

THE PERFECT EXAMPLE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

*How Christ Fulfilled the Law, Set Our Perfect Example, and Showed the Lasting
Meaning of the Ten Commandments*

Introduction: A Common Misunderstanding About Law and Grace

Many Christians today misunderstand the relationship between believers, God's moral law, and what Jesus Christ accomplished. A common teaching says that because Christ obeyed the Mosaic Law for us, people no longer need to follow God's direct commands. In this view, the moral law belonged to an earlier age and ended when grace began.

But a careful reading of the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible presents a very different picture. The Old and New Testaments show that Christ's perfect obedience was never meant to excuse human disobedience. His life showed the true purpose of the law. It gave believers a perfect example to follow and the power to live faithfully. To say that Christ obeyed so that we may disobey turns the New Covenant upside down.

This study explains how the Bible describes the fulfillment of the law. It makes three main points. First, Christ's work confirmed the law rather than removing it. Second, the Bible connects love with obeying God's moral commands. Third, the Ten Commandments express two great duties: loving God with our whole being in the first four commandments, and loving our neighbor as ourselves in the last six.

Chapter I: Christ Came to Fulfill the Law, Not Destroy It

Jesus Himself explained that God's moral law still has authority. In the Sermon on the Mount, He warned people not to confuse spiritual freedom with freedom from all moral limits. He clearly rejected any teaching that removes the lasting value of the law.

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

— **Matthew 5:17-18**

The Greek word translated as “fulfil” is *pleroo*. It means to fill completely or bring something to its full meaning. It contrasts with “destroy” (*katalyo*), which means to tear down or make void. Jesus therefore said that He came to show the law’s full depth, live out its true spiritual meaning, and obey it perfectly. He did not fulfill the law to end it. He fulfilled it to make its meaning clear for every generation.

Jesus added the time marker, “Till heaven and earth pass.” As long as the world remains, God’s moral commands remain. Not even a “jot,” the smallest Hebrew letter, or a “tittle,” a tiny mark on a letter, will disappear. This careful wording shows that God’s law reflects His unchanging character. If the law could simply be ignored, the sacrifice of the cross would not have been necessary. The cross shows how serious the law’s demands are.

Jesus then gave a serious warning about how people should obey and teach the commandments in God’s kingdom:

"Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

— **Matthew 5:19**

Jesus links a person’s standing in the kingdom with how that person treats the commandments. The passage does not support the idea that believers are free from obeying and teaching them. Jesus praises two actions: doing the commandments and teaching them. His own life joined these actions perfectly. He obeyed every moral command and taught His disciples to do the same.

Chapter II: Christ as Our Example

The New Testament presents Christ’s earthly life not as a reason for believers to remain passive, but as a pattern they must follow. Peter wrote to scattered believers who were suffering. He described Christ’s sinless life as an example and told them to follow in His steps.

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:"

— **1 Peter 2:21-22**

The Greek word translated as “example” is *hypogrammos*. It describes a writing pattern that children trace while learning their letters. Peter teaches that Christ’s perfect life, free from sin and fully in line with God’s holiness, is the pattern believers should trace with their own lives. If Christ’s obedience were meant to replace all obedience from us, Peter’s command to “follow his steps” would make little sense. Footprints show a path meant to be followed, not only admired.

John teaches the same idea in his first letter. He says that a person’s claim to belong to Christ should be visible in the way that person lives.

"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."

— **1 John 2:6**

The word “ought” points to a real moral duty. Anyone who says they remain in Christ should live as Jesus lived. Jesus obeyed His Father’s commands and said in John 15:10, “I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.” Believers therefore should keep growing in obedience, following the example Jesus gave.

Paul explains how this example can become real in a believer’s life. In Romans, he says that Christ’s mission and the gift of the Holy Spirit make it possible for the law’s righteous purpose to be fulfilled within believers.

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

— **Romans 8:3-4**

Paul does not say that the law’s righteousness was fulfilled only *for* us so that we could ignore it. He says it may be fulfilled **in us**. The problem was not the law, which Romans 7:12 calls “holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.” The problem was sinful human nature, which could not meet the law’s demands. Christ defeated the power of sin and gave believers new spiritual life. The law can then be written on the heart and shown in daily conduct.

Paul then asks whether faith cancels the law. His answer clearly rejects that idea:

"Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."

— **Romans 3:31**

To “establish” the law means to put it on a firm foundation, confirm its authority, and support its purpose. True biblical faith does not erase the law. It helps believers understand, honor, and obey the law, with Christ as their perfect standard.

Chapter III: Love Is Shown Through Obedience

Many people wrongly separate love from law. Love is often treated as a personal feeling that can stand apart from, or even oppose, obedience to God’s commands. Some say that “love is the fulfillment of the law” means a general feeling of love is enough, even when a person ignores specific commandments.

To correct this mistake, we should look at how Scripture defines love for God. John states the meaning plainly:

"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."

— **1 John 5:3**

According to this passage, love for God is not mainly an emotion, a spoken claim, or an abstract idea. It is shown by **keeping his commandments**. John ties love and obedience together. A person cannot honestly claim to love God while openly rejecting His boundaries. John also says the commandments are “not grievous.” They are not meant to crush people, but to protect and guide them toward a good life.

John repeats this point in his second letter and applies it to the whole Christian life:

"And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it."

