

An Exegetical and Theological  
Examination of Matthew 5:17-20

By

Marc A. Clauson

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in Biblical Studies  
Liberty University

May 1993

## Dedicatio

Hic opus dedicatur meis parentibus et meis avibus quibus matutinus  
in meae vitae instillebant caritatem Dei et ecclesii et mei fideli  
uxori cui hortatur me in caritati et bonis operibus et primus Dei  
gloriae Patri, Dei filii et Dei Sancti Spiriti, quibus vivamus,  
movemus et habemus vitam

## ABSTRACT

Recent polemics relating to the use and validity of the Mosaic Law make a reexamination of some of the key Biblical passages imperative as well as a rethinking of the basic framework by which the issue of the Law is discussed. Matthew 5:17-20 is a passage often used by all sides in the Law debate and is here analyzed as to its relevance to the Law issue. This pericope is Jesus' programmatic statement about his mission with respect to the Law. The passage clearly states that the Law is not abolished and this truism serves as the broadest interpretational framework for this thesis. However it is not as clear what Jesus' precise positive mission was with regard to the Law, as indicated by the often debated term *plērōsai*.

This thesis begins by framing the issues at the heart of the Law controversy and then examines the basic historical development of those issues in the history of Christian thought. Then an overall interpretational framework is posited and developed utilizing the concepts of the overlapping and simultaneous aspects of the present and future Kingdom of God - the "now and the not yet". Because the Old Age continues in certain of its aspects but the New Age in Christ has also broken in, the Mosaic Law also must be thought of in a transformed sense, remaining valid but undergoing a change in its use or jurisdiction and in some cases becoming irrelevant. The whole Law undergoes this change and continues in this transformed state until the final consummation of God's Kingdom.

Following the groundwork an exegetical process is begun, including examination of the grammar and syntax of Matthew 5:17-20, the various contexts, historical and cultural, and the surrounding cotexts of the pericope. Also included is a brief analysis of the treatment of and attitude toward the Law by the various New Testament writers. The resultant interpretation of the passage is consistent with the overall interpretational framework, that is, that the Law has not been abolished and continues to serve a useful function in the church, the believer, and the world, but in a transformed sense. The Law of Moses must remain a valid expression of God's will and cannot be thought of as imperfect. But because of the fundamental salvation-historical changes, the Law also undergoes changes in its jurisdiction, uses, and applicability to specific situations. For the Law to be fulfilled means to be transformed. The essential kernel remains though the culturally-specific shell becomes irrelevant and non-applicable in certain situations, although, since none of the Law is abolished it may (permissive, not mandatory) be used so long as its use does not attempt to mediate the salvation of men in any way.

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## ABSTRACT

Recent polemics relating to the use and validity of the Mosaic Law make a reexamination of some of the key Biblical passages imperative as well as a rethinking of the basic framework by which the issue of the Law is discussed. Matthew 5:17-20 is a passage often used by all sides in the Law debate and is here analyzed as to its relevance to the Law issue. This pericope is Jesus' programmatic statement about his mission with respect to the Law. The passage clearly states that the Law is not abolished and this truism serves as the broadest interpretational framework for this thesis. However it is not as clear what Jesus' precise positive mission was with regard to the Law, as indicated by the often debated term *πληρωσαι*.

This thesis begins by framing the issues at the heart of the Law controversy and then examines the basic historical development of those issues in the history of Christian thought. Then an overall interpretational framework is posited and developed utilizing the concepts of the overlapping and simultaneous aspects of the present and future Kingdom of God - the "now and the not yet". Because the Old Age continues in certain of its aspects but the New Age in Christ has also broken in, the Mosaic Law also must be thought of in a transformed sense, remaining valid but undergoing a change in its use or jurisdiction and in some cases becoming irrelevant. The whole Law undergoes this change and continues in this transformed state until the final consummation of God's Kingdom.

Following the groundwork an exegetical process is begun, including examination of the grammar and syntax of Matthew 5:17-20, the various contexts, historical and cultural, and the surrounding cotexts of the pericope. Also included is a brief analysis of the treatment of and attitude toward the Law by the various New Testament writers. The resultant interpretation of the passage is consistent with the overall interpretational framework, that is, that the Law has not been abolished and continues to serve a useful function in the church, the believer, and the world, but in a transformed sense. The Law of Moses must remain a valid expression of God's will and cannot be thought of as imperfect. But because of the fundamental salvation-historical changes, the Law also undergoes changes in its jurisdiction, uses, and applicability to specific situations. For the Law to be fulfilled means to be transformed. The essential kernel remains though the culturally-specific shell becomes irrelevant and non-applicable in certain situations, although, since none of the Law is abolished it may (permissive, not mandatory) be used so long as its use does not attempt to mediate the salvation of men in any way.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

In Matthew 5:17-20 Jesus made the intriguing statement that he had not come to abolish the Mosaic Law. In fact, he said he had come to fulfill the Law (5:17) and that it would continue valid until heaven and earth passed away (5:18). Furthermore Jesus issued a stern warning against those who would teach otherwise (5:19). This pericope is quite Jewish and seemingly contradictory of the rest of the New Testament, so much so that some scholars do not even believe these to be Jesus' authentic words. Rather the pericope is seen as Matthew's theological insertion to appease his Jewish community.<sup>1</sup> What is one to make of this unusual passage? How is one to interpret Matthew 5:17-20 consistent with the remainder of the New Testament and with Jesus' other sayings?

The aim of this thesis is to examine Matthew 5:17-20 in its cultural, historical, grammatical, and theological contexts, and to interpret the pericope accurately. The primary goal, therefore, is exegesis, not theological reflection on the Mosaic Law or its application in modern Christian ethics. Nevertheless, the conclusion of the thesis will necessarily and legitimately discuss theological implications, laying a foundation for further inquiry.

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<sup>1</sup>This would be the position of radical redaction critics.

Since this thesis is primarily exegetical, one would not be able to adopt an a priori conclusion about the results of the research undertaken. However it is possible to make some preliminary comments about parameters for the study as well as about the theoretical framework and the methodology.

#### A. Methodological Consideration

Regarding parameters of the study, this thesis will not go beyond the plain words and meaning of the pericope in question. If Jesus said he did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets (Mt. 5:17), then we must take this as "true." It was not Jesus' intention to abolish the Mosaic Law. But one cannot be sure at this point what is meant by νόμος. Is it the whole Mosaic Law of the Old Testament, only the "moral aspect" of that Law, or something else? This question may be answered if we are able to determine the intent of Jesus through his use of the term πληρῶσαι, itself a difficult term to interpret. Within the broad assertion that Jesus did not intend to abolish the Law, one cannot be so sure what has "happened" to the Law. Nevertheless, the continuing validity of the Law in some sense will be assumed as a parameter.

The theoretical or conceptual framework of this study, as set forth in Chapter 3, has to do with the idea of the Kingdom of God or of Heaven and its relationship to the Old



and New (Messianic) Ages. This methodology, once developed, will make certain assumptions about the simultaneous present and future aspects of the reign of God.<sup>2</sup> These assumptions in turn will become the basis for interpreting Matthew 5:17-20.

It will be argued that in the person of Jesus, the Kingdom and therefore the New or Messianic Age, is present. Nevertheless, the Kingdom is also future since the Parousia has not occurred. Therefore the Old Age is also present and has not yet passed away. This event creates an "overlap" between the Old and New Ages, which continues until the Parousia.<sup>3</sup> As we shall see, this theory of the overlap of the Present (Old) Age and the Coming (New) Age in the life of Jesus was developed precisely in order to explain both statements to the effect that the kingdom in some sense is present as well as future and to explain certain events in the synoptic Gospels (e.g. the overcoming of Satan while Satan yet retains authority).

The implication of this framework for this thesis is quite significant. If the concept of the "now and not yet" is valid, then it will help to explain the apparent inconsistency between Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:17-20

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<sup>2</sup>See Chapter 3 generally and specifically footnotes 1, 2, and 10.

<sup>3</sup>See the seminal work by Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964. esp. pp. 81-84. See also W.G. Kummel, Promise and Fulfillment. Naperville: Allenson, 1957.

and other statements which seem to indicate that the Law is no longer valid.<sup>4</sup> The future-present idea will also aid in interpreting Matthew 5:17-20.

Turning to methodology, as stated earlier, this thesis is primarily exegetical. A proper exegesis does not consist of merely determining word meanings in abstract and then putting the words together to find the meaning of the pericope in question. One must begin with a study of the cultural and historical background of the pericope, in order to place it in the proper social setting. This portion of the analysis will involve a study of Judaism in the First Century A.D., particularly the religious aspects of late Judaism. Another requirement for a proper exegesis is to place the pericope at issue into its broader setting in the New Testament. Here we will compare other passages in the New Testament which deal with the Mosaic Law, with Matthew 5:17-20. One must also view the pericope within the context of the Gospel of Matthew as a whole. The overall aims and theology of Matthew will contribute to an understanding of our own pericope. It is also important to examine the context immediately preceding and following Matthew 5:17-20, that is, the Sermon on the Mount. Finally, the thesis will examine the grammar and syntax of Matthew 5:17-20. Word studies in context will be valuable for interpretation.

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<sup>4</sup>Besides Jesus' statements and incidents in the Synoptics, we may also include Paul's letters, which appear to be strongly anti-Law.

Nevertheless, the key is context. Apart from context, which will already be established from broad to narrow, grammatical or lexicographical studies will be of little value to interpret Matthew 5:17-20.

#### B. Theories of Meaning of Matthew 5:17-20

Theories about the meaning of Matthew 5:17-20 are nearly as numerous as the scholars who have propounded them. Furious debate has at times raged around the interpretation of this pericope, with the debate centered upon Jesus' attitude to the Mosaic Law. This debate has in turn engendered further dialogue concerning the validity of the Mosaic Law in the Messianic Age, with the coming of Jesus. Matthew 5:17-20 and the following antitheses of Matthew 5:21-48 have become the center of much attention in New Testament ethics. What is the ethical standard of the New Testament and to what extent is that standard binding upon the Christian community or upon the political community?

Since the late 19th century, the debate over the continuing validity of the Mosaic Law has distilled into three distinct strains of thought. The first school arose out of the 19th century liberal tradition seeking the "historical Jesus" in the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>5</sup> In addition

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<sup>5</sup>See e.g. Albert Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus. New York: MacMillan, 1920. German original, 1906 and Rudolph Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951-1955.

this school of thought has been influenced by the so-called religionsgeschichte schule, also of the late 19th century, which attempted to interpret Christianity in terms of its religious background, both Hellenistic and Jewish.<sup>6</sup> The Biblical studies program which evolved from these earlier schools utilizes source and redaction criticism as its methodology and attempts to relate the New Testament to its contemporary cultural and religious Jewish and Hellenistic setting.

Representative scholars of this tradition include B.H. Branscomb, Robert Banks, F. P. Sanders, W.D. Davies, J.D.G. Dunn, and John P. Meier.<sup>7</sup> In mentioning these names, we are not necessarily saying that these scholars have followed every tenet of the liberal tradition of Biblical studies. They do nevertheless, exhibit characteristics and tendencies of the earlier traditions.

It should also be noted that there appears to be little consensus of opinion among these scholars regarding the continuing validity of the Mosaic Law in ethics or its precise use. Their aim has generally been to place Jesus

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<sup>6</sup>See e.g. Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup>B.H. Branscomb, Jesus and the Law of Moses. New York: Smith, 1930; Robert Banks, Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition. Cambridge: University Press, 1975; E.P. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985; W.D. Davies, Torah in the Messianic Age and For the Age to Come. Philadelphia: SBL, 1952; J.D.G. Dunn, Jesus, Paul, and the Law. Louisville: Knox, 1990; and John P. Meier, Law and History in Matthew's Gospel. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1976. Many others could be cited in addition.

and his teaching and the Gospel writers' particular theological agendas in their proper cultural and thought world. This approach has tended to atomize the New Testament in its emphasis on the various communities and in its emphasis on the editorial activity of the respective writers . Hence, divergent and even contradictory views of the Mosaic Law result.<sup>8</sup>

A second strain has come from the Reformed tradition arising from the Swiss and English Reformations.<sup>9</sup> More recently, especially since the appearance of Gregory L. Bahnsen's Theonomy in Christian Ethics,<sup>10</sup> attention has again concentrated upon the Mosaic Law in connection with the Theonomic movement.

Theonomist writers, mainly from confessional Reformed backgrounds, take as their starting point the Calvinistic and Puritan view of the Mosaic Code in its ceremonial, moral, and civil aspects. These writers have focused mainly on the civil aspect, calling for a civil code based on the Old Testament. They have also asserted that the moral aspect of the Mosaic Law is binding upon the church and that both Jesus and Paul fully affirmed the continuing validity

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<sup>8</sup>This is true despite the commitment of such scholars to minimize presuppositional bias.

