

THE LAW AND JESUS: BREAKING THE LAW OF GOD MATHEW 05:17–20

Introduction

Jesus Christ was accused of destroying or abolishing the law of God. He has always been accused of minimising God’s law. Every generation has its proponents who feel that Jesus *emphasized* love and de-emphasized the law. Many have felt that the thrust of Jesus is love and forgiveness, and the afterthought is law and justice. As a result, many have felt less obligated to follow God’s law. They have felt freer to live a looser life and to do as they wished. The feeling has been that if they keep the law of God in the back of their minds, they have the Christian liberty to interpret behaviour as they see fit (within some reason). After all, it is argued, the “priesthood and security of the believer” are two of the basic teachings of Scripture. Therefore, the law’s clear restrictions and obligations and its demand for obedience are minimized, and what is called love and forgiveness are emphasized. Christ pulls no punches and comes straight to the point: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law” (v.17), “anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments....” (v.19), “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law...” (v. 20).

- I A person must know that Christ came to fulfil the law (vv. 17-18).
- II A person must do and teach the law in order to be great in the Kingdom of Heaven (v. 19).
- III A person must have more righteousness than a religionist to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (v. 20).

MATHEW 05:17–48 JESUS, THE FULFILMENT OF LAW

This Scripture is of critical importance. It is God’s Son explaining the law of God.

1. Christ confirmed God’s law, all the Scripture of the Old Testament. Christ said He was not abolishing the Law or the Prophets. The term “the Law or the Prophets” was a reference to the whole Old Testament. What Christ said was that He, as God’s Son, came to fulfil the law; and His teaching was just as binding as the Old Testament law. (See note, Mt. 5:17-18.)
2. Christ illustrated God’s laws, explaining the broad principles which were and still are to be applied to everyday life. He took a few practical laws and showed how a person was to take the broad principle and apply it to his own daily behaviour.
3. Christ condemned the oral or Scribal Law (condemned it rather strongly.) When Jesus Christ and the other New Testament writers condemned the law, it always referred to the oral or Scribal Law, not to God’s Law (See note, Mt. 5:17-18). □

I. *Mathew 05:17–18 Jesus Fulfils the Law*

A person must know that Christ came to fulfil the law. Jesus said He was neither contradicting nor abolishing the Old Testament Scriptures nor standing against them. He was fulfilling them, completing them, bringing out what was implied. He was showing what the real meaning of the Old Testament Scripture is, its full meaning — all that God intended the Scripture to say. As God’s Son, He is the Revelation of the truth. He is to reveal the true and complete meaning of the Scriptures. There are several ways in which Jesus Christ fulfilled the law.

1. Before Christ, the law described how God wanted man to live. The law was the ideal, the words that told man what he was to do. But Christ fulfilled and completed the law; that is, God gave man more than just mere words to describe how He wants man to live. He gave man the Life, the Person who perfectly pictures and demonstrates the law before the world’s very eyes. Jesus Christ is the Picture, the Living Example, the Pattern, the Demonstration of life as it is to be lived. He is the Perfect Picture of God’s will, the Ideal Man, the Representative Man, the Pattern for all men.

John 1:14 *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

John 8:45 *“Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!”*

Col 1:15 *He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation.*

Heb 1:3 *The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*

1 Pet 2:21-23 *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*

2. Before Christ, the law was only words and rules. It could only inject the idea of behaviour into the mind of a person. It had no spirit, no life, no power to enable a person to do the law. But Christ fulfilled and completed the law. He was Spirit and Life, so He was able to put spirit and life to the words and rules of the law. He was able to live the life described by the words and rules. As such, He was able to inject both the idea and the power to behave into a person’s mind and life. It is now His life that sets the standard and the rule for the believer; it is His Spirit and life that gives the believer power to obey.

