

Briefing Document: Matthew Lesson 42-Christ and The Law

January 11, 2026

Executive Summary

This document synthesizes the core themes of a lesson on Matthew 5:17-20, which establishes the absolute and eternal authority of God's law. The central argument posits that in an era defined by moral relativism, the Word of God stands as the only true anchor for law, justice, and righteousness. Jesus Christ did not come to abolish the Old Testament law but to fulfill it, reaffirming its complete and unchanging authority down to the smallest detail. The lesson critiques modern tendencies, both secular and religious, to reinterpret or dismiss biblical authority, framing this as an attempt to accommodate sin. Ultimately, it concludes that a commitment to the whole counsel of God, as revealed in the Old Testament and fulfilled in Christ, is the necessary foundation for a righteous life within God's kingdom.

1. The Crisis of Relativism and the Need for an Absolute Standard

A foundational theme presented is the untenability of a society that attempts to establish rules without an absolute moral standard. The current societal landscape is characterized as a "sea of relativism," where the absence of a divine anchor leads to legal and moral chaos.

- **Failure of Humanism:** Without God and theology, truth itself is abandoned. It is argued that a consistent legal system cannot be built upon "philosophical humanism, on fluctuating, changing principles of what is right and what is wrong."
- **The Problem of Legitimacy:** The text poses a critical question: "How can moral principles be grounded and social institutions ultimately legitimized in the absence of a religiously based culture?" The answer provided is unequivocal: they cannot.
- **The Ineffectiveness of Relative Laws:** Laws that are merely "judicial guesses" without the backing of an absolute, divine standard will fail to command obedience.
- **God's Law as the Anchor:** The analysis concludes that the only solution to this crisis is the law of God. It is presented as the absolute source of truth, the absolute standard of morality, and the absolute rule of justice.

2. The Unchanging Authority of God's Word

The document asserts that the Bible is this absolute, eternal, and inviolate standard. Christ's own view of Scripture is presented as the definitive model for believers.

- **The Permanence of Scripture:** Jesus's words in Matthew 5 are highlighted to underscore the law's permanence: "*not one jot¹ or tittle² will by no means pass from the law, till all is fulfilled.*" This statement affirms that every part of God's Word will be fulfilled and that its authority is immutable.

- **Critique of Modern Interpretation:** A strong critique is leveled against contemporary efforts to undermine the Bible's authority. These efforts include:
 - Denying divine authorship of certain chapters.
 - Dismissing sections that are culturally or personally disagreeable.
 - Reinterpreting verses to align with modern sensibilities.
 - Claiming the Bible contains errors or is not fully inspired or authoritative.
- **Redefining Scripture to Fit Sin:** The motive behind these reinterpretations is described as an attempt to "evade allowing the Bible to confront us" and, more directly, to "redefine Scripture to fit our sin."
- **The Call for Submission:** The proper response to Scripture is not to change it but to allow it to change the individual. The text advocates for letting God's Word "shatter us," "crush our evil ways," and "overturn our disobedient lives."

3. Christ's Proclamation: Fulfilling, Not Destroying, the Law

A significant portion of the analysis focuses on the historical context and theological implications of Jesus' sermon, clarifying His relationship to the Old Testament law.

- **Historical Context:** At the time of Jesus' public ministry, His teachings were a stark contrast to the prevailing religious instruction of the Scribes and Pharisees. His emphasis on inward morality, grace, mercy, and friendship with sinners led many to wonder if He was a revolutionary intending to "subvert the authority of the Word of God, and substitute His own."
- **A Manifesto of Affirmation:** Jesus's declaration in Matthew 5:17-20 serves as a direct refutation of any notion that He came to destroy the law. His purpose was the opposite: to fulfill it completely. His statement is described as an "amazing manifesto of the King."
- **Raising the Standard:** The Pharisees had reduced God's law to an external, legalistic system. They believed the standard was impossibly high and needed to be managed through traditions. Jesus's view was that they had "dragged it down so low," and He came to "raise the standard to where it belonged." He did this by driving the law's requirements "back inside where it belonged," revealing that His commitment to God's law was greater than that of the most meticulous Pharisee.
- **Breaking the Least Commandment:** Jesus reinforces the totality of the law's authority by stating, *"whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven."*

4. The Old Testament's Foundational Role for Christians

The lesson directly addresses the relevance of the Old Testament for contemporary believers, framing it as indispensable.

- **Binding Authority:** The text explores the vital question: "Is the Old Testament binding on the Christian?" While not every ceremonial aspect may apply in the same way, its authority as God's Word is absolute.
- **Foundation of the New Testament:** The Old Testament is described as the "foundation to the New Testament." A proper understanding of Christian doctrine and life is impossible without it.
- **The Path to Righteous Living:** The sermon connects adherence to God's Word with the practical outworking of Christian character. When faced with the high calling of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) and the command to be "salt and light" (Matthew 5:13-16), the means to achieve this life is found in upholding the Word of God. As Jesus declared to the Father in John 17:17, "*Your word is truth.*"

Key Terminology

Term	Phonetic Pronunciation	Definition
Jot ¹	(from Greek: <i>Iota</i>) [ee-OH-tah]	Refers to the smallest letter of the Greek alphabet (<i>iota</i>), which itself corresponds to the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet (<i>yodh</i>). Its use signifies that not even the most minute detail of the law will be neglected.
Tittle ²	(from Greek: <i>Keraia</i>) [keh-REH-ah]	Refers to a tiny stroke or decorative mark that distinguishes one Hebrew letter from another. Its use, alongside "jot," emphasizes the complete and meticulous authority of every single part of God's written law.