

Again, for our purposes it is not necessary to pause over the question of whether reference is made to the fulfillment of prediction which is certain or whether the fulfillment mentioned is the fulfilling of the demands of the moral law in the life of the Lord Jesus. The emphasis may be on one or the other of the aspects of the Scriptures, but the terminology shows clearly enough that the Scriptures as a whole are under consideration and are guaranteed in their perfection and effect.

It is of interest to compare another instance reported twice elsewhere where Christ refers to words more enduring than heaven and earth. They are the words of Christ Himself (Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:33). The reference of course is not to the preservation of Christ's words - most of which were not, as a matter of fact, preserved - but to the perfection and force of Christ's words. And it is indicative of the claims of Christ for His own authority that He does not hesitate to classify His own words on a par with those recognized by the Jews to have been from God. The words of Jesus and the words of the sacred volume are indeed on a par and both, as the Psalmist said, are forever settled in heaven.

Now this exegesis of Matthew 5:17,18 is not unusual. The words are plain and well attested. The difficulty which is alleged is that the verses which follow in Matthew 5:21-48 seem to give a contrary view. Sanday in his well-known Bampton Lectures on "Inspiration" finds a lower view of the inspiration of the Old Testament in this latter section and on that account questions somewhat the genuineness of verses 17 and 18. (p. 410) The Westminster Study Edition of the Holy Scriptures edited by men of Princeton Seminary, McCormick Seminary and others does the same. "These words, if taken literally, cannot have been spoken by Jesus, for in vv. 34,39 he boldly sets aside explicit words of the Law!" p. 31 New Testament sect. Emil Brunner in "The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption" (p. 219) also declares that there is here a contradiction between Christ's statements earlier in the chapter and in the latter part and Brunner doubts the earlier verses. Now on the face of it, it is not easy to doubt that vss. 17 and 18 actually give Christ's views on the authority of the Old Testament. As has been mentioned, it is a well attested saying. Its meaning is beyond serious dispute. But moreover the fact is that the pervasive representation of Christ's view in the Gospels is that He thoroughly believed the Scriptures. From the time of His early ministry in Nazareth (Luke 4:21) to His arrest in the Garden (Matt. 26:54) He was conscious that the Scriptures must be fulfilled and were fulfilled in Himself. He quoted the Scriptures to the tempter, to the multitudes, to His disciples, to His accusers. His references elsewhere to its truth and necessity are numerous and explicit (compare only John 5:46, 47, John 10:35, Luke 16:31, and Luke 24:25). Rather than doubt either of the strands of Jesus' teaching allegedly found in Matthew 5, we should seriously strive to find their synthesis. We believe it can be shown that the latter verses also are not false, but have been widely misinterpreted.

Christ's own Authority vs. Tradition

Six times in the chapter the refrain occurs "ye have heard that it was said by them of old time...But I say unto you". Here, the argument runs, Jesus was setting up a new authority - His own -