Rom 8:1-4 *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened*

by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

Gal 2:19-20 *For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Gal 5:16-18 *So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.*

Heb 8:10 *This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.*

3. Before Christ, the law stated only the rule and the principle of behaviour. It did not explain the rule nor the spirit behind the rule. Neither did the law give the full meaning of the rule. The law always had to have an interpreter. But Christ fulfilled and completed the law. He explained the rule and the spirit behind the rule. He interpreted the law. He gave the law its real and full meaning.

Gal 3:23-24 *Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.*

Rom 3:20-22 *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference.*

4. Before Christ, the law demanded perfect righteousness; it demanded a perfect life. But man failed at certain points. Man just could not obey the law perfectly; he fell short of perfect righteousness. But Christ fulfilled and completed the law. He kept the law in every detail. He secured the perfect righteousness demanded by the law. He fulfilled all the requirements, all the types, and all the ceremonies of the law — perfectly. As such, He became the Perfect Man, the Ideal Man, the Representative Man for all men. As the Ideal Man, He simply embraced all men; He embodied the righteousness that man must now have.

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Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference.

2 Cor 5:21 “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Heb 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.

Heb 7:26 Such a high priest meets our need — one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

1 Pet 1:18-19 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

5. Before Christ, the law demanded punishment for disobedience. If a man broke the law, he was to be punished. But Christ fulfilled and completed the law. In fact, He went to the farthest point possible in fulfilling the law. He paid the maximum price, showing the ultimate love. He bore the punishment of the law for every man’s disobedience; He took the punishment of the law upon Himself. As the Ideal Man, He not only embodies the righteousness that must cover all men, He also frees all men from the penalty of the law. And He makes them sons of God. (Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 3:13-14; 4:1-7.)

Thought 1. Several other passages need to be looked at for a complete understanding of Christ and the law and the believer. (Rom.7:4; 7:14-25; 8:2-4; Gal. 3:10.)

Thought 2. Christ speaks to two different types of people.

- 1) The strict religionist or legalist. Christ does not abolish or weaken the law. The liberty He preaches fulfils the law as it should be fulfilled. He is not to be rejected because a person thinks His liberty weakens the law. He is to be acknowledged as God’s Son who is to be followed and obeyed. (Rom.14:1-23; Gal. 5:13; 5:16-18.)
- 2) The carnal or loose religionist. Christ does not weaken the law by allowing a person to live as he wishes — by conscience only. He does not release men from the duty and responsibility of the law. He fulfils and strengthens and even enlarges the law. Liberty does not mean license; it means that a person is now free to serve God in the spirit and life of the law, not just in the letter of the law.

Thought 3. The Old Testament is the Word of God — according to Christ. (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:11; 2 Pet. 1:19-21.)

Thought 4. Christ considered His coming to be significant — one of the pivotal points of history. The following words show this (see vv. 17-18).

“I have come....”

“I have come...to fulfil.”

“I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear...”

“Until everything is accomplished.”

He speaks as a person whose entrance into the world held great meaning for the world. This fact says something of extreme importance to man: “Hear Him.” What He says is binding. It is *as* binding, if not *more* binding, than the law itself.

Rom 10:3-4 *Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*

Mat 20:28 *“Just as the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

John 3:17 *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

John 10:10 *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”*

John 12:47-48 *“As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.”*

MATHEW 05:17 THE LAW

The law referred to four different writings to the Jews.

1. It referred to the Ten Commandments.
2. It referred to the first five books of the Bible, that is the Pentateuch.
3. It referred to the law and the prophets, that is, all the Scripture of the Old Testament.
4. It referred to the oral or the Scribal Law.

God’s law, given in the Old Testament, was not enough for the Jews. They reasoned that if the law was really God’s Word, then it must include — have embodied within it — every rule and regulation for conduct. Therefore, they took the great principles of the law and reduced them to thousands upon thousands of rules and regulations. These rules and regulations became the oral or Scribal Law. There were two groups who gave their lives to the teaching and keeping of the law.