<sup>9</sup>See e.g. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1559, ed by John T. McNeill, trans by Ford Lewis Battle. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960. See also numerous Puritan writers and The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), Ch. XIX.

<sup>10</sup>Theonomy in Christian Ethics, Nuttley, N.J.: Craig, 1977.

of the moral and civil aspects of the Law. The Theonomic view differs from mainstream biblical scholarship mentioned above in that the Theonomist divides the Law into its triplex usus while New Testament scholars deny that such an arbitrary division existed in the contemporary Judaism of Jesus' day.<sup>11</sup>

A third tradition, historically arose first in the Pietist, Anabaptist and Antinomian groups of the 16th or 17th centuries and later in the classical dispensationalist theology developed by J.N. Darby (Plymouth Brethren) and advanced by Lewis Sperry Chafer.

These sects of the so called Radical Reformation and the later "Third Reformation" were not completely coherent theologically, but they tended to view the Mosaic Law in roughly the same way. For them, the "Third Use" (tertius usus) of the Law was deemphasized or rejected. Some Antinomians also rejected the second use to drive unbelievers to repentance.

Classical dispensationalism contrasted Law and grace in such a way that the Law was said to be "done away" in this current dispensation of grace.<sup>12</sup> The Law of Moses "is not intended to be the rule of the believer's life under grace.

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<sup>11</sup>But see W.D. Davies, Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come, who believes that Judaism was not unanimous regarding the unity of the Mosaic Law.

<sup>12</sup>See Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology, 8 Vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), vol. 4, p. 234.

Yet, on the other hand, the abiding principles of the law which are adaptable to grace, are carried forward and restated under the teaching of grace, not as law . . ."<sup>13</sup> More specifically, Matthew 5:17-20 is interpreted in such a way that Jesus' fulfillment of the Law related to his personal obedience, typological fulfillment, and redemption required by the Law. The believer is given righteousness from God which exceeds the Law's demands. The Mosaic Law itself has no direct force for the individual, Spirit-directed Christian.<sup>14</sup>

Toward the end of the 20th century the more radical de-emphasis of the Law has been moderated, allowing for a greater continuity between the Old and New covenants.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the issue today in moderating circles is the degree of continuity between the Old and New Testaments. A greater place is seen for the Mosaic Law in such a system, though not as great as that of the theonomists.

There are of course, variations of each of these three main traditions. For example, some Reformed writers fear the Theonomic view as being theocratic. The Mosaic Law is,

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., vol. 4, p. 243.

<sup>14</sup>This is not to call these groups antinomian in a pejorative sense, but to call attention to their de-emphasis on the Mosaic Law with regard to some of its uses.

<sup>15</sup>See e.g. John S. Feinberg, ed., Continuity and Discontinuity. Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988.

in part, preserved, but transformed and reshaped by Jesus in a cultural context.<sup>16</sup>

The issue for each view discussed distills to the degree of continuity between the Old Testament (the pre-Messianic era) and the New Testament (Messianic Age). Each of the schools of thought surveyed above appeals to one degree or another to Matthew 5:17-20 for support, though other passages are also relied upon. Obviously, there has been significant disagreement over the meaning of this pericope. The problem seems to be how to reconcile the Jewishness of the pericope with other apparently contradictory statements on the Law by Jesus, Paul and other New Testament writers. If one wishes to take the Scriptures seriously without denying the inerrancy of Scripture, then one is forced to face Matthew 5:17-20 squarely and to approach the pericope honestly.

Which of the schools of thought mentioned earlier corresponds most closely to Biblical data? In part the answer depends on one's interpretation of passages like Matthew 5:17-20. In fact, this pericope is crucial in attempting to determine the role of the Mosaic Law, if any, for today. This thesis will attempt to show, by an accurate

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<sup>16</sup>See W. Robert Godfrey, ed., Theonomy: A Reformed Critique. Grand Rapids: Academie, 1990 and Knox Chamblin, "The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ," in Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments, ed. by John S. Feinberg. Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988. pp. 181-202.



interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20, that the Mosaic Law does in fact have a part in informing Christian ethics. We will begin by surveying the history of interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20, and of the conception of the Mosaic Law. Next, we will lay an exegetical foundation by examining the text of Matthew 5:17-20 itself, the cotext of the pericope, that is, surrounding text, and finally, the context, the cultural, historical, and religious background of the text. With this foundation we will proceed to the interpretation of the text itself to determine its meaning.

When one attempts to ascertain meaning, problems arise because of the time gap between the writing and the modern interpreter. In turn this is an issue concerning human communication.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly in attempts to determine the meaning of Matthew 5:17-20, we will consider three aspects of meaning: (1) author's meaning; (2) receptor's meaning or perceived meaning (by the audience at the time the discourse was spoken or written); and (3) textual meaning or objective meaning.<sup>18</sup> Included in this determination of meaning, as already mentioned, is the concept of the inauguration of the Messianic Age and its impact upon the Mosaic Law. We will

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<sup>17</sup>See Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation. Downer's Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1989, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup>See Ibid., pp. 39 ff. There is only a formal distinction between author's meaning and the objective meaning of the text. In an inerrant text, and especially in the words of Jesus regarding a didactic genre, there is, of necessity, no real difference.

show that the idea of the "now and not yet," connected to the arrival of the Kingdom of God in Christ (and therefore the beginning of the Messianic Age) has a profound effect on the character and use of the Mosaic Law.

Chapter 2: History of the Interpretation  
of Matthew 5:17-20 and of the  
Place of the Mosaic Law

Because of the pivotal role it plays in discussions concerning the continuing validity of the Mosaic Law, Matthew 5:17-20 has had a long history of interpretation, from the early church to the 20th century. The aim of this chapter is to survey that history and in the process, to survey the historical attitudes toward the Mosaic Law generally. The chapter will be broadly divided into three sections: (1) the Patristic and Medieval period; (2) the Reformation and post-Reformation period (including the 17th century); and (3) the Modern period, from the 17th century through the late 20th century. In each of these periods major representative writers as well as various important groups will be examined with regard to their use of Matthew 5:17-20 and the Sermon on the Mount and with regard to their view of the Mosaic Law. This is not, however, an exhaustive survey.

Soon after the New Testament Gospels and letters were written, debates arose concerning the role and validity of the Mosaic Law. Such debates occurred, if for no other reason, because the Christian community accepted the Old Testament books early on, along with their halakic or legal portions. In addition, the early church was initially made up mostly of former Jews who brought with them their

devotion to Torah. As time passed however, the church came to be dominated by Gentile converts from pagan backgrounds who cared little for the traditions of Judaism. These converts naturally had greater affinities to the New Testament writings which at points raised questions about the use of the Mosaic Law.

In the Apostolic Fathers we find no systematic treatment of Matthew 5:17-20 and only a vague, partial reference to Matthew 5:19 in Ignatius' Epistle to the Ephesians.<sup>1</sup> This does not mean the Apostolic Fathers were indifferent to the subject of the Mosaic Law. In the Epistle of Barnabas, for example, the author tells us that Jesus has abolished ceremonial commandments such as sacrifices and Sabbath-keeping. (Ep Barn 2.6)<sup>2</sup> In Christ the Old Testament ceremonial commands are fulfilled. In the Didachē, especially parts 2, 3, and 5 one sees numerous ethical exhortations to a church along with mention of various vices such as murder, adultery, sexual promiscuity, theft, magic, sorcery, covetousness, perjury, fornication, idolatry, and astrology.<sup>3</sup> All of the prohibitions related to these vices are found in the Pentateuch. The author

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<sup>1</sup>Chapter XV, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. of 1885 ed., 1975), p. 55.

<sup>2</sup>The reference is to the edition of J.B. Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer, The Apostolic Fathers, 2nd ed, edited and revised by Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990).

<sup>3</sup>See Holmes ed., *Ibid.*, pp. 150-152.

seems to accept the precepts of the Mosaic Law in the ethical-moral realm.<sup>4</sup>

Most interesting for this thesis is the view of Marcion (d.c. 154), who apparently wished to eliminate Matthew 5:17 entirely from his scheme, consistent with his program to excise the Old Testament God.<sup>5</sup> Later Marcionites inverted the order of the clauses in 5:17 to give the verse an

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<sup>4</sup>Mention should also be made of various heretical sects of this period and overlapping with the Apologetic Period. These heresies included Docetism, Ebionitism, the Nazarenes, the Elkasaites, proto-Gnosticism, Marcionitism, and the Cerinthians. (See Karl Baus, History of the Church: From the Apostolic Community to Constantine. New York: Seabury, 1980, pp. 153-158 and A.F.J. Klijn and G.J. Reinink, Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973.) One can divide these sects, by their treatment of the Mosaic Law, into three categories: (1) those which radically adhered to the Mosaic Law (e.g. the Nazarenes), particularly ritual commandments; (2) those which radically abrogated the Mosaic Law (e.g. Marcionites); and (3) those which stratified or divided the Mosaic Law (e.g. some Gnostic groups) into three classes of commands, some of which were completed (fulfilled) by the Savior, others which were destroyed (abrogated), and finally some of which were translated (reinterpreted) from literal to spiritual principles. (See Jaroslav Pelikan, The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine. Chicago: University Press, 1971. Vol. 1, pp. 16-17, 93, who makes this argument of the Gnostics.) It is interesting to note that the orthodox church of this period accepted none of these unusual views of the Law, though at points it agreed, for example, regarding the status of the ceremonial commandments, with a few of the sects. (We should also note, however, that most of these sects - excepting the Nazarenes - showed little regard for moral precepts.)

<sup>5</sup>See Tertullian, Adversus Marcionem, IV.7.4, IV.9.15, ed. and trans by Ernest Evans. Oxford: Clarendon, 1972, who states that Marcion excised Mt. 5:17.

opposite sense: οὐκ ἤλθον πληρῶσαι τὸν νόμον, ἀλλὰ καταλύσαι.<sup>6</sup>

Opposed to Marcion were men such as Tertullian and Irenaeus, who also wrote on the Mosaic Law, but at a somewhat later date.<sup>7</sup> Tertullian cites, Matthew 5:17 several times to refute Marcion's view. The unity of the two Testaments is affirmed by Tertullian and he also speaks of a "peace that exists of the Law and the gospel."<sup>8</sup> The Law itself is considered good. The church moreover had need of ceremonial regulations, which it found in the Old Testament ceremonial commandments. With respect to the Sabbath for example, Tertullian suggests that Christ fulfilled the Law by explaining the circumstances which condition the Sabbath.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Tertullian asserts that Jesus "in his own person" fulfilled the Law and the Prophets.<sup>10</sup> The most complete statement made by Tertullian on Mt. 5:17 and the Law is found in Book IV (36.6) of his Adversus Marcionem. In response to Marcion, he argues that Christ did not rescind the "former commandments" (not to

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<sup>6</sup>Adamantius 2.15, quoted in E.C. Blackman, Marcion and His Influence. London: SPCK, 1948, quoted from the edition by Bakhuyzen, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller. n.d.

<sup>7</sup>Tertullian, Adversus Marcionem, c. 207-208; Irenaeus, Against Heresies, c. 182-188.

<sup>8</sup>Adversus Marcionem, 1.19.5.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., IV.12.14.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., IV.22.11.

kill, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness) but retained them and added what was lacking.<sup>11</sup>

Irenaeus argued that the "word of the Decalogue" had been extended and amplified, but not cancelled by Christ's coming.<sup>12</sup> A natural law had been "implanted in mankind . . . by means of the Decalogue (which if anyone does not observe, he has no salvation)."<sup>13</sup> The Decalogue was not cancelled by Christ; the Antitheses (Mt. 5:21-48) do not, to Irenaeus, imply "opposition to and an overturning of the precepts of the past . . . but they exhibit a fulfilling and an extension of them" in the sense that the Old (Mosaic) Law is now a sub-set of the New, broader, Law explained by Jesus.<sup>14</sup> The disciples were never commanded to do anything prohibited by the Law.<sup>15</sup> For Irenaeus, the ceremonial commandments were added as a pedagogic device to preserve the Jewish people from idolatry, but they were also a type of the future pointing to Christ.<sup>16</sup> As a proof that the Law is good and its "natural" kernel remains valid, Irenaeus

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., IV.36.6.