— **2 John 1:6**

Love is described as a continuing walk on the path God has marked out through His commandments. When believers ask how to show love for God, Scripture gives a consistent

answer: live according to His commands. Jesus made this clear during His last evening with His disciples:

"If ye love me, keep my commandments."

— **John 14:15**

This statement connects love for Christ with obedience to His commands. Jesus does not treat words of devotion as a substitute for a life that follows Him. He repeats the point later in the same conversation:

"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."

— **John 14:21**

The words “he it is that loveth me” make commandment-keeping a clear sign of genuine love. Without that practical definition, people can reshape love to excuse almost any behavior. The law gives love a firm form. It shows what love looks like in everyday life.

Chapter IV: The First Four Commandments — Loving God

A Pharisee who was an expert in the law once asked Jesus, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus did not create a new system. He pointed back to the heart of the law of Moses and summarized its purpose in two great commands.

"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment."

— **Matthew 22:37-38**

This statement summarizes what theologians call the **First Table of the Law**: the first four commandments given at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:3-11). These commands govern our relationship with God and explain devotion, worship, and reverence. To love God with all our heart, soul, and mind is to live according to these four commands.

The First Commandment says, “*Thou shalt have no other gods before me*” (Exodus 20:3). Loving God with all our heart means giving no created thing, earthly power, or personal desire the highest place that belongs only to God. It calls us to remove every rival from our devotion.

The Second Commandment says, *“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image... Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them”* (Exodus 20:4-5). Loving God with all our soul means refusing to reduce the infinite God to a physical image we can control. It rejects human-made forms of worship and calls us to worship God in spirit and in truth, as He directs.

The Third Commandment says, *“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain”* (Exodus 20:7). Loving God with all our mind means treating His name, character, and reputation with deep respect. We must not use His name carelessly, falsely, or for selfish purposes. Our thoughts and words should honor His greatness.

The Fourth Commandment says, *“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God”* (Exodus 20:8-10). Loving God with all our strength includes honoring the pattern of work and rest established at Creation. It recognizes that our work and time belong to God and calls us to set aside our own activities to honor Him.

When Jesus summarized these commands as loving God with our whole being, He did not replace their details. He showed the attitude needed to obey them. We cannot fully follow the great command to love God while rejecting the Sabbath, misusing His name, worshiping images, or putting other gods before Him. The first four commandments show what love for God looks like in practice.

Chapter V: The Last Six Commandments — Loving Others

After explaining our duty to God, Jesus gave the second great command. It concerns how we treat other people and cannot be separated from the first.

“And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

— **Matthew 22:39-40**

The words “on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” picture the two commands as supports holding up the teaching of the Old Testament. This second command, loving our neighbor as ourselves, summarizes the **Second Table of the Law**: the last six commandments (Exodus 20:12-17). They guide human relationships and promote justice, safety, and respect.

In Romans, Paul directly connects this summary to the words of the Ten Commandments. He shows that loving our neighbor means avoiding specific wrongs and protecting the good of other people:

"For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

— **Romans 13:9-10**

Paul names the final commandments to show that “love thy neighbour” sums up their specific instructions. The last six commandments show what love for others requires:

The Fifth Commandment says, “*Honour thy father and thy mother*” (Exodus 20:12). Love begins in the family. Respect for parents supports strong relationships between generations and helps build a stable society.

The Sixth Commandment says, “*Thou shalt not kill*” (Exodus 20:13). Loving our neighbor means treating human life as a gift from God. It calls us to protect life and reject hatred, cruelty, and violence.

The Seventh Commandment says, “*Thou shalt not commit adultery*” (Exodus 20:14). Love respects marriage and the boundaries of another family. It protects faithfulness, purity, and the trust needed for healthy relationships.

The Eighth Commandment says, “*Thou shalt not steal*” (Exodus 20:15). Love respects another person’s property and work. It rejects theft, exploitation, and dishonest gain.

The Ninth Commandment says, “*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour*” (Exodus 20:16). Love requires truthfulness. It protects another person’s reputation and supports justice in human relationships.

The Tenth Commandment says, “*Thou shalt not covet*” (Exodus 20:17). Love removes envy and greed from the heart. Instead of wanting what belongs to others, it encourages contentment and a sincere desire for our neighbors to do well.

Paul’s conclusion is clear: “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” Love does not replace the law. Love puts the law into action by refusing to harm others. If we love our neighbor, we will not violate their marriage, steal their property, take their life, lie about them, or envy what they have. The last six commandments give practical shape to love for others.

Conclusion: How Example, Love, and Law Work Together

When we consider the full teaching of the King James Bible, God's design becomes clear. Christ did not fulfill the law in order to tear it down. He did not obey so that we could rebel. He came as the perfect example, showing the beauty of the law in a human life and leaving a path for His followers.

God's law is held together by two kinds of love: devotion to God and right treatment of others. The first four commandments show how to love God. The last six show how to love other people. Love does not make the commandments outdated. The commandments teach us how to love without falling into sin.

A true disciple of Christ does not treat law and grace as enemies. Through the Holy Spirit, the New Covenant does what sinful human nature could not do. God writes His lasting law on the human heart and gives believers power to walk as Christ walked. In this way, the law's righteousness is lived out through love, bringing glory to God the Father.