1. The Scribes: they were the writers and teachers of the law (Lk. 6:2).
2. The Pharisees: they were the strict followers of the law (Act. 23:8). □

II. **Mathew 05:19** *Consequences of Disobedience of Law*

A person must do and teach the law in order to be great in the Kingdom of Heaven. Breaking and doing the law carries with it the idea of continuous action. No person is

perfectly obedient all of the time. Every person fails sometime (Rom. 3:23; Jas. 3:2; 1 Jn. 1:8, 10). But any person who continues to break a commandment, even if it is the least commandment, shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. And the person who continues to obey the commandments shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. A person cannot break a commandment and ask forgiveness, then go out and break another commandment and ask forgiveness over and over. Such a person cannot expect God to think he is serious about the commandments of God. No man would think he is serious - why should God? The person only deceives himself. Note two significant points.

1. Three persons teach the law to others.
 - a. The *keeper* and the *breaker* of the law. A person teaches by what he does. Others see and observe and learn from what he does. If a person repeatedly breaks a law, no matter how small a law, he teaches that the law is not important — not worth enough to be kept.
 - b. The *instructor* of the law. This refers to the teachers of the law and of religion. Each instructor either adheres to or rejects the law. Each instructor teaches his students the truth or else deceives his students into following human reasoning. The person who breaks and teaches the breaking of the law attempts to *void the law*, that is, to do away with it. (Rom. 3:31; Mt.15:3; Psa. 119:126; see 89:39) It would seem that an attempt to void the law is much more serious crime than to disobey a commandment. It must also be noted that continuing to disobey a commandment is denying the commandment — treating it as though it is unimportant and unnecessary. It treats the commandment as though it is not even existing and has no bearing upon a person's life. Such behaviour is consciously or unconsciously teaching men to **void the law**.
2. Christ warned all who break and teach others break the law, even if they break only the least commandment: they shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. There are four persons who are severely warned.
 - a. The worldly or carnal: person who continues to break the commandments of God.
 - b. The teacher or instructor: the person who teaches that the commandment of God is a farce. The person who says there is no such thing as God's law, there are only the commandments of men.
 - c. The person who teaches and encourages others to sin and to disobey the commandments of God — even if the commandment is one of the least. Nothing is more contemptible and nothing will be judged more severely. This is one of the most serious offenses among men. (Rom. 2:17-29.)

Luke 17:2 “It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.”

Rom 2:23-24 You who brag about the law, do you dishonour God by breaking the law? As it is written: “God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

Rom 14:15 *If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.*

Gal 1:8-9 *But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!*

- d. The mocker or persecutor: the person who rebels, mocks, and curses God's law and its strictness (and the God and the followers of it).

Mat 7:26-27 *"But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."*

Eph 5:6 *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.*

2 Th 1:7-9 *And give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.*

Heb 2:2-3 *For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.*

Jude 1:14-15 *Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him."*

Thought 1. Four significant facts are seen in this point.

- 1) All the commandments of God are important, but some are less important than others. The man who breaks the least commandment and continues to break it (teaching men such) shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven.
- 2) Breaking a commandment of God and continuing to break it is serious, even if it is one of the least commandments. Such behaviour teaches men that the commandment is not important. The result is that a person shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven.
- 3) When a commandment is broken, a person is to ask forgiveness and repent. He is not to continue breaking the commandment and asking forgiveness over and over. Continuous disobedience teaches that the commandments of God are not

really all that important. It is that person who will be judged severely (1 Cor. 3:10-17; 2 Cor. 5:10.)

- 4) The obedient person can expect great reward.
 - He shall be called great in heaven.
 - He is loved in a special way by both God and Christ (Jn. 14:10, 14).
 - He receives very special manifestations of Christ's presence (Jn. 14:21).

Thought 2. Who fails to do the law? Who breaks the law?

- 1) The person who neglects the law just fails to do it.
- 2) The person who disobeys the law — does what it says not to do.
- 3) The person who does not know the law — cannot do it because he just does not know it.
- 4) The person who narrows the law, that is, limits and weakens the law by making it say less than what it really says. Many make the law apply only to what they want because it allows them to do their own thing and to live as they wish.