<sup>12</sup>Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 4.13.1

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 4.15.1

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 4.13.1-2.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 4.13.1-2

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 4.12.4

cites, without much commentary, Matthew 5:17-18, in the context of a fulfillment motif.<sup>17</sup>

Justin Martyr (d.165) is another important early writer who tells us something about the Mosaic Law in the early church. Justin in his Dialogue with Trypho devoted major attention to the Law, though there is no direct citation or use of Matthew 5:17-19.<sup>18</sup> The various ceremonial regulations of the Old Testament were types pointing to Christ.<sup>19</sup> In fact, when Justin uses the term "Law" he almost always means the ritual law. Justin also distinguishes an ethical part of the Law, expressing universal, binding principles, but not exhausting all universal principles (a form of natural law).<sup>20</sup> Finally, Justin distinguishes commandments that were historically conditioned and are no longer valid.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, however, the Law contributes nothing to righteousness.<sup>22</sup>

A representative of the Alexandrian school was Origen (185-255), who was known for his allegorizing exegetical hermeneutic. Among his other works, Origen wrote a

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 4.34.2

<sup>18</sup>In the Dialogue, he does mention Mt. 5:20 at Ch. CV, but without comment.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., ch XL-XLII; this is the predictive or prophetic element of the Law.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., ch XCIII.

<sup>21</sup>See Ibid., XLVII.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., XLVII.



Commentary on Matthew which unfortunately has not survived intact, missing the section on the Sermon on the Mount. Origen's thought on the Law is influenced by his allegorical method. The Law has a literal meaning but also a higher, spiritual meaning. For example, the ceremonial commandments were types or shadows of the ultimate spiritual reality, Christ.<sup>23</sup> In particular, Origen focuses on the Sabbath and dietary laws. The Jews interpreted the Law literally, while the Christians to Origen interpret it spiritually, but do not nullify it. There is no New Law but only a spiritualization of the Mosaic Law.

Origen also defines a natural law which embodies transcendent truth and remains valid for all men. This law is partly expressed in portions of the Mosaic Law, in the moral-ethical commands. Therefore, the timeless parts of the Law are taken up into Jesus' new teaching, while the ceremonial commandments disappear since they are culturally bound types.<sup>24</sup> Augustine is a pivotal figure in church history. Therefore, it is important to consider his use of the Mosaic Law generally and Matthew 5:17-20 more specifically. Augustine wrote a commentary on Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount in which he specifically discusses Matthew 5:17-20. Before examining this work, however, it is

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<sup>23</sup>See De Principiis, Bk IV.24 in Roberts and Donaldson, eds. The Ante-Nicene Fathers, op cit, VCL IV, p. 375; and Against Celsus, Bk VII, Ch. XXII-XXV (pp. 618-621)

<sup>24</sup>See Against Celsus, Bk VII, Ch. XXV.

useful to remember that in his exegesis Augustine did have a tendency to use an allegorical method, similar to Origen's. When Augustine addresses 5:17 in his Sermon, he begins by stating that, "In this sentence the meaning is twofold."<sup>25</sup> Jesus meant either that he came to add "What is wanting" or to "do what is in it [the Law]."<sup>26</sup> If the first meaning is accepted, the idea is that Jesus did not destroy the Law but "confirms it by perfecting it."<sup>27</sup> Augustine goes on to bring out the meaning of vv. 18-19, consistent with 5:17. The overall sense of Augustine's interpretation is that the Law is fulfilled by perfecting it. Perfection implies addition to the Mosaic Law. For example, Augustine states that a

least commandment . . . is not to kill; whosoever shall break that, shall be called least in the Kingdom . . . ; but whosoever shall fulfill that commandment not to kill . . . ascends a certain step. He will be perfected . . . if he be not angry without a cause.<sup>28</sup>

Here we encounter Augustine's allegorical method at work when he not only defines Jesus' relation to the Law in "adding" to it to perfect it, but also "spiritualizes" the Law and applies the internal principle to the individual so as to place him on a higher spiritual plane. Nevertheless,

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<sup>25</sup>Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, 1.8.20.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 1.8.20

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 1.9.21.

the letter of the Law is still good though it produces a lesser rank in the kingdom.

Augustine also conceives of a natural law which antedates the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law only makes this natural law more explicit. Hence Augustine accepts as still valid the moral precepts of the Law.<sup>29</sup> The ceremonial commandments, however are not valid after Christ's coming since they were typical of Christ.<sup>30</sup>

Augustine also related the Mosaic Law to the civil realm.<sup>31</sup> He first distinguished among sins against nature, sins against custom, and sins against the laws.<sup>32</sup> Sins against nature violated God's unchanging (moral) laws, which Augustine also calls God's "eternal law."<sup>33</sup> An example of this type of sin is Jacob's plurality of wives, whereby he "used the women not for sensual gratification, but for the procreation of children."<sup>34</sup> There is therefore a sin regardless of motive, since the action violates God's eternal law.

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<sup>29</sup>See Contra Faustus, 6.2, 15.7.

<sup>30</sup>But Augustine would allow a Christian to live by ceremonial precepts as long as it was understood that they could not mediate salvation. See Ibid., 6.2.

<sup>31</sup>See Herbert Deane, The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine. New York: Columbia, 1963, pp. 85 ff.

<sup>32</sup>Contra Faustus, 22.47.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 22.28.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 22.47.

On the other hand, customs and laws may differ from time to time and place to place. These laws are binding only on those who live in a given jurisdiction at a given time, but God's eternal law is "supra-jurisdictional" and timeless and offenses against this natural law may always be punished.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, the Law is required for those who have not benefited from grace while it is not required (that is, the "letter") for the one who delights in righteousness, though it is still good.<sup>36</sup>

There is no essential disagreement between the Medieval view of the Mosaic Law and that of the orthodox Church Fathers. This assertion is borne out when one examines the Medieval treatment of Matthew 5:17-20. The major figure of this period is Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) whose thinking has significantly influenced later Catholicism.

Aquinas' "Treatise on Law" comprises Questions 90-108 of his Summa Theologica (Pt. 2.1). In Questions 107-108 of

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<sup>35</sup>See Deane, *Supra*, note (33), pp. 88-89.

<sup>36</sup>See Contra Faustus, 15.8. Augustine's polemical opponent Pelagius, because of his particular view of man and sin, gave to the Mosaic Law a central place. The Law was given as a means of grace to set before man the standard to which he must conform. One must fulfill the whole Law by strenuous acts of the will. Pelagius gives chief place to the moral aspects of the Law, giving only temporary or secondary value to ceremonial requirements. In fact, it seems that Pelagius rejected the ceremonial aspects altogether with Christ's coming, though they were useful in their time. See Robert F. Evans, Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals, New York: Seabury Press, 1968, pp. 99-100, and Reinhold Seeberg, Textbook of the History of Doctrines, trans. by Charles E. Hay, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1895 repr. 1961, vol. 1, pp. 337-338.

this section Aquinas deals with the Sermon on the Mount, including Matthew 5:17, where he comments on Christ fulfilling the Law. Aquinas writes, "Now Christ fulfilled the precepts of the Old Law both in his works [by obeying the Mosaic Law] and in his doctrine."<sup>37</sup> Christ fulfilled the Law in his doctrine in three ways: (1) by explaining the true sense of the Law (clarification - See Mt. 5:21); (2) by "prescribing the safest way of complying with the statutes of the Old Law,"<sup>38</sup> a sort of "hedge" principle; and (3) by adding "counsels of perfection," precepts which extend beyond bare salvation to a higher spirituality or perfection.<sup>39</sup> Hence the Old, Mosaic Law is fulfilled by a New Law which supplies what is lacking in the Mosaic Law. Aquinas also called the Mosaic Law a shadow or figure of the New Law, implying at least an incompleteness in the Old Law.<sup>40</sup>

Another representative of the Medieval theology, in this case, late Medieval Nominalism, was Gabriel Biel, who, it is said, influenced Luther indirectly. Biel (1410 - 1495) generally followed the Nominalism of Occam. His views on the Mosaic Law are interesting because of his probable

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<sup>37</sup>Summa Theologica, Pt 2.1, Questions 107, art. 2.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., "Counsels of perfection" obtain more merit, beyond that necessary for salvation.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 2.1, Question 107.

influence on Luther's thought. According to Biel the "moral hierarchy" consists first of all of what he calls voluntas dei (the will of God) or, equally, lex aeterna (the eternal law).<sup>41</sup> Parallel to this structure is a second, one of whose components is natural law and its natural manifestation, including Scripture.<sup>42</sup> Included as a part of Scripture of course is the Mosaic Law, or, as Biel terms it, the "Old Law".

Biel views the Mosaic Law as imperfect in that Moses' law required exterior acts and ceremonies.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, this imperfection was not one of the law as such but of the way it was used. With the coming of Christ, the so-called Law of Christ is now the fulfillment of the Law of Moses since it implies interiorization of righteousness.<sup>44</sup>

In Biel's academic works one sees that for him, consistent with the Medieval tradition, the ceremonial and judicial laws have been abrogated while the moral law, with the Decalogue as its core, remains and is approved by Christ.<sup>45</sup> Hence believers are not redeemed from the

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<sup>41</sup>See Heiko Oberman, The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism. Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1983, p. 108.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Biel, Sermones dominicales de tempore. Hagenau, 1510, quoted in Oberman, Ibid, p. 112.

<sup>44</sup>Oberman, p. 113.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

servitude to the Law. Rather Christ has fulfilled and perfected that Law in order that he should be imitated.<sup>46</sup>

A. Reformation and Post-Reformation Period  
(through the 17th Century)

1. Magisterial and Radical Reformation

In this period we will consider the views of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, the Anabaptists, and Melancthon, as well as the more developed systems of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) and the Puritan writers. It was during this period that the debates and controversies over the Mosaic Law set the stage for much of the later discussion about the Law in Reformed traditions.

Turning first to Luther, one may see his interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20 by examining his Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>47</sup> In his analysis of 5:17, Luther states that Christ had come "for the very purpose of correcting and confirming the teaching of the Law."<sup>48</sup> Luther states his case even more clearly by "paraphrasing" 5:17: "'I do not intend to bring another law or a new law, but to take the very Scriptures which you [the Jews] have, and to emphasize

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<sup>46</sup>See *Ibid*, p. 118, where Oberman indicates that, to Biel, Christ has given his spirit to establish new ceremonial and judicial laws.

<sup>47</sup>See Luther's Works, vol. 21, ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan. St. Louis: Concordia, 1956, hereafter designated LW.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 67.

them, dealing with them in such a way as to teach you how to behave.'"<sup>49</sup> Jesus came to properly expound the Law.

Luther goes on to use Augustine's two-fold interpretation of the term "fulfill," the first meaning being "to supplement deficiencies" and the second, "to carry out its [the Law's] content in works and in life."<sup>50</sup> No one can improve upon the Law as it stands by itself, however, so Luther rejects the first meaning. But the "real kernel" of the Law as opposed to its distortions must be taught. Furthermore, in opposition to the papists Luther asserts that the Law consists of "necessary commandments" which will not pass away before heaven and earth (5:18).<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, one cannot be justified by the Law, nor can one live as a Christian under Law.

Although Luther at one point upholds the "goodness" of the Law, he asserts in another place that "everyone ought to know that "Moses and his law have been abrogated by Christ and are not binding on us Christians."<sup>52</sup> Is Luther contradicting himself?<sup>53</sup> What is the role of the Mosaic Law in Luther? The problem in answering these questions may

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>52</sup>LW, vol. 46, The Christian in Society, III, p. 145.

<sup>53</sup>One might argue that he was and that he was not concerned about it in his polemics.



stem from the "dialectic tension" in Luther's thought between Law and Gospel, and from polemics with various opponents<sup>54</sup>

In his How Christians Should Regard Moses (1525) Luther states that the Mosaic Law does not bind Gentiles, but the Jews only.<sup>55</sup> Further, the Mosaic Law cannot be regarded as valid unless it agrees with the New Testament and what Luther calls "natural law."<sup>56</sup> If one keeps some part of the Mosaic Law it is because it has been implanted in man by nature and the Mosaic Law agrees with nature at that point.<sup>57</sup> The Mosaic Law is apparently only a partial restatement of the natural law, which is comprehended in the concepts of worship of God and love of neighbor.<sup>58</sup> Luther also speaks of a law of nature (naturliches Recht) which he defines as the sum total of naturally developing rules of social and community life.<sup>59</sup> This law of nature seems to be for Luther the basis for civil law, though in part it is also reflected in the Decalogue.

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<sup>54</sup>See Heinrich Bornkamm, Luther and the Old Testament, trans. by Eric W. and Ruth C. Gritsch. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969, pp. 121 ff. In fact, Luther often reflects a certain dualism in his thought. See Edward A. Dowey, "Law in Luther and Calvin," Theology Today 41 (1984-85), pp. 146-155.

