

Is there a flaw with God's Law? Matthew 5:17 - 20

There is a rather sarcastic letter that has been circulating on the internet over the past decade. It was obviously written to question the wisdom of using the Old Testament Law as a moral measuring stick for our modern society. The letter pretends to be written by a sincere believer who asks a series of absurdly naive questions along the following lines: *"I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?"*¹

We might be tempted to laugh, however we should note that the religious leaders of Jesus' day wanted to kill him for breaking the Sabbath law: *9 Going on from that place, [Jesus] went into their synagogue, 10 and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" 11 He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." 13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus. (Matthew 12:9-14 [TNIV])*

Anticipating this reaction to his ministry Jesus taught in his 'Sermon on the Mount': *17 "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." (Matthew 5:17)*² So what does it mean that Jesus came not to abolish but to fulfil God's Law?

1. Read Matthew 5:20 – 24. How are Christ's instructions different to the Law given to Moses?
2. Read Matthew 5:27 – 30. Why is it so much harder to follow Christ's teachings than the commands given to Moses?
3. What is the ultimate goal of God's Law? Can we achieve this goal through our own effort? (Read Matthew 5:48; Leviticus 19:2)
4. Read Romans 3:21 – 23. How has Christ fulfilled the Law on our behalf? Does this mean that it no longer matters how we behave?

¹ An example of this letter and its background can be found on snopes.com: Letter to Dr. Laura www.snopes.com/politics/religion/drlaura.asp

² The Law of Moses is comprised of both religious laws and practical laws for governing and instructing the society of Moses' time. But Jesus warned against replacing God's principles and values that form the foundation of these laws for mere legalistic righteousness.