Thought 3. A person may neglect the law for several reasons.

- 1) He is deceived about the law's importance. Someone has misled him about its importance.
- 2) He is too preoccupied with worldly affairs to place much importance in the law.
- 3) He is reacting against some strict teaching in his past; therefore, he now neglects the law.
- 4) He has not been taught the seriousness of keeping God's law.
- 5) He fears the restrictions the law will place upon his life and behaviour. He does not want to live as the law says, so he neglects it.

Thought 4. The law of God is often broken for two tragic reasons.

- 1) Some have never heard about God's law. Believers have failed to take the message of the law to the world.
- 2) Some do not have the law impressed upon their minds enough to worry about keeping it. Believers have not stressed the message with enough conviction and power to show its importance.

III. *Mathew 05:20 The Value of Righteousness*

A person must have more righteousness than a religionist to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Note three facts.

1. Righteousness is necessary to enter heaven (Mt. 5:6; Rom. 3:21; 4:5; 4:22; 5:1; 10:6; Gal. 2:16).

Mat 5:20 *“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

Rom 1:18 *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.*

Rom 3:10, 23 *As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one;”.... “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*

2. The religionists, the Pharisees and the Scribes, had some righteousness. They just did not have enough. They were, in fact, strict religionists. They worked at obeying thousands and thousands of rules and regulations, governing everything ranging from dress and social behaviour to ministry and work. However, they lacked the one essential: loving God so much that they would deny themselves and seek their righteousness in His Son, Jesus Christ.

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Rom 10:3-4 *Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*

3. The point is worth thinking: a person must have more righteousness than a strict religionist to enter heaven. Many are religious, but few are strict religionists. What did Christ mean? Who can enter heaven if a strict religionist cannot?

Rom 4:5 *However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.*

Eph 2:8-9 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Titus 3:4-5 *But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.*

Thought 1. There are four facts in this verse that must be heeded. They should stir everyone of us, stir us to search our hearts and make sure we are approaching God as we should.

- 1) Many religionists make the same fatal mistake that the Pharisees and Scribes made. They seek acceptance with God...

- by giving God a formal worship instead of giving God a confession of unworthiness and of their need for Him in a personal way.

- by giving God good works instead of giving God their hearts.
 - by giving God a clean and moral body instead of giving God a confession of needing help spiritually.
 - by giving God only a part of their lives, instead of giving God the total abandonment of themselves. (Lk. 9:23.)
- 2) Many make the fatal mistake the religionists made, but to a lesser degree. They worship and do good...
- to be respectable in the community
 - to seek the acceptance of God
 - to have the fellowship of others
 - because they were forced by their parents to do good
 - to feel comfortable within their own consciences
 - to secure the approval of family and friends
 - because they were taught to do good
- 3) Some feel they must do good to be acceptable to God. Their motive in life is to work and work at doing good in order to secure God's acceptance. They have never learned the truth: they cannot do enough good to be perfectly acceptable to God. They must trust His love — that He loves them so much that He will take their trust and count it as righteousness (Mt. 5:6; Rom. 4:5; 4:22; 5:1).
- 4) Many worship and do just enough good to satisfy their consciences. They do just enough good to make them feel comfortable and acceptable to God. But they miss the whole point. What God is after the only thing that makes a person acceptable to God — is the giving of his total being over to God (day and night).
- in unworthiness and confession: that he has need for God in his life now and forever.
 - in trust and love: that he trusts and loves God because God has given His own Son and promised to accept him in His righteousness.
 - in thankfulness and appreciation: because God has accepted and assured abundant life now and eternally.
 - in adoration and praise: because God is God (Elohim) and has revealed His glorious love in Christ who has redeemed him eternally.
 - in worship and service: because the love of Christ compels him (2 Cor. 5:14). ■