<sup>55</sup>LW, vol. 35, p. 165.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>58</sup>See Bornkamm, Luther and the Old Testament, p. 131.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

The Mosaic Law remains valid insofar as it agrees with natural law.<sup>60</sup> But the law, natural or Mosaic, cannot justify a person. When one has Christ, the Law no longer condemns and in that sense the Law is abrogated for the believer. The believer has freedom to keep the Law or not.<sup>61</sup> Only the Gospel justifies one before God. The Law may point one to the Gospel but has no power to save.

We should finally mention the issue of whether Luther viewed a two-fold or three-fold function of the Law.<sup>62</sup> It seems that Luther accepted a usus civilis and a usus theologicus or spiritualis, the former to restrain transgressions (but rooted in natural law), the latter use to reveal sin and God's wrath.<sup>63</sup> It is not clear that Luther had a third use, a positive use in the life of the believer.

John Calvin is not nearly so enigmatic in his thinking about the Mosaic Law. To Calvin, "Christ's coming did not take anything away [from the law], even from the ceremonies, but rather the truth behind the shadows was revealed . .

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<sup>60</sup>LW, vol. 40, p. 97, Against the Heavenly Prophets.

<sup>61</sup>LW, vol. 45, p. 97, Temporal Authority.

<sup>62</sup>See Gerhard Ebeling, "On the Doctrine of the Triplex Usus Legis in the theology of the Reformation," in Word and Faith, trans by James W. Leitch. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963, pp. 52-78.

<sup>63</sup>LW, vol. 26, pp. 308-310.

.<sup>64</sup> The Jews had distorted the true meaning of the Mosaic Law, but Christ had then restored its true meaning.<sup>65</sup>

In his Commentary, A Harmony of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, Calvin interprets Matthew 5:17-20. Beginning with verse 17, Calvin sees an agreement of Law and Gospel in that the New Covenant does not abrogate the Law of the Old Covenant but confirms it.<sup>66</sup> The "doctrine" of the Law itself, though not in all points in relation to men's lives, remains valid.<sup>67</sup>

In his Institutes Calvin uses the term "Law" in various ways and divides the Law into three aspects. The term "Law" may mean (1) the Ten Commandments plus the "form of religion handed down by God through Moses";<sup>68</sup> (2) the special revelation of the moral law to Israel in the Decalogue and Jesus' summary;<sup>69</sup> or (3) civil and ceremonial statutes.<sup>70</sup>

Regarding the uses of the Mosaic Law, Calvin states that generally the Law (both moral and ceremonial aspects)

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<sup>64</sup>John Calvin: A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, vol. 1, p. 180.

<sup>65</sup>Eerdmans, 1972, vol. 1, p. 180.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., pp. 178-179.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 181 (see 5.18).

<sup>68</sup>John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. by John T. McNeill. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960, II.7.1.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., II.8.1,7.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., IV.20.14-16.

leads one to Christ by creating a desire for Christ.<sup>71</sup> The first function of the Law, particularly the moral law, is to drive one to despair by setting up a perfect standard of righteousness.<sup>72</sup> The Law, again the "moral" law, as a mirror, discloses man's utter sinfulness and pride in relation to God's holiness, causing the unbeliever to be terrified but the believer to seek the grace of God.<sup>73</sup> Second, the Law restrains the unrighteous as a deterrent in the civic realm.<sup>74</sup> Finally, Calvin speaks of the Law as it applies to believers, who, though they have the Law in their hearts, profit from the external Mosaic Law by having a standard for behavior.<sup>75</sup> Once a person passes from unbelief to belief, the Law no longer condemns but exhorts, though it is not abrogated altogether.<sup>76</sup>

Here we must mention Calvin's division of the Law into aspects: the moral, judicial, and ceremonial law.<sup>77</sup> The moral law, comprehending true worship of God and Christian love, is the "eternal rule of righteousness" for all men at

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., II.7.1.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., II.7.3.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., II.7.6-9.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., II.7.10-11.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., II.7.12.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., II.7.14.

<sup>77</sup>See especially Ibid., IV. 20.15.

all times.<sup>78</sup> The judicial law, given for civil government, "imparted certain formulas of equity and justice," and differs from nation to nation and time to time, but within the broad limits of equity prescribed by God's eternal law.<sup>79</sup> The ceremonial law was intended to tutor the Jewish people until the "fullness of time," as a sort of foreshadowing. This law has been abrogated "not in effect but only in use."<sup>80</sup> The ceremonies retain their sanctity, but are shadows of the substance, which is Christ.<sup>81</sup>

We should finally note that the moral law is a witness to Calvin's natural law, that is, the moral law is a partial reflection of natural law.<sup>82</sup> The judicial law is also a subset of natural law, whose precepts may legitimately vary among places and with times.<sup>83</sup>

Turning to Philip Melancthon, caution must be exercised since the only available English text of his Loci Communes is the 1555 edition, representing a paraphrase of one of Melancthon's student's notes of the 1521 edition. Nevertheless, one may formulate a general idea of

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., IV.20.15.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid. IV.20.15-16.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., II.7.16.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., IV.20.16; natural law in Calvin is usually associated with conscience.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., IV.20.16.

Melanchthon's views on the Law. First, Melanchthon is apparently the first to explicitly divide the Mosaic Law into three parts: (1) the lex moralis, laws about virtues, also called eternal law; (2) lex cerimonialis, laws about the church concerned with external works such as sacrifices; and (3) the lex judicialis, laws about civil government, justice, and peace.<sup>84</sup>

Melanchthon also speaks of three uses of the Law: (1) a civil use; (2) a use to preach the wrath of God to drive men to anguish and to show the righteousness of God; and (3) a use which gives the saints a moral standard by which to please God.<sup>85</sup> The lex moralis, referring to God's unchangeable, eternal law, or principle of righteousness, as partially expressed in the Decalogue, is related to the second use of the Law in that the preaching of God's eternal law is a testimony to all men of God's wrath and demand.<sup>86</sup>

The lex moralis is, as we said, God's eternal and unchangeable law. It appears to be at least partially equivalent to Melanchthon's "natural law" which he says is "proclaimed in the Ten Commandments" and clarified through

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<sup>84</sup>Melanchthon, Loci Communes, trans. and ed. by Clyde L. Manschreck from 1555 ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965, ch. VII, "On Divine Law," p. 83.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., pp. 122-129.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

Christ, the prophets, and the apostles.<sup>87</sup> This natural law was planted in men's hearts at creation.

The lex ceremonialis Melanchthon says is temporal and intended only for Israel, remaining only until the coming of the Messiah.<sup>88</sup> The lex judicialis, the laws about civil government, as expressed in the Mosaic Law, is also temporal, being intended only for Israel.<sup>89</sup> It is clear that Melanchthon did not accept the Mosaic Law only, as the basis of civil law, especially when he writes against Thomas Muentzer, an Anabaptist, "who says that a Christian in court must render judgments according to the Law of Moses; he [Muentzer] would destroy the Roman law which is now used."<sup>90</sup> In short, when Melanchthon interprets Matthew 5:17-20, he agrees that the moral law is not abrogated and that the three uses of the law all refer to the moral law. This law was fulfilled in that Christ reiterated the lex moralis and clarified it.<sup>91</sup> The ceremonial laws, however, are abolished in their literal application but retained in principle.<sup>92</sup> The civil law of Moses was wholly abolished.

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., pp. 83-84.

<sup>91</sup>See Ibid., p. 125 where Melanchthon quotes Mt. 5:17.

<sup>92</sup>See Ibid, p. 96, where Melanchthon discusses the Sabbath as a caerimonia.

The final Reformer to be examined is Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) who was a contemporary of Luther. In Zwingli's Commentary on True and False Religion (1525), the author has a short but clear discussion of the Mosaic Law.<sup>93</sup> Like other Reformers, Zwingli divides the Law into three aspects: the eternal moral law, the civil laws, and ceremonial laws.<sup>94</sup> The civil and ceremonial laws "have to do with the outer man" and vary with time and place. Furthermore the ceremonial laws have been abolished by Christ.<sup>95</sup> But the moral law, also called the divine law, having to do with the inner man, "will never be abrogated."<sup>96</sup> This moral law is summed up in the love commandment, but includes prohibitions contained in the Mosaic Law, e.g. theft, false witness, murder.<sup>97</sup> One decides what to keep from the Law and what to exclude from continuing validity by the standard of love.<sup>98</sup> Zwingli is not clear about whether parts of the moral law, which he calls "crimes" may be used in civil law,

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<sup>93</sup>ed. by Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller. Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1981, pp. 137-138, 277-278. There is, however, no direct mention of Mt. 5:17.

<sup>94</sup>See Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 138: Christ is the end of the law and the end of the law is love.



though he implies that they are examples but not exhaustive examples.<sup>99</sup>

As to uses of the Law, Zwingli believes the Law causes men to come to a knowledge of sin and also that it points to the way of life.<sup>100</sup> These uses are essentially consistent with Luther and other Reformers.

The Magisterial or "Mainstream" Reformers have been examined at some length because of their influence in later discussions about the Mosaic Law. But we will not neglect mention of the so-called Radical Reformation, including the Antinomians and Anabaptists generally. The discussion will however be relatively brief.

Warren Kissinger suggests that the Anabaptists "who are a classic example of the sectarian and Christ against culture position, found their authority and dynamic in the teachings of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount."<sup>101</sup> The Anabaptists were certainly a diverse group and it would be impossible to set forth all the variations on their interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20 or their views of the Mosaic Law. Nevertheless, we may be able to draw some general conclusions.

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<sup>99</sup>See *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>100</sup>See Huldreich Zwinglis Samtliche Werks. Berlin: Leipzig, Zurich; 1905- , vol. I, 103.32-104.7 and *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>101</sup>Warren S. Kissinger, The Sermon on the Mount: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography. Betuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1975, p. 30.

For the Anabaptists the Sermon on the Mount was a central teaching. The Sermon on the Mount also represents a new set of values.<sup>102</sup> The teachings of Jesus were a "new law," not merely a clarification of the Mosaic Law. The uses of the Law (the Old Law) are (1) to aid one to recognize sin, (2) to aid the testimony against sin, and (3) to enlighten the soul to discover and learn the path of piety and to flee sin.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, the Radical Reformers did distinguish the moral, ceremonial, and civil aspects of the Mosaic Law, but the ceremonial and civil aspects were definitely abrogated by Jesus' coming.<sup>104</sup> The moral law is perfected by Jesus in his teaching, implying that it was before imperfect. In summary, the Law is fulfilled in believers, who then have the Spirit to guide them ethically.

We may distinguish between the Anabaptists and Libertines or Antinomians of the 16th century by the latter's radical abrogation of the Law. Several examples of such a radical view may come to mind, but in general these groups seem to have been an extremely pietistic or mystical collection of sects who not only denied the necessity of the civil and ceremonial aspects of the Law, but also the

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>103</sup>See Baltasar Hubmaier, "On Free Will," in Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, ed by George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal. Philadelphia: Westminster 1957, p. 127. The Law cannot, however, condemn the believer.

<sup>104</sup>See Ibid., Dietrich Philips, "The Church of God," p. 253 and Sebastian Franck, "A Letter to John Campanus," p. 150.

applicability of the moral law in any respect to the believer.<sup>105</sup>

2. Post-Reformation Period (17th Century)  
including the English Reformation:  
Protestant Scholasticism

Toward the end of the 16th century and into the 17th century, as the doctrinal positions of the Reformation developed, a more systematic and elaborate view of the Mosaic Law also evolved. The best examples of the Law and the interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20 are found in the later Reformed confessions, particularly the Westminster Confession of Faith (1697), and English (and American) Puritans, and scholastic theologians such as Johannes Wollebius (1586-1627) and Francis Turretin (1588-1631).

Turning first to the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XIX, "Of the Law of God," one sees an excellent example of a more elaborate view on the Mosaic Law.<sup>106</sup> The Westminster Confession distinguishes the moral law, fully

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<sup>105</sup>See the discussion in John Calvin, Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines, ed. and trans. by Benjamin Wirt Farley. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982, pp. 250-151. One might also mention Johannes Agricola as an example, against whom Martin Luther wrote. Some Antinomians denied a second use of the Law to reveal God's wrath and to drive men to repentance. They did this by emphasizing only the Gospel as the means whereby men are brought to God (contra Luther). See Paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther, trans. by Robert C. Schultz. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966.

