

Briefing Document: Matthew Lesson 53-Christ and the Law

January 18, 2026

Executive Summary

This briefing summarizes the key theological insights from "Lesson 53" regarding the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Old Testament Law, based on Matthew 5:17–20. The central thesis is that Jesus did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it, establishing it as the preeminent and unchanging standard for righteousness.

Critical takeaways include:

- **The Nature of Fulfillment:** Christ's mission was to restate and embody God's original intention for the Law, which had been perverted by the traditions of religious leaders.
- **Internal vs. External Righteousness:** True righteousness must be an internal reality driven by the Holy Spirit, exceeding the purely external, performative legalism practiced by the scribes and Pharisees.
- **The Absolute Authority of Scripture:** The Law is binding because it is authored by an unchanging God. This standard remains absolute regardless of societal shifts or cultural pressures.
- **Contemporary Application:** Adherence to God's Law necessitates a firm stance on the sanctity of life and a commitment to active, fearless witnessing in the world.

The Preeminence and Purpose of the Law

In Matthew 5:17–20, Jesus addresses a potential misconception among His followers that the New Covenant would nullify the Old Testament. He explicitly states His position on the authority of Scripture:

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:17–20)

Defining the Law

In the context of the first century, the term "Law" could refer to several concepts. Jesus, however, focuses on the divine Law authored by God, rather than the secondary traditions developed by men:

- **The Decalogue:** The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20).

- **The Pentateuch:** The first five books of the Bible.
- **The Prophets:** The entirety of the Old Testament revelation.
- **Distinction from Oral Tradition:** Jesus distinguishes God's Law from "oral scribal traditions." He rebukes the religious leaders for substituting the traditions of men for the Law of God.

The Character of God as Author

The Law is considered invaluable and binding because of its source. As noted in Malachi 3:6: "*For I am the Lord, I do not change.*" Because God's nature is unchangeable, His moral standards are not subject to human opinion or the "whims of daily society."

Internal Righteousness vs. External Hypocrisy

A major theme of the discourse is the failure of the "phony externalism" practiced by the religious elite. Jesus demands a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, focusing on the heart rather than the mask.

The Problem of the Pharisaic Standard

The Pharisees had devolved into a religion that was entirely external. They performed charitable deeds, prayed, and fasted specifically to be seen by men. Jesus repeatedly labels them as "hypocrites" throughout the Gospel of Matthew, referencing Isaiah's prophecy:

"These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." (Matthew 15:8)

The Call to Internal Transformation

Christianity is defined by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Righteousness is not found in "washings" or tithing "little bits of spice," but in an internal order where the heart is aligned with God's Law. This internal righteousness then serves as the basis for being "salt and light" in the world; without true righteousness, an individual cannot draw others to the Lord.

Contemporary Applications and Mandates

The briefing highlights how the unchanging Law of God should dictate the behavior and priorities of the modern church.

The Sanctity of Life

The document asserts that every life is sacred to God from the moment of conception. This is supported by the divine declaration in Jeremiah 1:5:

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you."

The current cultural acceptance of abortion is viewed as a result of man's thoughts superseding God's Law. There is a call for the church to support agencies like pregnancy centers and to pray for a "cultural realignment" that recognizes children as gifts from God.

Fearless Witnessing

The purpose of salvation is to lead others to Christ. This requires:

- **Engagement with the World:** Believers are urged to go where people are "mired in sin," following the example of Jesus who ate with tax collectors and reached out to those in the "deepest, darkest" places.
- **Intentionality:** Witnessing should be a proactive effort to share the "good news" with the same excitement one might share about a sporting event.
- **Authenticity:** The life of a believer must tell a story of being "ever changing from glory to glory," mirroring the brightness of Christ.

The Role of the Church

The church is cautioned against becoming "sequestered away." Instead, it must be the instrument of God, speaking through both mouth and actions. The standard of God must be raised high, even if it requires coming across "negatively" to expose what is "phony" in the modern church.

Greek Glossary and Phonetic Guide

The following terms from the original Greek were utilized to provide depth to the biblical analysis of Christ's relationship to the Law and His critique of religious leaders.

| Greek Word | Phonetic Pronunciation | Definition |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Kataluo ^[^1] | <i>kat-al-oo'-o</i> | To abolish, nullify, or destroy. Specifically used in the context of smashing down a wall or raising a house to the ground. |
| Hypokrites ^[^2] | <i>hoop-ok-ree-tace'</i> | A stage actor or one who wears a mask. Originates from Greek drama where actors wore masks to portray characters (e.g., a smile for comedy or a frown for a villain). |

[^1]: Used in Matthew 5:17 to indicate that Jesus did not come to "dismantle" or "abolish" the Old Testament Law. [^2]: Used by Jesus throughout Matthew (e.g., Matt 15:7, 23:13) to describe those whose religious practice is a mere external performance or a "mask" hiding an unchanged heart.