**Christ throughout the Bible**

Text: Matthew 5:17

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**Scriptures:** Hebrews 8:1-5; Luke 24:44-49; Matthew 5:17-20

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 232, 107, 110, 386, 533

**Series:** Belgic Confession (Article 25)

**Theme:** The unfolding redemptive historical plan of God is revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures in shadows, patterns, types and symbols which all point to Christ who is the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets.

**Proposition:** Seeing the Christ-centred nature of all Scripture helps us to better understand, and also to live out, the gospel, and to be more equipped to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.

**Introduction**

The Bible contains a lot of words. Most English translations have around 1100 chapters, over 31,000 verses and over 800,000 words. There are many different themes and concepts in Scripture. Yet some people think of the Old Testament, which is about 77% of the whole Bible, as being of limited value and importance when compared to the New. They see a few instructive stories there and some historical background but beyond that little of any significant value for the Christian today.

As we’ve been seeing as we’ve worked through some of the Old Testament laws in Deuteronomy, there are many things which were very different back then. For example, the details of the civil laws for Old Testament Israel do not apply to us today. You **can** plough with an ox and a donkey together if you want to! (22:10).

So what did Jesus mean when He said during the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ “*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them*” (Matt 5:17)? He had come ‘preaching the gospel of the kingdom’ teaching in the Jewish synagogues and out in the open where he was accessible to anyone who would come to hear Him speak (e.g. Matt 4:23). When He referred to the ‘Law’ and to ‘The Prophets’ He would have been well understood by his listeners as speaking about the whole Old Testament. These are the Scriptures which His Jewish listeners, especially the scribes and Pharisees were familiar with.

His righteous judgement against the Pharisees was not on their obedience to God’s good law. He was opposed to their focus on outward appearance rather than inner attitude (e.g. Matt 23). The Old Testament law demanded a radical holiness, not merely a set of religious rituals performed by a person with a heart which did not love God. We see this in God’s call to His people through Moses: “*Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn*” (Deut 10:16).

Jesus fulfils the Old Testament in many different ways:

* He is the One to whom all the ceremonies, symbols and shadows in the first 39 books of the Bible point.
* He is the One about whom the Old Testament prophets spoke.
* He is the One who has completely obeyed the Law of God.
* He is the One who reveals the meaning of the Bible more clearly than any prophet before Him.

Jesus Christ is found throughout the Bible. This is a truth which He confirmed: He said that it is the Scriptures ‘*that bear witness about me*’ (John 5:39). He opened up the meaning of God’s Word to two men on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection, as Luke records: “*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself*” (Luke 24:27).

Seeing the Christ-centred nature of all Scripture helps us to better understand, and also live out, the gospel. It also enables us to be more equipped to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light. We can open up the whole Bible to others as we glorify God by pointing out the many intricate connections that bind the Word of God together and that all point to Christ as Lord and Saviour. This afternoon we’re going to look at the topic of Belgic Confession Article 25 – ‘Christ, the fulfilment of the law’, under three headings this afternoon:

1. Types and shadows
2. Promises and fulfilment
3. Christ and the gospel
4. **Types and shadows**

In English, the word ‘type’ originally referred to an impression made with an instrument or object by striking it with something. That’s where the word ‘typewriter’ comes from. These now largely obsolete mechanical machines use thin metal arms with characters moulded in metal (called typebars) that use the ink of a ribbon to impress each letter one by one on a piece of paper which is moved along by a carriage. We still speak about ‘typing’ when writing a document on a computer, as I am doing now in preparing this sermon, even though nothing is physically striking my screen.

When the disciple Thomas doubted the resurrection of Christ, he declared: "*Unless I see in his hands the* ***mark*** *of the nails, and place my finger into the* ***mark*** *of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe*." (John 20:25). The word ‘mark’ here is the Greek word ‘type’ – a pattern made by an object when pressed into another substance.

The use of the work ‘type’ or ‘mark’ in Scripture is also broader than this. It is used figuratively of a pattern, or a copy of something, either physical or conceptual, like a principle or a virtue. The Apostle Paul exhorted the Philippians to ‘*keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us*’ (Phil 3:17). He also wrote about Adam who was a ‘type’ of Christ (Rom 5:14).