<sup>106</sup>See a collection of these Reformed creeds in Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom. vol 3. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1877, 1977 repr.

expressed in the Decalogue and explained elsewhere in the Pentateuch, the ceremonial laws, prefiguring Christ, and "sundry judicial laws."<sup>107</sup> The moral law remains valid. Matthew 5:17-19 is interpreted to comprehend the moral law: "Neither doth Christ in the gospel [reference to Mt. 5:17-19] any way dissolve, but much strengthen, this obligation [to the moral law]."<sup>108</sup> The ceremonial laws are abrogated in the New Testament.<sup>109</sup> The judicial laws were said to have "expired together with the state of that people [Israel], not obliging any other, now, further than the general equity thereof may require."<sup>110</sup> There is some debate regarding the meaning of "general equity" but it seems to be related to the idea of a natural law or principles from the Mosaic Law as applied in specific cases. The Confession continues, setting out the various uses of the moral law, consistent with the Reformers.<sup>111</sup>

Johannes Wollebius is a representative of Protestant scholasticism in his discussion of the Law. Like other Reformed scholastics, Wollebius distinguishes the moral,

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid., pp. 640-641.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., Westminster Confession, Ch. XIX.V.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., Ch. XIX.III.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., Ch. XIX.IV.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., Ch. XIX.VI: (1) to show God's will; (2) to discover sin; (3) to restrain the regenerate; (4) to show God's approbation of obedience.

ceremonial, and political law.<sup>112</sup> The moral law makes the Redeemer known and teaches what God wants.<sup>113</sup> In Christ's coming (Mt. 5:17), he did "not correct an imperfect law, nor did he decree a new one like a second Moses, but he upheld the law against the corruptions of the Pharisees."<sup>114</sup>

Fulfillment then in Matthew 5:17 does not mean perfection in the sense of correction but in the sense of confirmation and explanation. The moral law is summarized in the Decalogue, but "any commandment may be made to apply to various matters . . ."<sup>115</sup> The ceremonial and political law "is ancillary to the moral law."<sup>116</sup> Moreover, the ceremonial law, being a "type of Christ" is abolished by the death of Christ.<sup>117</sup> The political law on the other hand "dealt with the civil constitution of the Jews" and, in matters where it is "in harmony with the moral law and with ordinary justice, it is binding upon us."<sup>118</sup> But the parts of the civil law dealing with peculiar Jewish situations are not binding.

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<sup>112</sup>See his Compendium Theologiae Christianae in Reformed Dogmatics, ed. and trans. by John W. Beardslee III. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977, pp. 75 ff.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

As one moves to an examination of the Puritans, one begins to see in some, but not all, puritan sects, an even more nomistic trend.<sup>119</sup> The importance of the Puritan (English and American) view of the Mosaic Law lies in its influence upon later Reformed Orthodoxy and the modern Theonomy movement.

The Puritan theologians generally divided the Law into moral, ceremonial, and judicial aspects and maintained that the Mosaic moral law is eternal since Christ "expunged no part of it."<sup>120</sup> The function of the moral law was as guidance to the believer and as damnation of the unbeliever.

But the Puritans were not a monolithic group. Some referred to as Nomists, insisted on Law-keeping to such a degree that they were accused of forsaking the Gospel and espousing salvation by good works.<sup>121</sup> On the left were the Antinomians who insisted that the believer was free from all obligation to the Law and that Law-keeping infringed on free grace.<sup>122</sup> The main body of Puritans was somewhere between

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<sup>119</sup>See Mark W. Karlberg, "Moses and Christ - The Place of Law in Seventeenth-Century Puritanism," Trinity Journal 10 (1989), pp. 11-32.

<sup>120</sup>Quoted from John Crandon, Mr. Baxter's Aphorism's Exorcised and Authorized (1654) in Ernest Kevan, The Grace of the Law: A Study of Puritan Theology. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976.

<sup>121</sup>See Kevan, *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*; in fairness some Antinomians believed only that the Law as a curse was abolished. See Robert Towne, The Assertion of Grace. London, 1644, p. 33.

these extremes. The Law has not been abrogated, but Christ fulfilled it in some way as to make it harmless to the believer. Nevertheless, Christ strengthens its obligation and cleanses it from the errors of the Pharisees.<sup>123</sup> The Christian is thus bound in Law but not condemned by it.<sup>124</sup> Christ gave no new laws but expounded and clarified the Old Law. Ceremonial laws were considered types of Christ and abolished with his coming. The judicial law however is a different matter. Here the Puritans made a distinctive contribution with their vision of a Theocratic society, though, again one should be careful not to generalize.<sup>125</sup> Especially the New England Puritans emphasized the validity of the Mosaic civil code.<sup>126</sup> But other Puritan writers maintained that only that part of the judicial law consistent with natural law (common and general equity) remained valid in government.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

<sup>124</sup>The purposes of the Law were (1) to secure right action and restrain wrong; (2) to provoke to sin; (3) to convict and condemn the unregenerate; (4) to guide the regenerate. See Ibid., pp. 80 ff.

<sup>125</sup>In addition, there were those of the 16th century who also would retain the judicial law (e.g. John Know and Henry Barrow). See P.D.L. Avis "Moses and the Magistrate: A Study in the Rise of Protestant Legalism," Journal of Ecclesiastical History, Vol. XXVI (1975), pp. 169-170.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-30.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

#### D. The Modern Period

The period from the 18th to the 20th century will be examined in this section. The focus will be upon the rise of classical dispensationalism and the continued development of the Reformed view of the Law, as well as the interpretation by both traditions of Matthew 5:17-20.<sup>128</sup>

The classical dispensational school of thought is uniquely American, although there are historical antecedents in European Protestant thought. Dispensationalism merits attention because of its opposition to the Theonomist position on the Mosaic Law and its interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20. Lewis Sperry Chafer will serve to represent this line of thinking. In Volume IV of his Systematic Theology he sets forth his view of the Mosaic Law, arguing that the Law was a "covenant of works" in Moses' day, and became a "ministry of condemnation."<sup>129</sup> The Law, furthermore, "was given only to the children of Israel."<sup>130</sup> It is terminated at Christ's death and has no relation to Gentiles.

In his interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20, Chafer sheds more light on his view of the Mosaic Law. Chafer writes, "This Scripture (Matt. 5:17-48) declares that the law shall

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<sup>128</sup>European liberal theology by and large neglected the role of the Mosaic Law and will therefore not be included here.

<sup>129</sup>Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology. Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948, Vol. IV, p. 161.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., p. 165.



not pass until it is fulfilled."<sup>131</sup> The Law of Moses is said to be "intensified" by its fulfillment as Christ "transfers the obligation from the outward act to the attitude of the heart."<sup>132</sup> But the Mosaic Law itself is relegated to the future millennial kingdom. Elsewhere, Chafer asserts that because of the radical antithesis between Law and Gospel, the Gospel applying to this present age, the Mosaic Law is "done away."<sup>133</sup> At one point, Chafer alludes to the traditional tripartite division of the Law - civil, ceremonial, and moral - but immediately dismisses any use of the civil and ceremonial aspects in this age.<sup>134</sup> The moral law of the Decalogue "reappears" in the New Testament in the character of grace, reincorporated into the teachings of grace.<sup>135</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, especially in America in the writings of Charles Hodge, B.B. Warfield, John Murray, and N.B. Stonehouse, all at Princeton Seminary at one time or another, there arose a more scholastic form of Calvinism which interpreted Matthew 5:17-20 to mean that the Law was not abolished by Jesus but was properly expounded. The term *πληρωσαι* in Matthew 5:17 was interpreted as "to

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<sup>131</sup>Ibid., pp. 219-220.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., p. 220: The Mosaic Law is legal, external.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., pp. 209-210.

make it [the Law] perfectly obeyed" or "to enforce"<sup>136</sup> or "to establish," "ratify," or "confirm."<sup>137</sup> These writers posited a continuity between the Old and New Testaments that eliminated the antithesis between Law and Gospel. Moreover they tended to combine rationalistic thought with applied Puritanism to construct a "new" system of Mosaic Law useful in the New Covenant in the personal, political, and even ecclesiastical realms. The Theonomist movement of the late 20th century appears to have theological antecedents in this Reformed tradition as well as in Puritanism.<sup>138</sup>

In recent years, the dispensational system has been significantly moderated so that the Modern Dispensationalist approaches the analysis of the relation of the Old and New Testaments in terms of continuity and discontinuity. As a result the Mosaic Law is not viewed in such absolutist terms but is seen as having a place in Christianity. Its function and role today are determined by the criterion of the degree of discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Using this criterion, the Law retains its validity, but parts of it are no longer applicable to the

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<sup>136</sup>B.B. Warfield, "Jesus' Mission According to His Own Testimony," Princeton Theological Rev, 13 (1915), pp. 557-559.

<sup>137</sup>See Greg Bahnsen, Theonomy in Christian Ethics, pp. 66-86, for a survey of these American Reformed scholastic views.

<sup>138</sup>It must be admitted that the Modern Dispensationalist view allows more room for the continuity between Old and New Testaments and is therefore at some points in agreement with the "Covenant" theologians regarding the Mosaic Law.

the Christian (e.g. the ceremonial system). It is important to understand the Modern Dispensational scheme as a significant break with the Classical Dispensational view and as a step toward greater common ground with the Reformed position (which sees more continuity than discontinuity).<sup>139</sup>

### C. Conclusion

As one attempts to draw conclusions from this survey, the first thing to emphasize is that the church has always taken seriously the plain words of Matthew 5:17-20, especially of Matthew 5:17, that Jesus did not come to abolish the Mosaic Law. At the same time, the church also has attempted to reconcile the words of Matthew 5:17 with other passages in the Gospels and in the New Testament generally which appear to contradict Matthew. At times this attempted reconciliation has occurred by dividing the Law into moral, ceremonial, and civil aspects, arguing that the ceremonial commandments fell away with Jesus' arrival and that the civil law was culturally and temporally bound to Israel.<sup>140</sup> The moral law however remained in certain respects. Thus in no case was the Law eliminated

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<sup>139</sup>See as a representative, John S. Feinberg, ed., Continuity and Discontinuity. Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments.

<sup>140</sup>As we have seen, some groups have not relegated the civil or judicial law to the Old Testament period, e.g. some Puritan sects, the Theonomists.

altogether. Whatever Jesus meant by πληρωσαι (5:17), he nevertheless preserved the Mosaic Law. A critical question will be, for whom did Jesus preserve the Mosaic Law?

In this thesis however, we will argue that the historic solution to the Law problem has been inadequate, though not without some merit. The church's categorization of the Law has been artificial in light of the discoveries of Biblical-historical research which have shown the Jewish view of the unity of the Law.<sup>141</sup> The following chapter will begin to lay the foundation for a more adequate interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20 by considering the Gospels' teaching about the kingdom of God (or heaven) as both a present reality and future hope and the overlap of the Present Age with the Age to Come in the Christian view of salvation-history. Jesus' programmatic statement about the Law in Matthew 5:17 will then be considered in the context of the overlap of the two Ages - the "already" and the "not yet."

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<sup>141</sup>We must remember that in the Gospels, Jesus' audience was primarily Jewish.

### Chapter 3: The Concept of the Present and Future Aspects of the Kingdom of God (or Heaven)

While reading through the Gospels, one notices that there are certain statements indicating that God's rule has somehow "broken through" on earth in the life of Jesus. The kingdom is said to be present. In other places, however, one sees statements to the effect that the rule of God is yet future. Reconciling these apparently contradictory ideas is a difficult task in itself. Nevertheless, in accepting the concept of inerrancy, one must accept at least a theoretical reconciliation as a possibility. We will here not only attempt to harmonize these ideas but to use them to help determine the meaning of Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus' programmatic statement concerning the Mosaic Law and its role with his coming.

The concept of the Kingdom of God (or of Heaven) permeates the Gospels. The idea of the Kingdom in its present and future aspects has been described in several ways, for example, in terms of the "now" and "not yet"<sup>1</sup> and in terms of promise and fulfillment.<sup>2</sup> However the idea is described by various authors, it may, nevertheless be a

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<sup>1</sup>See Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964, who develops this idea.

<sup>2</sup>W.G. Kummel, Promise and Fulfillment: The Eschatological Message of Jesus. London: SCM, 1957.

valid and useful human artifact based upon careful reflection of the Biblical data.

#### A. Conceptions of the Kingdom

The idea of a simultaneous present and future aspect of the Kingdom of God surely had its opponents. Some would argue that the Bible teaches only a future Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> Jesus made no distinction between a present actualization of the Kingdom and a future completion.<sup>4</sup> Others would assert that any mention of a present kingdom of Heaven must be seen as an offer of the Kingdom to the Jews which was rejected (by rejecting Christ himself) resulting in a postponement of the Kingdom to the millennial future as a spiritual-eschatological concept.<sup>5</sup> This view also gives to the Kingdom an aspect of fulfillment of Old Testament promises in Jesus' mission and of a future literal Kingdom.<sup>6</sup>

Other scholars, particularly those in liberal theological circles of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, see only a present aspect of the Kingdom in the Gospels. The apocalyptic or eschatological element of

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<sup>3</sup>See e.g. Johannes Weiss, Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1892 repr. 1971; pp. 67-74.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>5</sup>See e.g. Charles Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today. Chicago: Moody Press, 1974.

