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The Significance of the Law in the Teaching of Christ

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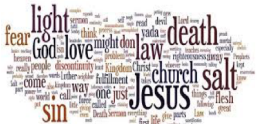
Let me repeat something Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount.
Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill... For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17, 20-21).

It is interesting that the Pharisees said Jesus broke the Law, and Jesus said He fulfilled the Law. Why did the Pharisees think Jesus broke the Law, and why did Jesus think He fulfilled it? The answer to both questions is the same. Jesus kept the **significance** of the Law, which is the mind of God. When Jesus said, *I did not come to abolish but to fulfill* the Law, He did not just mean the ceremonial Law, but all the Law. And He did not mean He kept all the particulars of the Law but that He fulfilled what God had in mind when He gave Moses the Law. Jesus kept the significance of the Law with His whole life.



The Pharisees took the Law in the opposite direction. Instead of looking toward the mind of God, they looked toward the welfare of Israel and applied the Law with Israel in mind. They treated the Law like the Gentiles (the ones Paul addresses in Romans 1:25) treated nature. They worshiped and served the creation rather than the Creator. The Pharisees worshipped and served the Law God created, rather than the God who created the Law.

Significance is what Christ had in mind when He said: *You have heard ... **But I say to you***. Six times Jesus said: *You have heard ... **But I say to you.*** Of course, Jesus was doing more than applying the Mosaic Law. He was also giving some new revelation from God. However, His *but I say to you* statements are also an application of the **significance** of what *you have heard*. They are an application of the mind of God who inspired Moses to write what *you have heard*. *But I say to you* is the **significance** of what *you have heard.*

Let's look at one of those statements.
You have heard that the ancients were told, "You shall not commit murder" and "Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court." But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, "You good-for-nothing," shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, "You fool," shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell (Matthew 5:21-22).
Here's what Jesus said using our analysis:

Observation:	*You shall not commit murder.*
Context:	This is one of the Ten Commandments given to Israel on Mount Sinai.
Interpretation:	The Israelites were not to take it upon themselves to murder one another.
Significance:	God does not want us to act out of anger toward one another.
Application:	*I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty ...*

Jesus also told His followers that their righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20), because the Pharisees applied the Law without considering its **significance.** And the **significance** of the Law comes not from the letter of the Law but from the Spirit of the Law, which is the mind of God.