There is a method of interpreting different parts of the Old Testament Scriptures which is called ‘typology’ (from the word ‘type’). Typology recognizes that there are patterns in the Scripture which are like Christ and His Work; irrespective of whether the actual word ‘type’ is used in the New Testament to identify them. Typology identifies ‘spiritual correspondences’ between persons, events and objects within God’s unfolding plan of redemption as revealed in Scripture.

For example, in the historical account of Abraham obeying God by preparing to sacrifice his son Isaac, there is a pattern which mirrors Christ. Isaac was the only, much loved, son of Abraham. Isaac carried up the wood for the sacrifice as Jesus carried his own cross. Just as the ram caught in the thorn bush became a substitute for a man, so Jesus is the substitute sacrifice. The Protestant Reformers recognised the value and significance of typology in the faithful interpretation of Scripture, this is reflected in Belgic Confession Article 25.

However, there is a danger with typology of ‘taking a good thing too far’. The result then is what is called the allegorical interpretation of Scripture. Here’s an example from the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matt 25:1-13) which some of the early ‘Church Fathers’ and others over-interpreted as they searched for hidden meaning ‘buried’ under the text of Scripture:

* In this parable, Clement of Alexandria thought that the oil represented the Father’s compassion.
* Augustine that the oil represented joy.
* Chrysostrum that the oil was the word of teaching.
* In the Middle Ages Bede said that the oil represented repentance
* In the Reformation Luther thought that the oil was grace

How would you know which interpretation is correct? In contrast to typology, allegory lacks the controlling boundaries of Scripture; it does not take account of the context or genre of a Biblical passage.

We have all seen shadows formed in the shape of an object or person upon which or whom a light is shining. In writing to the Colossians about Old Testament festivals and practices, Paul speaks of these ‘shadows’ which point to Christ: “*These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ*” (Col 2:17). The Old Testament blood sacrifices were types or shadows of Christ, who is the ultimate and only effective offering for sin. As the writer to the Hebrews notes: “*For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*” (Heb 10:4). The law has ‘*but a* ***shadow*** *of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities*’ (Heb 10:1).

Guido de Bres wrote in Belgic Confession Article 25 that ‘*the use of them (ceremonies, shadows and symbols) ought to be abolished among Christians*’. Whilst we have liberty to enact Old Testament ceremonies like the Passover, we must not do so with the understanding that these are part of our worship today. To do so would be to deny that all the Old Testament types and shadows have been completely fulfilled in Christ, which brings us to our second point.

1. **Promises and fulfilment**

Careful investigation of the natural world reveals both the inter-connectedness of the internal biological systems within plants, birds, insects, animals and people and also the complex relationships between different organisms within the biosphere on this planet. The wise student of creation exclaims with the angels "*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!*" (Isaiah 6:3), whereas the fool says, ‘I can see nature’s design’, whilst denying the existence of the Designer (Ps 14:1).

**Just as** the physical world bears testimony to the eternal nature and divine power of God (Rom 1:20), **so**, the Word of God bears testimony to the power and grace of God as His plan of redemption unfolds through time. Tracing the multitude of these threads uncovers some of the complexity, wonder and beauty of the tapestry of the Bible. Underpinning the many connections from types, shadows, signs and symbols to Christ is the Biblical pattern of promise and fulfilment. As we see the many promises of God fulfilled in Christ, we can gain greater confidence in the comforting truth that He who has begun a good work will certainly bring it to completion (Phil 1:6). There is great spiritual benefit in reading and understanding the Old Testament as we look forward to the future in Christ. The Apostle Paul puts it this way: “*For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope*” (Rom 15:4).

The word ‘fulfil’ in Matthew 5:17 means to ‘make come true’, ‘to fill’, to ‘bring to completion’. He is the ‘substance’ that all the shadows foreshadow. He is the reality that all the signs and symbols point to. Jesus is the ‘antitype’ of all the types in the Old Testament. Bible scholars call the fulfilment of a ‘type’ the ‘antitype’, for example:

* Jesus said to Nicodemus “*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up*” (3:14). The serpent on the pole was the type, Christ is the ‘antitype’ who fulfils the promise of One who would bring healing for God’s people
* The Passover Lamb (Exo 12:1-13, 49) is a type of Christ (1 Cor 5:7). The unblemished lamb is the ‘type’ whose blood was seen by the Lord who then passed over the houses of the Israelites so that their firstborn (representative of all) would not die. Christ is the ‘antitype’ who fulfils God’s promise to rescue His people by conquering Satan (Gen 3:15).
* The rock from which Israel drank in the wilderness (Ex 17:6) is the type, Christ is the antitype, the ‘spiritual rock’ who is the Deliverer of God’s people fulfilling the promise of God to rescue His people, not from slavery in Egypt, but from the bondage to which this captivity pointed – that of sin and death.