<sup>6</sup>See G.E. Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974, p. 60, for a discussion of this two-moment idea.

Jesus' teaching was time-bound. The Kingdom is really only religious experience.<sup>7</sup> Jesus himself considered the Kingdom to have definitely arrived with his coming; the "wholly other" has broken into history.<sup>8</sup>

A majority of scholars have accepted the idea of the Kingdom in both a present and a future aspect. Representatives of this approach include Oscar Cullmann and W.G. Kummel, already mentioned,<sup>9</sup> and the more conservative Dutch scholar Herman Ridderbos.<sup>10</sup> The Kingdom is conceived as a modification of the redemptive time-line of Judaism. In the Jewish view, time was divided into the "Present Age" and the "Age to Come," with the dividing point being the Day of the Lord when God would establish His reign in the Messiah.<sup>11</sup> The redemptive time-line in primitive Christianity has a new or shifted center or mid-point. The mid-point is no longer in the future but has already passed in the resurrection of Jesus (the Christ-event).<sup>12</sup> There yet remains a future parousia of the Messiah-Christ. The

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<sup>7</sup>See e.g. Adolf Harnack, What is Christianity? New ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1957.

<sup>8</sup>See C.H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, 3rd rev. ed. London: Nisbet, 1936.

<sup>9</sup>See W.G. Kummel, Promise and Fulfillment and Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time, *Supra*, footnotes (1) and (2), ch. 3.

<sup>10</sup>The Coming of the Kingdom. Philadelphia. Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962.

<sup>11</sup>Cullman, Christ and Time, pp. 81-82.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

Kingdom therefore has already come, but is also still to come in its fullness.<sup>13</sup>

Geerhardus Vos also suggested a similar scheme, but improved upon Cullmann's time-line by indicating that the Age to Come moves on a higher level than this age while overlapping with this Present Age.<sup>14</sup> The Ages co-exist until the parousia of Jesus.

Many other writers have adopted similar concepts of the present and future aspects of the Kingdom.<sup>15</sup> Most of these scholars share in common the idea that the Kingdom has broken into this world with Jesus' coming and that the consummation of the world is at hand. The future has begun already in the present. The New Age and the Old Age co-exist until the parousia. To be sure, one sees nuances of this central theme, but they are only variations, not radical modifications.

It seems clear that the concept of the Kingdom as "now" and "not yet," present and future, is justified by the fact that Jesus himself made statements to that effect. The Kingdom does have a future aspect (e.g. Mt. 24) but also a

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 81-92; Kummel, Promise and Fulfillment, pp. 141 ff.

<sup>14</sup>Geerhardus Vos, The Pauline Eschatology. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953.

<sup>15</sup>See G.E. Ladd, The Presence of the Future. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974, pp. 24-38, for a survey of some of the most important contributors.



presence (e.g. Mt. 12:28; Mk. 1:5; Mt. 10:7; Lk. 17:20). But even if this tension is plausible, one must still determine what is meant by the terms βασιλεία του θεοῦ, βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, or the absolute βασιλεία. It is important to understand what the Kingdom is before the idea has any usefulness in interpreting passages dealing with the Mosaic Law. If the coming (Mt. 5:17: ἦλθον) of Jesus does mark an inbreaking (presence) of the Kingdom into the world and the beginning of a new era, then this idea may have significant implications for understanding the role of the Law in this New Age.

#### B. The Meaning of the Kingdom of God (or of Heaven)

The first task is to deal with the oft-cited conceptual difference between the terms βασιλεία του θεοῦ and βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. "Kingdom of Heaven" occurs only in Matthew's Gospel (34 times) while "Kingdom of God" occurs in the other Gospels as well as in Matthew. Neither term is used often before Jesus' day.<sup>16</sup> The Kingdom of God or of Heaven appears in various contexts and, according to G.E. Ladd, has four distinct uses: (1) the abstract meaning of reign or rule (Lk. 19:12; 23:42; Jn. 18:36); (2) a "future apocalyptic order into which the righteous will enter at the end of the age" (= Age to Come, e.g. in Mk. 9:47; 10:23-25;

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<sup>16</sup>See J. Jeremias, New Testament Theology. New York: Scribner's, 1971, p. 96.

Mt. 8:11); (3) a present reality among men (= This Present Age, e.g. in Mt. 11:12; 6:33; 12:28; Mk. 10:15); and (4) a present realm or sphere "into which men are now entering" (e.g. Mt. 11:11 where Jesus speaks of those in the Kingdom; (Mt. 21:31; Mt. 23:13)).<sup>17</sup>

It is interesting to note that although Mk. 10:23-25 and Mt. 8:11 use different qualifiers for Kingdom, the former using τοῦ θεοῦ and the latter τῶν οὐρανῶν, in their respective contexts both appear to mean a future apocalyptic order. In addition, if one compares Mt. 11:12 to Mt. 12:28, it is evident that in both instances the idea is of something present among men, but the terms are different. Finally, although Mt. 11:11 (Kingdom of Heaven) and Mt. 21:31 (Kingdom of God) both pertain to a present sphere, each uses different terms to express the idea. What one sees then is the use of both Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven interchangeably to express similar concepts. From this fact, we conclude that there is no reason to distinguish the terms in abstracto and that both may mean the same thing. The next question concerns what the two terms do mean. We have already given a partial answer above in distinguishing the various uses of the two terms. Below we will elaborate on the previous data and attempt to define the concept of the kingdom (βασιλεία).

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<sup>17</sup>George Eldon Ladd, The Presence of the Future, op. cit., pp. 122-123.

Is the Kingdom the reign of God or the realm over which God rules?<sup>18</sup> Could the Kingdom be both ideas? Typical answers to these questions have depended upon how interpreters approached the present versus future aspects of the Kingdom.<sup>19</sup> This makes the problem all the more difficult.

G.E. Ladd has asserted that the Kingdom is "God's rule which men can and must receive in the present; but God's rule will also be eschatologically manifested in the future."<sup>20</sup> In short, the Kingdom is God's rule. Further, in the Gospels, this rule or reign of God manifests itself in the person and activity of Jesus.<sup>21</sup> Therefore the Kingdom is not an abstract concept of God as eternal ruler, though this is true, but also a dynamic idea of God's reign breaking into history in Christ.<sup>22</sup>

Herman Ridderbos is in essential agreement with Ladd that the Kingdom connotes the kingly self-assertion of God in redemption and judgement and is a dynamic action of God breaking through in power.<sup>23</sup> It is not a spatial kingdom.

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 143-144.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>23</sup>See Herman Ridderbos, The Coming of the Kingdom, op.cit., pp. 19-20, 25.

The coming of the Kingdom is associated with the appearance of Christ.

If the Kingdom is the rule of God, in what sense does this rule have both a present and future aspect? Moreover, how are the "already" and "not yet" related to Cullmann's and Ridderbos' (and Ladd's) ideas of the overlapping Ages, the Old Age or "this Age" and the "Age to Come"? If God's rule is both now and yet to come, how does this idea impinge upon the Mosaic Law? To put it another way, if "this Present Age" and the "Age to Come" are both existent simultaneously with the coming of Jesus, how can this overlap idea help to explain Jesus' programmatic statement of Matthew 5:17-20 while at the same time reconciling statements and actions in the Gospels indicating that in some sense and to some degree the Law has ceased to be valid?

First, to say that the Kingdom is already present or "now" implies that the "Age to Come" has arrived. Conversely, if the Kingdom is "not yet" then the Present Age to that extent, continues to exist. The Old Age is equivalent to the pre-Messianic Age before any fundamental changes in the concept of the Mosaic Law.<sup>24</sup> The Age to Come is equivalent to the Messianic Age, arriving with Jesus, at which time certain changes must take place with regard to the Mosaic Law. Changes, it is argued, must occur

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<sup>24</sup>At least according to this thesis.

with respect to the Law because of the partial in-breaking of God's rule or reign, just as the Gospels indicate cataclysmic changes in the world, e.g. casting out demons, miracles of various kinds, and others.<sup>25</sup> Jesus himself sees Satan already falling from Heaven (Luke 10:18), indicating a present victory. The paradox then arises: the Mosaic Law in one sense remains valid but in another sense undergoes change or modification.<sup>26</sup>

It remains, however, to examine more precisely the relation of the present Kingdom and the future Kingdom, this Present Age and the Age to Come. Cullmann believes it is possible for both aspects of the Kingdom to exist at the same time precisely because "in Christ, time is divided anew, inasmuch as it has received a new center, and hence a new twofold division is imposed upon the old, but still valid division."<sup>27</sup> What the Jews expected of the future they still expect, along with Christians - the Day of the Lord.<sup>28</sup> But this event no longer is at the center of redemptive history; the center is now in a historical event. The center has, therefore been reached, but the end is still

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<sup>25</sup>See G.E. Ladd, The Presence of the Future, op.cit., p. 139, regarding exorcism as a sign of the present kingdom in Mt. 12:28.

<sup>26</sup>Of course, the term *πληρωσαι* plays an important role in determining the nature and extent of the changes.

<sup>27</sup>Cullmann, Christ and Time, op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

to come.<sup>29</sup> In Jesus then we see a juxtaposition of "already fulfilled" and "not yet fulfilled."<sup>30</sup> It is no contradiction to say, as John does, that judgement has already occurred (Jn. 3:18) while it will take place in the future (Jn. 12:48).<sup>31</sup> Cullman appears to sum up his view in the sentence, "It is already the time of the end, and yet is not the end."<sup>32</sup>

Herman Ridderbos adopts a view quite similar to Cullmann's that the Kingdom is both present and future in the person of Christ. It is in Ridderbos' The Coming of the Kingdom that one finds the rudiments of a connection between the Kingdom's simultaneous presence and future and Jesus' relation to the Mosaic Law in Matthew 5:17-20, particularly in 5:17 in the term ἡλθον.<sup>33</sup> The word ἡλθον, being part of a saying of which scholars have found a series, bears witness, in Ridderbos' estimation, a "special consciousness of having a call."<sup>34</sup> The call is Messianic and its mission has to do with the arrival of the Kingdom, as evidenced in Jesus' works (e.g. Mt. 12:28) and his teaching (e.g. the Sermon on the Mount).

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>33</sup>Op. cit., pp. 91-92, 285 ff.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

Ridderbos then discusses one aspect of Jesus' preaching--that on the Law.<sup>35</sup> He asserts that "the preaching of the Kingdom is also that of the law."<sup>36</sup> Christ is said to have proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom as the "fulfillment of the great time of salvation and as the fulfillment of Scripture (Mark 1:15; Luke 4:21)." But also, according to Ridderbos, Christ "gives supreme emphasis to the fulfillment of the law as the purpose of his Messianic coming and as the content of the gospel of the Kingdom."<sup>37</sup> While we might disagree that fulfillment of the Law was the purpose of Jesus' Messianic coming, the importance of this statement should not be lost. The Kingdom has arrived in Jesus and "something has happened" to the Law as a result. But, as Cullmann and Ridderbos would agree, the Kingdom has not fully arrived yet and so the Law continues also to be valid in some sense. In essence this is a redemptive-historical or heilsgeschichte approach to the Mosaic Law with the inbreaking of the Kingdom.

What exactly is the relation of the Law of the Present Age (pre-Messianic) to the teaching of Jesus on the Law in the Age to Come (the Messianic Age)? Ridderbos emphatically asserts, based on his examination of the concept of fulfillment ( $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\omega\sigma\alpha\iota$ ) that the Mosaic Law in its sense of

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 291 ff.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 292.

external authority is fully maintained.<sup>38</sup> The Law is not replaced by a new law of "disposition" or conscience. Nor is the teaching of Jesus merely a "quantitative supplement" of the existing Mosaic Law.<sup>39</sup> In that case the arrival of the Kingdom only adds to the "list" of commandments. Rather to Ridderbos, fulfillment of the Law "is subject to the norm both of the literal Old Testament wording of the law, and of the meaning of salvation manifested in Christ."<sup>40</sup> This explanation accounts for both the future and present aspects of the Kingdom respectively. There is no "displacement of the culture by ethics" either, that is, elimination of religious practices and substitution of a spiritualized form."<sup>41</sup> Nor is the love command opposed to the "judicial sphere of civil legislation" as if to negate the civil use of the Law.<sup>42</sup> Part of the Mosaic Law is not cancelled by Jesus at the expense of another part. There is no question of criticism of the Law or rejection of it.<sup>43</sup> Fulfillment involves a deepening of the Mosaic Law revealing its all-embracing demand.<sup>44</sup> In Ridderbos' estimation, the Law has

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 294, see Lk. 16:17.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 306.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 308.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 311.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 314-315.



only been "suspended" on one point, that is "when its contents can no longer be made compatible with the meaning of the administration of salvation inaugurated by Jesus' coming" because of progress in the history of salvation in the inbreaking of the Kingdom.<sup>45</sup>

In summary, the "validity of the Old Testament law is placed under the condition of its fulfillment."<sup>46</sup> An example mentioned by Ridderbos is the civil laws of Israel.<sup>47</sup> In other words, the fulfillment of the Law effected by the coming of the Kingdom (in Jesus) determines the content and use of the Mosaic Law in the New Age. But this New Age and the Old Age overlap in this Present Age between Jesus' coming and the Parousia. As a result, the Law is in no way invalid, but paradoxically at the same time it is not to be thought of in the same way as before.

