

Briefing Document: Matthew Lesson 62-Christ and the Law

April 12, 2026

Executive Summary

This briefing document analyzes the theological relationship between Jesus Christ and the Mosaic Law, centered on the exposition of Matthew 5:19. The core finding is that while the civil and ceremonial laws of Israel have been fulfilled and set aside following the birth of the Church and the crucifixion, the moral law remains binding as a reflection of God's immutable character. The document highlights the distinction between the "Three Ps of Sin"—presence, power, and penalty—noting that while believers are liberated from the penalty of sin through Christ's sacrifice, they remain obligated to uphold God's moral standards. Furthermore, the analysis emphasizes that a believer's status and reward in the kingdom of heaven are directly contingent upon their habitual obedience and their commitment to teaching others to observe God's commandments.

The Significance of Matthew 5:19

The foundational scripture for this study is *Matthew 5:19: 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.*

Consequences of Obedience and Disobedience

The text establishes a clear hierarchy of respect, honor, and reward within the kingdom of heaven based on an individual's relationship with God's standards:

- **The Least in the Kingdom:** This designation applies to believers who deliberately "loose" themselves from God's law, turning their backs on His standards to pursue their own self-will. While such individuals do not lose their salvation, their habitual disobedience renders them "unusable" and "unblessable" in the context of ministry, resulting in minimal rewards in heaven.
- **The Great in the Kingdom:** This status is reserved for those who live by both precept and pattern. True greatness is achieved by those who demonstrate through their lifestyle and their instruction what it means to adhere to the standards of God.

The Higher Accountability of Teachers

There is a specific warning issued to those who influence the spiritual lives of others. It is considered a grave offense to teach others to break God's law, an act often rooted in ignorance. Citing *James 3:1*, the text notes: *My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.* Those who speak for God are held to a higher standard of accountability and will face a more rigorous judgment.

The Tripartite Nature of the Law

To understand why certain aspects of the Law are no longer practiced while others remain mandatory, the law must be divided into three distinct branches: civil, ceremonial, and moral.

1. Civil Law

The civil law served as the legal framework that constituted Israel as a chosen nation under God.

- **Current Status:** This branch of the law has ended because Israel, as a nation, turned away from its Savior.
- **Replacement:** Upon the birth of the Church, the civil law was fulfilled. The "middle wall of separation" mentioned in *Ephesians 2:14*—the legal barrier between Jew and Gentile—was broken down. The Church is now the "new people" of God, a blending of Jew and Gentile.

2. Ceremonial Law

The ceremonial law dictated the sacrificial system, priesthood, feasts (such as Passover and Pentecost), and dietary restrictions.

- **Current Status:** This branch was fulfilled and terminated by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.
- **Evidence of Fulfillment:** The tearing of the temple veil from top to bottom signified the end of this system. *Colossians 2:16-17* explains that these ceremonies were merely "a shadow of things to come," but the "substance is of Christ." Consequently, dietary laws and Sabbath observations are no longer binding on the believer.

3. Moral Law

The moral law is an extension of the very nature and character of God.

- **Current Status:** Unlike civil and ceremonial laws, the moral law remains binding. It has not changed.
- **Apostolic Affirmation:** The epistles reinforce the continuity of the moral law. In *1 Thessalonians 4:7*, it is stated: *For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.* Similarly, *1 Timothy 4:12* commands believers to be an example in *word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*

The Paradox of Grace and the Law

The New Testament epistles present a paradox: the law is fulfilled and no longer binding in one sense, yet it remains relevant in another. This is clarified through the "Three Ps of Sin."

The Three Ps of Sin

Aspect	Status for the Believer	Description
Presence	Persists	Believers have not yet escaped the physical presence of sin; this only occurs at glorification.
Power	Persists	Sin still exerts power over the believer's mortal body, as described in Romans 7.
Penalty	Removed	This is the only sense in which the moral law no longer "applies." Christ paid the wages of sin.

Freedom from the Penalty

Colossians 2:14 describes Christ *having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.* In antiquity, a "handwriting of requirements" was a signed debt letter. Every sin committed was a recorded debt against the individual. In an act of sovereignty and grace, God took these "volumes" of debt and nailed them to the cross with His Son. Therefore, while the law still defines what is moral, it no longer has the power to "slay" or condemn the believer to the ultimate penalty.

Theological Clarifications and Contemporary Failures

Critique of Dispensationalism

The document addresses the concept of "dispensations"—the idea that God's requirements change drastically across different eras. The text asserts that dispensationalism is a man-made theological construct originating around 1850 and popularized in the early 20th century. It argues that God is the same "yesterday, today, and tomorrow," and the principles found in *Matthew 5:19* cannot be "dispensationalized" away or ignored simply because they were spoken before the cross.

The State of the Modern Church

There is a sharp critique of the contemporary evangelical church in America, characterizing it as a failure. This failure is attributed to a lack of adherence to God's moral standards. The text suggests that the "dark cloud" hanging over the nation and the perceived abandonment of future generations is a direct result of the church failing to function as "salt and light" as originally designed.

Conclusion

Believers are urged to pursue righteousness, godliness, and purity, as instructed in *1 Timothy 6:11*. The removal of the law's penalty is not a license for "freewheeling" or sin, but a motivation for holy living. As summarized by the apostle Paul, believers are called to walk worthy of God, who calls them into His own kingdom and glory.