

Briefing Document: Matthew Lesson 64: Christ and the Law

April 26, 2026

Executive Summary

This document synthesizes the core teachings of Lesson 64 on the Sermon on the Mount, titled "Christ and the Law." The central theme is that human achievement and religious performance are insufficient for salvation. By examining the contrast between the self-righteous Pharisees and a humble tax collector, the source illustrates that the path to heaven requires a righteousness that exceeds human effort.

The purpose of the Law of God is not to provide a checklist for entry into heaven, but to act as a "mirror" and a "tutor." It reveals human sinfulness and the total inadequacy of personal "goodness," ultimately driving individuals to rely solely on the righteousness of Jesus Christ. True righteousness is characterized by humility and a "poor in spirit" attitude, rather than the prideful legalism displayed by religious leaders of the past and present.

The Religion of Human Achievement vs. True Humility

A primary focus of the source is the danger of self-righteousness, which is described as the "religion of human achievement." This concept is illustrated through the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector found in *Luke 18:9-14*.

- **The Pharisee's Approach:** The Pharisee represents those who trust in their own deeds. In the parable, he stood by himself and thanked God that he was not like other "sinners," such as extortioners or the tax collector. He boasted of fasting twice a week and giving tithes of all he possessed. This demonstrates a prideful heart that believes religious rituals make one righteous.
- **The Tax Collector's Approach:** The tax collector, despised by society as a traitor, stood at a distance and could not even look up to heaven. He beat his breast and prayed, "*God, be merciful to me a sinner!*"
- **The Conclusion:** Jesus taught that the tax collector went home justified before God, while the Pharisee did not. This emphasizes that God exalts the humble and humbles those who exalt themselves.

The Standard of Heavenly Entrance

In *Matthew 5:20*, Jesus sets a standard that would have shocked His listeners: "*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.*"

- **The Best is Not Good Enough:** The scribes and Pharisees were considered the most religious and "righteous" people in Jewish society. By stating that one's

righteousness must exceed theirs, Jesus showed that human goodness—even at its peak—is not enough to earn entry into heaven.

- **The Error of "Being Good":** Most people believe that heaven is for "good people" and hell is for "bad people." However, the source argues that even the "very best" people cannot enter heaven based on their own goodness.
- **The Role of Jesus:** The Book of Matthew establishes Jesus as the King of Kings who came to fulfill the Law, not to change the standard. He provides the only way to attain the perfection required by God.

The Purpose of the Law

The Law was not given to show people how good they are, but to prove how "rotten" they are at the core. The source identifies four "P" words regarding the Law: Preeminence, Permanence, Pertinence, and **Purpose**.

- **The Law as a Tutor:** As stated in *Galatians 3:24*, "*Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*" The Law acts as a schoolmaster or disciplinarian to lead people to the realization that they need a Savior.
- **The Mirror of Sin:** The Law serves as a mirror. When a person looks into it honestly, it identifies their sin and shows them their total inadequacy.
- **Intentional Frustration:** The purpose of the Law is to frustrate human effort. It is designed to show that no one can keep it perfectly. Once a person breaks even one part of the Law, they are guilty of breaking it all.

Internal Righteousness vs. External Legalism

The source contrasts the "phony system" of the Pharisees with the true righteousness of the Kingdom.

The Beatitudes as a Guide

The Beatitudes (*Matthew 5:3-16*) describe the character of those in the Kingdom, which directly opposed the Pharisaic system:

- **Poor in Spirit vs. Proud:** The religious leaders were arrogant and boastful, whereas the Kingdom requires being poor in spirit.
- **Mourning vs. Self-Sufficiency:** True believers mourn over their sinful condition; the Pharisees paraded their supposed holiness in the streets.
- **Meekness vs. Boastfulness:** The system of the day was boastful, while Jesus blessed the meek.

- **Hunger for Righteousness:** The Pharisees believed they were already righteous and did not hunger for God's true standard.

The Transformation

True salvation results in a transformed life. The source warns against modern religious systems that claim one can be saved without becoming a "new creature" in Christ. The only way to obtain the necessary righteousness is for Jesus to take away a person's sin and replace it with His own righteousness through the cross.

Greek Word Pronunciation and Definitions

The following terms were used during the presentation to describe the narrow nature of the path to heaven.

Word	Phonetic Pronunciation	Definition
Legal ^[^1]	LEE-guhl	Defined by the source as meaning "little," describing the pathway to the Kingdom.
Poly legal ^[^2]	PAH-lee LEE-guhl	Defined by the source as meaning "even narrower," describing the gate to the Kingdom.

[^1]: As used in the transcript to describe the Greek concept of the narrow pathway. [^2]: As used in the transcript to describe the Greek concept of the narrow gate.