

C. THE STANDARD OF THE TEACHING OF JESUS, ESPECIALLY IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

MAT 5:17 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.

MAT 5:18 "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.

MAT 5:19 "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

MAT 5:20 "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Comments: The word translated "abolish" (καταλῦσαι) has a variety of meanings, including "to destroy, demolish, dismantle; to do away with, annul, make invalid." The form is aorist active infinitive (of purpose). Is Jesus saying that He did not come to deny or cancel the Law's binding authority? Or to replace it with some other revelation of the will of God? Or to announce its irrelevance for the new age that He was introducing? Or to render it obsolete by announcing a higher standard?

However we understand "abolish," Jesus said He did not come to abolish the Old Testament and its commandments, but to fulfill it.

"To fulfill" could mean to fulfill the predictions of the Old Testament. This would fit with verse 18, which speaks of all being "accomplished." It could also mean to obey the commandments of the Old Testament. This would fit with verses 19-20, which speak of annulling commandments and teaching others to annul them versus keeping them, teaching them to others, and living in righteousness. In view of what follows concerning the contrasts between the level of righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees and the level of righteousness of the Old Testament, the latter meaning would seem to be indicated (commandments).

Jesus would then be saying, "Do not think that I came to abolish the commandments of the Old Testament. I did not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them."

Our Lord then tells His listeners that they will not enter the kingdom of heaven unless their righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees. It is important to notice that He does not contrast the righteousness of the Old Testament with His own (supposedly higher) standard of righteousness, but rather with that of the scribes and Pharisees. It is not O.T. versus Jesus, but O.T. versus scribes and Pharisees, that Jesus stresses. Thus in this passage it is not His righteousness that is higher than that of the O.T., but the O.T. righteousness that is higher than that of the scribes and Pharisees.

MAT 5:21 "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'

MAT 5:22 "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.