One might ask how this idea of the overlapping of the Present Age with the Age to Come is of value in interpreting Matthew 5:17-20. The answer is first that, if the concept itself is valid, then immediately the terms of this pericope are at the least delimited in their meaning, if not precisely defined. For example, the terms  $\eta\lambda\theta\omicron\nu$  (= I came) and  $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\hat{\omega}\sigma\alpha\iota$  (= to fulfill) in 5:17 take on an eschatological significance in the sense of salvation-

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 311.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 332, fn 50.

history. Within the eschatological context, we are then able to determine a more precise meaning or use of these most important terms and thus we may understand Jesus' attitude toward the Mosaic Law.

Furthermore, it is possible that the already-not yet scheme may be useful in interpreting particular phrases in Matthew 5:17-20. For example, in 5:18 one comes across the two problematic  $\epsilon\omega\varsigma$  clauses, one of which seems to indicate the enduring validity of the Law until the end of the world, the other which appears to limit the Law's validity to some shorter time period. Is it possible that the difficulty in these clauses is mitigated when one considers the Mosaic Law in light of the coming of the Kingdom and the overlap of the Old and New Ages? The following chapters will indeed attempt to interpret the  $\epsilon\omega\varsigma$  clauses in this very context.<sup>48</sup> In fact, we will argue that unless one takes seriously the simultaneous present and future aspects of the Kingdom, it is impossible to reconcile adequately Jesus' programmatic statement on the Law in Matthew 5:17-20 with other statements and actions by Jesus in the gospels in relation to the Mosaic Law.

This thesis does not, however, make the claim that the concept of the Kingdom is the only criterion of interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20. Historical, cultural, religious, linguistic, syntactical, grammatical, and

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<sup>48</sup>In 5:18 one should note the important use of  $\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\tau\alpha\iota$ .

contextual considerations are not to be neglected and are in fact critical to the exegesis. In a sense, all the hermeneutical tools utilized in the exegesis of this pericope are mutually reinforcing. No one tool is adequate, even a useful theological tool such as the concept of the Kingdom. Indeed, using only one procedure fails to take advantage of the "checks and balances" to be attained by the use of multiple tools, a fact which can be fatal to honest exegesis. The following chapters will undertake the task of applying multiple hermeneutical methods. It is still asserted, however, that the concept of the Kingdom is a key idea in this exegesis since it provides an overall context within which to examine the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:17-20.

## Chapter 4: The Text of Matthew 5:17-20

This chapter will consider philological, grammatical, and syntactical issues of the text of Matthew 5:17-20 itself, as a basis for further analysis of this pericope's context and cotext.<sup>1</sup> Each verse of the pericope will be examined as a unit insofar as that is feasible. The meanings of individual words and phrases will be established by their uses ultimately in the cotext of this pericope, but also by reference to uses in other texts and meanings given in standard lexicons and word books. Syntactical problems will be addressed with reference to various Greek grammars available. Unless particularly important, key terms, though repeated, will only be dealt with once.

### A. Matthew 5:17

This analysis of 5:17 will examine terms and phrases in the order in which they appear in the verse, omitting unimportant words. *οὐκ νομίσητε*. In New Testament Greek the verb, form *νομίζω*, has the usual sense of "think," "suppose," "believe," "consider," or "assume."<sup>2</sup> In each

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<sup>1</sup>These terms are drawn from Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation. Downer's Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 1989. Context is the social and historical setting of the text while cotext is the text surrounding the pericope in question.

<sup>2</sup>See Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains, vol., 1. New York: United Bible Societies, 1988, sec. 31.29, pp.

case the idea is of some cognitive process. The use of μή, with a form of νομίζω is found (besides this pericope) only in Matthew 10:34.

The interesting issue regarding this phrase is whether its use indicates that some group believed that Jesus taught or represented an annulment of the Mosaic Law. Two main views exist: (1) the phrase is a "rhetorical wall" off which to bounce a positive statement, in which case there is no real opposing audience, and (2) the phrase rebuts a real misunderstanding, either on the part of the Pharisees or the disciples.<sup>3</sup> Meier asserts that νομίσῃτε, since it is in the aorist subjunctive tense and mood, does not lend itself to the idea that Jesus believed these thoughts about the Law were in the minds of the Pharisees or the disciples. The sense then, to Meier, would not be "stop thinking" but "do not begin to think."<sup>4</sup>

Blass and Debrunner state that the subjunctive of prohibition, as we have here, replaces the imperative and may have the sense of warding off something still dependent

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369-370.

<sup>3</sup>See W.D. Davies and Dale Allison, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988, p. 483, for a discussion of both views.

<sup>4</sup>John P. Meier, Law and History in Matthew's Gospel. Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976, p. 65.

on the will.<sup>5</sup> Zerwick asserts that  $\mu\eta'$  with the aorist subjunctive is used to forbid a future act, with an absolute prohibition, as opposed to  $\mu\eta'$  with the present imperative used to forbid continuation of an act.<sup>6</sup> Zerwick does however equivocate on his statement, allowing for exceptions.<sup>7</sup> This issue probably cannot be resolved by reference to grammatical principles alone. It is certainly plausible, though grammatically less common, that Jesus meant to say "stop thinking," given the possible audience and situation at the time.<sup>8</sup>

$\hat{\eta}\lambda\theta\omicron\nu$ . This word is the main verb of v. 17 and is significant because it occurs elsewhere in Matthew in sayings which have particular Christological significance. The issue relating to this simple aorist (= I came) concerns its technical meaning, whether the term signifies Jesus' eschatological, Messianic mission and whether it is part of a programmatic statement regarding the purpose of Jesus' coming.<sup>9</sup>  $\hat{\eta}\lambda\theta\omicron\nu$  plus an infinitive of purpose in a

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<sup>5</sup>See F. Blass and A. Debrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. Chicago: University Press, 1961, rev. ed., Robert Funk, p. 183-184, 188.

<sup>6</sup>Maximillian Zerwick, Biblical Greek. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963, pp. 79-80, 246.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 80-81, see also Blass and Debrunner, p. 173.

<sup>8</sup>Meier, op. cit., p. 66, urges us to view the phrase as addressing a real misunderstanding and to seek an audience, but on redactional grounds since he believes that the words of Mt. 5:17 are "used" by Matthew to rebut a particular problem.

<sup>9</sup>See Ibid., p. 67, and chapter 3 on this idea.

dialectical construct (οὐκ . . . ἀλλὰ), always spoken by Jesus, occurs several times in the Gospels, e.g. Mk. 2:17 and Mt. 10:34-35.<sup>10</sup> Again, the precise significance may only be determined by reference to the context and cotext(s) of Matthew 5:17-20.

καταλύσαι. As a transitive verb, καταλύω may mean (1) tear or throw down, (2) destroy, dismantle or demolish; or (3) do away with, abolish, cancel, annul, make invalid, in reference to laws. The third range of meanings, applied to law, is rare, but is found in 2 Maccabees 2:22, 4:11, and 4 Maccabees 5:33; where the references are to abrogation of a whole body of law, a complete rescinding. Grammatically, καταλυσαι appears to be an infinitive of purpose (in a dialectical construct opposed to πληρώσαι). With the strong adversative ἀλλὰ (=but), the term indicates the antithesis of Jesus' purpose in coming.

νόμος. The word means simply "law," "principle," or "rule." The problem is whether in this text the word should be understood as the Mosaic Law as a whole, the Pentateuch, or Scripture generally.<sup>11</sup> In light of the use here of προφήται in conjunction with νόμος, the use of νόμος for all Scripture may be ruled out. The Jewish scriptures as a whole were referred to in two ways: (1) "the Law and the prophets" and (2) "Law, prophets, and the writings." The

<sup>10</sup>See also Mk. 10:45, though it is not in dialectical form.

<sup>11</sup>See W. Gutbrod, "νόμος." TDNT, IV, pp. 1036-1091.

former reference, except for Luke 24:44, is used in the New Testament, while the rabbis adopted the tripartite division. The two-part division occurs ten times in the New Testament (Mt. 5:17, 7:12, 11:13, 22:40; Lk. 16:16; Jn. 1:45; Ac. 13:15, 24:14, 28:23; Rom. 3:21). Luke also uses Μωϋσέως καὶ τοὺς προφήτας (16:29, 31; 24:27). In general, we may say that νόμος here has reference either to the Pentateuch or to the legal parts of the Pentateuch.

προφήται. Given its connection with νόμος, προφήται must refer to the prophetic books of the Old Testament (at the least). As to the content of προφήται, it seems probably that, consistent with the New Testament's two-part division, the term includes both the prophets and the wisdom books.<sup>12</sup>

πληρῶσαι. This term has a fairly broad semantic range, including, "to fulfill," "to make come true," "to fill," "to make full," "to bring about," "to complete, accomplish, or finish," "to proclaim fully" and even "to clarify," "to extend," or "to bring to completion."<sup>13</sup> The basic meaning is to fulfill, but the question arises as to what fulfill

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<sup>12</sup>As argued by Davies and Allison, op. cit., p. 484, contra Meier, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>13</sup>One may consult various standard lexicons such as Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, Liddell and Scott as well as Louw and Nida. Also many writers have spoken of various nuances of the term.



connotes in its use as an infinitive of purpose expressing something about Jesus' mission.<sup>14</sup>

The Greek could be a translation of the Aramaic *ôsîp* (= to add to), a view favored by Jeremias.<sup>15</sup> Branscomb and Dalman posit that *πληρῶ* is the equivalent of the Hebrew *qûm* (*heqîm* or *quiyyem*), meaning establish, make valid, keep a promise, confirm a promise, or hold to words.<sup>16</sup> Schlatter adds that *qûm* might also mean to do or to execute.<sup>17</sup> It has however been pointed out that the LXX does not translate *qûm* with *πληρῶ* and that if the sense were "to establish" one would expect to find *ἴστημι* which we do not in Matthew 5:17.<sup>18</sup>

Another theory is that *πληρῶ* could mean to obey in the sense that Jesus came to do what was ordered.<sup>19</sup> Similarly Descamps advances the idea that *πληρῶ* is a translation of

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<sup>14</sup>If *ηλθον* is taken as a technical term.

<sup>15</sup>J. Jeremias, New Testament Theology, vol. 1. New York: Scribner's, 1971, pp. 83-85.

<sup>16</sup>B.H. Branscomb, Jesus and the Law of Moses. London: Smith, 1930, pp. 226-228 and G. Dalman, Jesus-Jeshua: Studies in the Gospels. London: SPCK, 1929, pp. 56-58.

<sup>17</sup>A. Schlatter, Der Evangelist Mattaus. Stuttgart: Calwer, 1948.

<sup>18</sup>See Davies and Allison, *op.cit.*, p. 485, fn 9.

<sup>19</sup>See T. Zahn, Das Evangelium Mattaus. Leipzig: Deichert, 1903, pp. 212-213.

the Hebrew ml' meaning to perfect or realize (in a prophetic context).<sup>20</sup>

Some have also suggested that πληρώ has the idea of completing the Mosaic Law by bringing a New Law which transcends the Old Law.<sup>21</sup> Jesus brings new demands which may both transcend and in some parts annul the old ones.<sup>22</sup>

A further theory sees πληρώ as an emphasis of the true meaning of the Mosaic Law. The Law is also fulfilled by Jesus himself who is the foreshadowed Messiah.<sup>23</sup> Jesus brings out the perfect or inner meaning of the Law or expands and extends the Law quantitatively without abrogation. This idea is related to the idea of πληρώ as an eschatological term. The τέλος which the Torah anticipated, that is, the Messiah, has revealed the Law's definitive meaning.<sup>24</sup> As one can readily see, the debate over the meaning of πληρώ has been continuing for some time. This term is probably the key term in the entire

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<sup>20</sup>A. Descamps, Les Justes et la Justice dans les evangiles et le Christianisme primitif homris las doctrine ovoprement Paulinienne. Genbloux: Duculot, 1950, pp. 127-131.

