (Lev. 20:12, 13)

These are just a few of the civic laws that we do not live by but were in place during the days of Moses that helped them live peaceably with one another. But we now acknowledge that these are not God's laws for us.

Sometimes people reach back into Levitical law and try to claim one of these civic laws as God's universal law for all of time, and for all people.

However, we no longer live under Levitical law and are no longer bound by these civic codes of conduct that helped the ancient Hebrews maintain a peaceful and orderly community.

The fact that something is in the Bible doesn't mean it is something we should live by. It takes discernment and sometimes just a bit of common sense to understand the difference between the two.

In addition to the civic laws of the Bible there are ceremonial laws which Moses gave the people to live by to help them have a worshipful encounter with God.

Since I didn't see any of you bring goats, sheep, doves, or pigeons with you to worship today to sacrifice, I will assume that you understand that we no longer abide by these ceremonial laws either.

The first chapter of Leviticus gives detailed instructions on how people were to offer these animals in the temple with the assistance of the priest so that they might have their sins forgiven.

Sin created a great divide between God and the people. The death of the animal reminded the Israelites that sin separates; it kills; it wounds; it destroys.

They were reminded that life was in the blood of the animal. Each time they sacrificed, they were reminded of God's ability to atone them of their sins. He had the ability to set them free from the guilt of their sin, just he did when he set them free from Egypt after they applied the blood of the Paschal Lamb on the doorposts of their homes. When the last plague came in Egypt, the death of the firstborn, those who had applied the blood of the lamb to the doorposts of their homes were spared.

Now with each sacrifice, God forgave their sins. God forgave them of their failure to follow Him with complete loyalty and integrity. This is how the people worshipped God.

They also worshipped by observing the Passover once a year. This was a ceremonial commandment given to them by Moses so that they would not forget what God did for them as He brought them out of Egypt.

Jesus was observing this ceremonial commandment with his disciples in the Upper Room when he changed how that meal would be remembered from that point forward for all who followed him as Lord and Savior.

From that moment forward, the bread represented his body broken for us. The wine represented his blood shed for us. For Christians, ceremonial law shifted from observing the Passover to observing the Lord's Supper.

Finally, there are the Moral Laws. These laws are the laws of God that expand all cultures and all millenniums. A good example of these laws is the Ten Commandments.

These are moral laws that show the nature and the will of God that have stood the test of time.

Saul believed that if someone could keep God's moral law perfectly, that would be the pathway to heaven. However, after living one of the most disciplined religious lives possible, he finally

gave up, but only after he had a personal meeting with the living Lord on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians.

This encounter led him to become a disciple of Jesus himself.

On the road to Damascus, he met the same Jesus who taught on a hillside in Galilee that “he had not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets, but to accomplish their purpose.”

Jesus said this because He had been accused of law breaking. He differed with the religious leaders on some of their traditions that they had created around the law like their ceremonial washing before they ate and their definition of what constituted work on the Sabbath.

Jesus’ teaching was unlike the teaching of the Pharisees, the people who were the authorities on the Law and Prophets.

The people said, “he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law,” (Matthew 7:29).

Jesus was teaching as if the laws were under his jurisdiction.

That is what was so upsetting to the Pharisees. They had been the keeper and the definer of the rules and in many cases the judge of how they were applied as well.

Jesus came along and made it sound as if the laws were subject to him and not the other way around—which they were.

This angered the religious leaders, so they were always trying to trap Jesus, to trick him into saying something blasphemous against Moses and the Law.

So they brought a woman caught in the act of adultery to him.

As you now know, this fell in the line of civil laws and the Levitical law said that this woman should be stoned to death for her actions.

Of course, it also said that the man should be stoned to death, so we see the hypocrisy of the accusers right away because they only brought the woman to him.

They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus,

“Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” 6 They were using this question as a trap, to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I" (John 8:3-11)

No one had ever come close to challenging the authority or usurping the power of these religious leaders.

However, the authority Jesus taught with did both.

In his teaching on the Galilean hillside that day, Jesus wanted to make these things clear.

1) He didn't come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. By this, Jesus means the eternal, moral, timeless, laws of God that expand all cultures and all millenniums.

Civic and ceremonial laws are going to change. These laws stand forever.

2) Instead he came to fulfill what the Law and the Prophets taught.

What Jesus claimed is that he is the fulfillment of all that was written from Genesis to Malachi. Our Old Testament is a collection of books written to introduce us to Jesus. That, of course, is what the gospels tell us.

Matthew and Luke tell us this in their genealogies of Jesus. John tells us this in his prologue when he says that Jesus was present in the beginning with God and then the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Now either Jesus' claim that he is the fulfillment of Law and the Prophets is true or he was insane.

If it is true, then Jesus should be worshipped, not only because prophecy has been fulfilled through him, but because his death, burial, resurrection, and accession into heaven validate his claim.

In Luke's gospel, the resurrected Jesus meets two people leaving Jerusalem and walking back to their home in Emmaus. Not recognizing Jesus, they begin to tell him all that happened in the city during the previous days, including how the women went down to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus and discovered that the stone was rolled away and that the body was gone.

Then Jesus said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” (Luke 24:25-26)

There’s been a lot of talk these days about fake news. We’ve seen how the Russians manipulated Facebook and spread information to over 100 million people during the Presidential campaign.

Is it possible that fake news was being spread as early as the first century? If so, what would the headline have been? How about this: “Jesus wants to abolish the Law. Jesus is teaching that the Law and the Prophets are no longer needed.” That was fake news.

Who would have been spreading such news? It was the religious leaders. They were spreading this fake news because Jesus was a threat to their power and their brand of religion.

It clouded their view of Jesus so much that after seeing his greatest miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, they left to begin a plot to have him killed.

So for emphasis and to combat their effort to undermine him, Jesus said: “Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who 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 practices and teaches these commandments will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus went on public record as supporting the Law and the Prophets. He was a good Jewish Rabbi.

But did Jesus go too far by saying that “anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches 9others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven?

Every person on that hillside had done that and so have we.

He went on to say, “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (v. 20).

Wow! Not only did that hurt if you were one of the religious leaders, but that also came as a huge shock to everyone else listening to Jesus because the Pharisees and teachers of the law were held in the highest of esteem.

An old proverb said, “if but two men were to enter into the kingdom of heaven, one of them would be a Pharisee and the other a scribe.”

(<http://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/5-20.htm>)

So their first question would have been, “If these people cannot get into the kingdom of heaven, then there is no hope for me.”

Adam and Eve had only one commandment to keep. They couldn't keep one. It's written in the Jewish Talmud that there are 613 commandments. The positive commandments to keep are 248 and the negative commandments are 365.

The reason Saul left Judaism and became a Christian is that he would have been the one because he was consumed with following the law and he concluded that it was an impossibility. Yet he knew he had failed miserably.

So he wrote these words to the church at Rome:

20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. 21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. (Romans 3:19-22)

You see then how Paul's words and Jesus' words fit together.

Jesus said that he came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.

God accepts Jesus' life as the one sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins.

We are declared righteous or in good standing with God when we place our faith in Jesus

You can't keep enough laws or do enough good deeds or live a good enough life to go to heaven.

You need the same grace Jesus gave to the woman caught in adultery.

While we are saved to do good works, doing a bunch of religious stuff for the sake of bringing attention to ourselves will not get us to heaven. The Pharisees couldn't see that.

Have you done that? Have you placed your faith in Jesus? Are you confident that if you died today, you would go to heaven because Jesus has extended his grace to you?

If not, will you come to Jesus today, and allow the angels in heaven to rejoice because God declared you righteous in His sight?

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