The promises of God are many and varied, and they have all either already been fulfilled or have not yet found ultimate and complete fulfilment in Christ. This truth is revealed by the Apostle Paul in 2 Cor 1:20 “*For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory*”.

When looking for the promises of God we do need to be careful not to misinterpret Scripture. All the promises of Scripture, both general and personal, find their fulfilment in Christ. For example: In Christ, God promises to give us wisdom if we ask (James 1:5). In Christ, God promises to provide a way out of temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). In Christ, He promises that our salvation is secure, no matter what (John 10:28–29). All the promises of Scripture are fulfilled in Christ who is the centre and substance of the gospel, which brings us to our third point:

1. **Christ and the gospel**

Guido de Bres wrote in the Belgic Confession that ‘the testimonies taken from the law and the prophets’ are used to ‘confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel’. When we understand that the Bible is not fundamentally a book which is centred around mankind, but is first and foremost ‘Christo-centric’ – Christ is at the core of Scripture. So, it is not helpful to see the Bible firstly as a book of dos and don’ts but to see the whole of Scripture in light of Christ.

The laws in the Bible are not, and never were, the way for the descendants of Adam to be saved. As Paul explains to the Galatians (3:24) “*So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith*”. The Old Testament law is usually divided into three parts.

1. **The moral law** (summarised in the 10 commandments) provided for discipline and order in the Israelites’ personal life and relationship to God and neighbour. These commandments still function to provide order in our lives, to teach us of our sin and need for Jesus Christ and to provide the rule for thankful living before our God, so that we may walk as His people.

Jesus, the Beloved Son in whom God the Father was well pleased, completely fulfilled the moral law.

1. **The civil law** was established for Israel as a nation. Israel was a theocracy. She was ruled by God, who provided for Israel a way to regulate her society in keeping with His holiness. Many of these civil laws were presented as case laws (in such and such a case, such and such was to happen) and though these laws do not function specifically any longer, they still provide lasting moral principles and values for modern nations.

Jesus, in His humanity on this earth, was a citizen living in an occupied land under Roman civil law. He always obeyed the governing authorities, when doing so did not conflict with God’s Law. Pontius Pilate justly declared “I find no guilt in Him” (John 19.6). Jesus obeyed the civil law, ‘rendering to Caesar’ the things that were Caesar’s.

1. **The ceremonial law** regulated the rituals of worship and the priesthood, many of which are found in the book of Leviticus. These laws included the sacrifices, the proper creation and handling of the holy things of the tabernacle and temple, including the tabernacle and temple themselves, the rites of purification and the function of the priests. As we’ve already seen these ceremonies, types and shadows all pointed to the coming ‘once and for all’ sacrifice that Jesus Christ would make on behalf of the people on the cross. Jesus fulfilled all the ceremonial law.

Grasping clearly that all the laws in the Bible are not duties to be performed to gain favour with God, but are the rightful response of self-aware sinful people to the great grace of God in Christ, liberates the troubled soul from the defeating drudgery of just trying harder.

In preaching the gospel of grace, preachers must be careful not to present a message of shadow and type, that is of Old Testament laws and patterns without grace. The Old Testament is a rich treasure of gospel truth, but only when the connections are rightly made and are presented so that the Light of Christ is seen. He is the One whose brilliant glory we could say ‘casts the shadows’ back in redemptive history.

In witnessing to others, we must be careful not to present the Bible simply as a rule book to be obeyed for a better life. If you are studying, reading, or sharing a passage of Scripture look for the connections to Christ. In the New Testament these are generally not hard to find, in the Old Testament it usually requires some more work because these links are found in the shadows and types, not in the substance of Christ and the gospel.

It is also necessary to consider sufficiently large portions of Scripture so that at least one type or shadow can be found and the promises of God which they represent can be shown to have been already or not yet fulfilled in Christ. Jesus came not to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfil them. The evidence for this reality is throughout the whole Bible. All of Scripture bears witness to Him. When you yourself bear witness to Christ, be sure to show others some of the many threads which link the shadows and types to Christ and in doing so illuminate the gospel and give glory to God.

AMEN.