

Fulfilling the Law

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What fulfills God's expectations for our lives? How does a Christian leader fulfill their ministry? What commandments are top priority and get highest billing in the Christian life? There are a group of related commandments that 'fulfill the whole Law':

a) Loving thy neighbor fulfills the Law (Romans 13:8-10, Galatians 5:14, James 2:8), the example given for doing this is that of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

b) Loving God with all your heart and mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself fulfills the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:37-40).

c) Doing unto others as you would have them do unto you fulfills the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 7:12).

d) The bearing of one another's burdens fulfills the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

e) Showing practical Christian love to those in need, especially widows and orphans in their distress (1 John 3:14-24, James 1:27) fulfills the Royal Law

f) We fulfill the Law by the Spirit (Romans 8:1-4) and not by the letter (Romans 7:6, 2 Corinthians 3:6)

We fulfill God's expectations by being good, kind, loving, generous Christians. We see a need and meet it, we see a burden and bear it. We treat others well. In fact we treat them so well that we would like to be treated that way ourselves! True Christianity and true Christian leadership is gracious, kind and practical and makes people feel as if they have been blessed. It builds people up, puts them on their feet and helps them become like Jesus.

On the other hand if we don't have love we are nothing – even if we prophesy, move mountains by faith, speak in tongues and make huge sacrifices for the gospel (1 Corinthians 13:1-4). Religious deeds do not fulfill the Law unless they are accompanied by love!

The Pharisees did not fulfill the Law – even though they prayed, tithed, fasted, gave alms, observed the Sabbath and went regularly to the Temple. They were even keen Bible students:

John 5:39-40 MKJV *You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life. And they are the ones witnessing of Me, (40) and you will not come to Me that you might have life.*

Despite all of this religious zeal the Pharisees failed to fulfill the Law because they were harsh, unloving and judgmental. They did not bear other folk's burdens – instead they added to them! In Matthew 23 Jesus points out why the Pharisees were not saved and why their 'religiosity' was a violation, not an observance of the Law. Some of His main points were:

a) Their complete lack of practical compassion for burdened people:

Matthew 23:4 MKJV *For they bind heavy and hard-to-carry burdens and lay them on men's shoulders. But they will not move them with one of their fingers.*

b) The Pharisees did not enter themselves and even prevented others from entering:

Matthew 23:13 MKJV *But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of Heaven against men. For you neither go in, nor do you allow those entering to go in.*

c) And they even made their converts into “children of Hell”:

Matthew 23:15 MKJV *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you compass sea and the dry land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.*

d) In fact they missed the main points of the Torah:

Matthew 23:23 MKJV *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and you have left undone the weightier matters of the Law, judgment, mercy, and faith. You ought to have done these and not to leave the other undone.*

e) And instead of being caring, kind and righteous they even exploited the vulnerable:

Matthew 23:14 MKJV *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and pray at length as a pretense. Therefore you shall receive the greater condemnation.*

To sum up: Treating others as you would wish to be treated fulfills the whole Law, and treating others badly violates the whole Law (no matter how many religious activities you undertake). The apostle James, the brother of Jesus, and a leader of the early church makes this point by using an illustration about the sin of favoritism or partiality. Please read the following long passage carefully:

James 2:1-13 ISV *My brothers, do not practice your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ by showing partiality. (2) Suppose a man wearing gold rings and fine clothes comes into your assembly, and a poor man in dirty clothes also comes in. (3) If you give special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Please take this seat," but you say to the poor man, "Stand over there" or "Sit on the floor at my feet," (4) you have made false distinctions among yourselves and have become judges with evil motives, haven't you? (5) Listen, my dear brothers! God has chosen the poor in the world to become rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him, has he not? (6) But you have humiliated the man who is poor. Are not rich people the ones who oppress you and drag you into court? (7) Are not they the ones who blaspheme the excellent name by which you have been called? (8) Nevertheless, you are doing the right thing if you obey the royal law in keeping with the Scripture, "You must love your neighbor as yourself." (9) But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and will be convicted by the law as violators. (10) For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point is guilty of breaking all of it. (11) For the one who said, "Never commit adultery," also said, "Never murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but you murder, you become a violator of the law. (12) You must make it your habit to speak and act like people who are going to be judged by the law of liberty. (13) For merciless judgment will come to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

His points are:

1. Partiality humiliates the poor man
2. Partiality is thus a gross sin against the Royal Law: "You must love your neighbor as yourself". If you wouldn't want to be humiliated - then don't humiliate others.
3. This sin or partiality does not break 'just one small law' it breaks all of the Law. It even makes the person a violator of the Law. Violating people, violates God's Law.
4. We will be treated as we treat others. Merciless judgment shall be shown to those who show no mercy (e.g. by deliberately humiliating others). On the other hand if we are merciful we will not be judged because mercy triumphs over judgment.

Therefore we see that: treating others as we would like to be treated ourselves fulfills the whole Law - and spares us from judgment. On the other hand treating others badly violates the whole Law and brings merciless judgment on our heads. Rude Christianity is a contradiction in terms. The good Christian is gracious, gentle, and displays great courtesy. Christians should think about how other people are feeling and seek to treat them kindly and well. The gracious, kind, thoughtful, well-mannered person will also be treated graciously on the Day of Judgment. And it is only righteous that it should be so!

Yes, we are saved by grace through faith and not by works (Ephesians 2:8,9). Indeed we are justified by faith and not through keeping the 613 laws of Moses! But once we are saved we are to be righteous, loving, kind, meek, gentle, thoughtful and good. The whole of Christianity is summed up in loving our neighbors as ourselves and doing unto others what we would want done to us. We

cannot escape this just because we are justified by faith. We are justified in order that we may be sanctified and sanctified in love by the Holy Spirit who enables us to fulfill the Law (Romans 8:4). We are made for good works that God has prepared beforehand for us to perform (Ephesians 2:10). No matter how spiritually gifted we are, without love we are nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-4).

Christian leadership is about humility, servanthood, thoughtfulness, love and grace. It is not about ecclesiastical dominance (Matthew 20:25-28, John 13:1-17, Philippians 2:5-11). Jesus even washed the feet of Judas! Good Christians love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. Christians respect everyone, viewing them as those for whom Christ has died. Love is the fulfilling of the Law (Romans 13:8-10).

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