

Briefing Document: Matthew Lesson 63: Christ and the Law

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Executive Summary

The relationship between a believer and the law of God is often misunderstood. This document analyzes the teachings surrounding Matthew 5:19 and the Epistles to clarify that while Christ ended the law's penalty, He did not abolish its moral value. Believers are no longer under the "curse" of the law because Christ paid that debt on the cross. However, the law remains a holy standard that reveals sin and guides moral conduct. By walking in the power of the Holy Spirit rather than human effort, a Christian can fulfill the law's righteous requirements with joy rather than fear.

The End of the Law's Penalty

A central theme in the study of Matthew 5:19 is that Christ marks the end of the law's ability to condemn those who believe. This does not mean the law has vanished, but rather its power to punish the believer has been satisfied.

- **Payment of the Debt:** Because Christ died on the cross, the believer has symbolically died with Him. The law cannot "slay" or kill someone who has already paid the penalty through faith in Christ.
- **Freedom from the Curse:** *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes* (Romans 10:4). This indicates that the believer is no longer under the legal curse of the law.
- **The Role of the Spirit:** Galatians 5:18 states, *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law*. Evidence of being born again is seen when the Holy Spirit moves in a person's life, taking them out from under the penalty of the law and providing the energy to fulfill it.

The Law as a Tutor

The Epistles describe the law's historical and personal role as a "tutor" or "schoolmaster."

- **A Temporary Guide:** *The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ... But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor* (Galatians 3:24-25).
- **The End of Discipline:** The law's job was to point out the need for a Savior. Once a person has faith in Christ, they no longer need the law to "beat them up" because Christ has borne the punishment.
- **Fulfilling the Law:** The moral law is no longer binding as a way to earn salvation, yet it is exalted by the gospel. To save humanity, Christ had to fulfill the entire penalty of the law for every person.

The Illustration of Death and Dominion

Using Romans 7, the text explains the legal limitations of the law through the metaphor of marriage and death.

- **Dominion in Life Only:** *The law has dominion over a man as long as he lives* (Romans 7:1). Just as a deceased person cannot be given a speeding ticket, the law has no power over those who have died to it.
- **The Marriage Analogy:** A woman is bound to her husband by law as long as he lives. If he dies, she is free to marry another without being an adulteress.
- **Dead to the Law:** *Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead* (Romans 7:4). Through Christ's death, believers are delivered from the law's penalty to bear fruit for God.

The Threefold Purpose of the Law

Even though believers are delivered from the law's condemnation, the law serves three vital functions:

1. **It Reveals Sin:** The law acts as a mirror. *I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet"* (Romans 7:7). Like a command that reveals a servant's clumsiness, the law reveals human weakness.
2. **It Provokes Sin:** Because of human nature, a rule often arouses a desire to break it. *But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire* (Romans 7:8). This is compared to a "wet paint" sign that tempts a person to touch the surface.
3. **It Condemns Sin:** When the commandment is understood, the reality of sin becomes clear, leading to a sense of spiritual death and a need for mercy.

The Believer's Delight in the Law

The document concludes that the law itself is not the problem; human nature is the problem. The law is described as *holy, and the commandment holy and just and good* (Romans 7:12).

- **Internal Desire:** A believer should delight in the law of God in the "inward man," even while struggling with the "law of sin" in their physical members.
- **The Solution in Christ:** The struggle of the "wretched man" is solved in Romans 8:4, which states that *the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*.
- **The Preeminence of the Law:** The law is described as preeminent, permanent, and pertinent. Christians are encouraged to be obedient and not to break even the least of the commandments, as a response to what Christ has done for them.