<sup>21</sup>W.D. Davies, Christian Origins and Judaism. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962, pp. 33-34.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>23</sup>W.C. Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912, pp. 45-46.

<sup>24</sup>See Robert Banks, Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition. Cambridge: University Press, 1975, pp. 207-210.

pericope. But its meaning will most likely be determined not by word studies but by examining context and cotext.

#### B. Matthew 5:18

Ἀμήν. The term itself is a transliteration of the Hebrew אָמֵן and in the Old Testament was used to affirm or to attest to something.<sup>25</sup> The LXX translates the Hebrew as γένοιτο.<sup>26</sup> In the New Testament, the Greek ἀμήν is used in three ways, one of which connotes that someone's words are true or reliable. This use is especially common in Jesus' words when he uses the ἀμήν before his sayings.<sup>27</sup> Schlier points out that the sayings of Jesus where ἀμήν, either single or doubled is used, "all have to do with the history of the kingdom of God bound up with His person."<sup>28</sup> In summary the term here seems to be a strong affirmation of the truth of what is said.<sup>29</sup>

γάρ. The term can express cause or reason, explanation (for), inference (so, then), or continuation of a thought. Meier rightly warns about any a priori conclusions concerning a causal link between 5:17 and 5:18.

<sup>25</sup>H. Schlier, "ἀμήν," TDNT, I, p. 33.5.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 336.

<sup>27</sup>30 times in Matthew; 13 times in Mark; 6 times in Luke. Luke also uses ἀληθῶς (e.g. Lk 9:27). See Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 338.

<sup>29</sup>See Louw and Nida, op.cit., vol. 1, p. 673 ( 72.6).

λέγω. This verb in the formula εγω λέγω υμιν or simply λέγω υμῖν, occurs many times in the Gospels, in the words of Jesus.<sup>30</sup> In many of the texts in which Jesus begins with λέγω υμῖν (or ἀμην λέγω υμῖν), the tenor of the saying is quite authoritative, emphasizing who was making the statement and hence validating the statement itself.

ἕως. This conjunction appears with the particle ἄν and the aorist subjunctive, and usually has a temporal sense of "until." The clause, ἕως ἄν is an indefinite temporal clause, and the ἄν with the subjunctive is said to make the condition "eventual" or "general" as to its time.<sup>31</sup> In other words the occurrence of the event (passing away of the Law) mentioned in the verse will take place at some future time but will not occur until another condition occurs (ἕως ἄν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ). ἕως may at times mean "while," "as long as," or possibly "in order that" (with ἄν).<sup>32</sup>

παρέλθῃ (from παρέρχομαι). The basic meaning is "to pass," "to pass away," or "to disappear." In the aorist subjunctive with ἄν in an indefinite temporal clause, the verb makes no assertions about concrete realities, but

<sup>30</sup>In Matthew alone, the phrases occur 54 times, 14 times in the Sermon on the Mount.

<sup>31</sup>See Zerwick, op.cit., p. 114, § 335.

<sup>32</sup>See Meier, op. cit., p. 48, fn 23, but these meanings are unlikely.

rather general assertions, and, in this case, with εως, eventual assertions.<sup>33</sup>

ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ. The combination of the terms heaven and earth may refer to the whole of creation. Several references occur in the New Testament of the terms together and speak of their passing away (e.g. Mt. 13:31). The more interesting question concerns how to interpret the entire clause. Is it an idiom for "never," given the uncertainty of the subjunctive?<sup>34</sup> Or does the phrase imply a future certainty of the passing away of heaven and earth (and when will this event occur)?<sup>35</sup>

ἰωτα and κεραία. Both of these terms refer to parts of the Hebrew-Aramaic alphabet. Matthew apparently uses ἰωτα to translate the Hebrew yod, the smallest Hebrew character. Some have seen ἰωτα to represent the whole Law as an indissoluble unity.<sup>36</sup> κεραία literally means a horn or projection or, figuratively, a hook on a letter. In Greek it denotes figuratively, something very insignificant.<sup>37</sup> In connection with νόμος the sense of the terms together may

<sup>33</sup>See Blass and Debrunner, op. cit., p. 192, 380.

<sup>34</sup>In support, see Allen, Matthew, op.cit., p. 46. Contra, see A. Honeyman, "Matthew v. 18 and the Validity of the Law," New Test St 1 (1954), pp. 141-142.

<sup>35</sup>See Meier, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>36</sup>Herman Strack and Paul Billerbeck, Kommentar Zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch. Munich: Beck, 1922, vol. 1, pp. 246-247.

<sup>37</sup>See Ibid., pp. 247-249.

indicate the most insignificant parts of the Law (seemingly). But this will be an issue for later discussion.

οὐμὴ. This combination of negatives with the aorist subjunctive is said to be used as an emphatic negative.<sup>38</sup> Zerwick further argues that in the majority of usages in the New Testament it expresses an emotional emphasis.<sup>39</sup> Possibly, Jesus wished to emphasize strongly the continuing validity of the Law against those who believed he taught the abrogation of it.

ἕως ἄν (2nd clause). Again we encounter a conjunction and particle with the aorist subjunctive. The meaning again is probably "until."

πάντα. In the plural the term means simply "all things." But what events are referred to here?

γένηται (from γίνομαι). The precise sense of this verb is much debated.<sup>40</sup> Basic meanings include happen, come to pass, or take place.<sup>41</sup> It is not impossible that the sense of the word could be "to be fulfilled," but this is less likely.<sup>42</sup> Another proposal is that the word means "to be

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<sup>38</sup>Zerwick, op.cit., p. 149, § 444.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>40</sup>See Meier, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>41</sup>Louw and Nida, op. cit., p.

<sup>42</sup>Meier, op. cit., p. 53, mentions this possibility.

done."<sup>43</sup> This possibility however does not seem to differ significantly from the basic meanings, though it could refer to Law being done. But such an option seems tenuous.

#### C. Matthew 5:19

οὐσ. With ἐάν, the relative pronoun is translated "whoever," and invites one to seek a wider audience than the disciples or Pharisees.

οὖν. The basic meaning is "therefore" but the word does not always imply a strict causal connection.<sup>44</sup> Rather it may be used to continue a narrative.<sup>45</sup> Here however, the conjunction is in a discourse and does, based on the rest of the text, seem to indicate a connection to verse 18.

λύση (from λύω). The term has a broad semantic range: loose, untie bonds, set free, break up, destroy, tear down, bring to an end, abolish.<sup>46</sup> Of commandments and laws it may mean repeal, annul, or "failure to conform to the law, with the possible implication of regarding it as invalid - 'to break (a law), to transgress.'"<sup>47</sup> At least one scholar

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<sup>43</sup>See H. Ljungmann, Das Gesetz Erfüllen. Mt. 5, 17 ff und 3, 15 Untersucht. Lund: Gleerup, 1954, p. 52, cited in Meier, *Ibid*, p. 54.

<sup>44</sup>Blass and Debrunner, *op.cit.*, p. 234, 451.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 234-235.

<sup>46</sup>Louw and Nida, *op.cit.*, vol. 1, 18.18, 37.127, 20.53, 15.139, 13,38, 13.100.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 470, 36.30.

suggests that the term means only "to violate," not "to abolish."<sup>48</sup> The verb by itself does not make clear whether the action of annulling or breaking is a general decree or a doing. But since the verb is in parallel with διδάσκω and in antithetic parallelism with ποιέω, the idea may be breaking by action on the part of individuals.<sup>49</sup> λύω here also suggests the breaking of individual commandments rather than a "theoretical" annulment of the whole Law.

μίαν τῶν ἐντολῶν τῶν ἐλαχίστων (= one of the least of these commandments). The object of the verb λύση is μίαν (= one), the one referring to τῶν ἐντολῶν (= commandment). ἐντολή generally translates as statute, command, or ordinance and in both Biblical and extra-Biblical literature is often connected with the Mosaic Law.<sup>50</sup> In the New Testament ἐντολή occurs six times in Matthew, referring to individual commandments in each case (See Mt. 15:3, 19:17, 22:36, 38, 40). Also in every case the context suggests a reference to Old Testament commandments, part of the Mosaic Law. The use of μίαν lends further support to a reference to individual precepts rather than the whole law, as does the plural use of ἐντολῶν. The use of τούτων (= these)

<sup>48</sup>See Grundman, Das Evangelium nach Matthaus. Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1972.

<sup>49</sup>See Meier, op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>50</sup>See e.g. Sir. 6:37, 10:19, 15:15; Sir. 2:15; 4 Macc. 13:15; 16:24; T Jud 13:7, 14:6; vit Adam and Eve 10:2; Enoch 14:1.



refers to the commandments at issue here, that is the precepts of the Mosaic Law. ἐλάχιστος, the superlative form of μικρός, can mean very small, least important in status.<sup>51</sup> The idea then is that the least important precepts of the Mosaic Law retain some kind of validity.<sup>52</sup>

διδάξη (from διδάσκω). The meaning is simply "to teach." The nuance may include the idea of some type of official pronouncement. But the term could also connote a teaching by example.

κληθήσεται (from καλέω). This verb may have the sense of name, call, summon, or invite.<sup>53</sup> Usually, when καλέω means name or call, it refers to speaking of a person by means of a proper name or to give a title to someone. It is possible that ἐλάχιστος here could be a sort of "title" for someone in the Kingdom (the future Kingdom since the verb is in the future tense).<sup>54</sup> In this sense κληθήσεται involves calling a person by an attribution which describes his

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<sup>51</sup>Louw and Nida, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 706, 627, 740 (79.125, 65.57, 87.66).

<sup>52</sup>See Ibid., p. 627, 65.57.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., §§ 33.129, 33.131, 33.307, 33.315.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., esp. §§ 33.129, 33.131, p. 403.

status or rank in the Kingdom. The term probably does not imply exclusion from the Kingdom.<sup>55</sup>

βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. Literally the phrase translates Kingdom of the Heavens. Here the phrase refers to an eschatological Kingdom. βασιλεία probably should be understood as either the reign of God or the domain over which God rules.<sup>56</sup> ποιήση (from ποιέω). This word is a natural term for obeying a command, and basically means "to do" or "to practice."<sup>57</sup> ποιήση here could be a Semitism in that obedience is equated with practice in Hebrew religion.<sup>58</sup> μέγας. The word can mean great or important.<sup>59</sup> It speaks of a status of a person. Again, with the use of κληθήσεται, μέγας could be a figurative title implying status in the Kingdom.

#### D. Matthew 5:20

γάρ. Again, one should be careful about seeing an automatic connection between 5:19 and 5:20.

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<sup>55</sup>See however K.L. Schmidt, "καλέω," TDNT, Vol. III, pp. 487-488 who sees καλέω as a technical term for the salvation process.

<sup>56</sup>Louw and Nido, op. cit., Vol. 1, § 37.64, 1.82.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., §§ 90.45, 42.7.

<sup>58</sup>Note the parallel of the two relative clauses of 5:19, the first using λύση . . . και διδάξη and the second (contrasting) using ποιήση και διδάξη. This makes more likely the possibility that λυση has to do with non-practice or non-obedience.

<sup>59</sup>Louw and Nida, op. cit., § 87.22, p. 736.

λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι. This introductory formula may function to summarize emphatically the preceding verses. It may also introduce the following material in 5:21-48.<sup>60</sup>

περισσέυση (from περισσέω). In its intransitive use the verb means "to be present in abundance," "to be more than enough," "to surpass, abound, or exceed."<sup>61</sup> If one accepts the usual sense of the term, it connotes a quantity. But it may also be used in a qualitative sense to refer to a degree, in this case, of righteousness.

δικαιοσύνη. The basic meanings are righteousness and a right relationship with someone.<sup>62</sup> If the meaning is righteousness, it is speaking of moral and ethical qualities in a person. This would seem to be the usage of the term in 5:20, although the reference could also be to God's conferral of righteousness (forensic) upon someone with the result of a right relation.<sup>63</sup>

πλείον. The term is the accusative of the comparative degree of πολὺς (= much, many). Here it is used as an

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<sup>60</sup>See Meier, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>61</sup>See Louw and Nida, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, esp. §§ 59.52, 57.24.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, §§ 34.47, 88.12.

<sup>63</sup>See Allen, *Matthew*, *op. cit.*, p. 46; W.D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 291; Robert Banks, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law: Authenticity and Interpretation in Matthew 5:17-20", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93 (1974), p. 242; and F.F. Bruce, "Justification by Faith in the New Pauline Writings of the New Testament," *Evangelical Q.* 24 (1952), p. 68, for the various positions on the sense of δικαιοσύνη.

adverb meaning "more," "in greater measure," or "to a greater degree." The term may have a quantitative or a qualitative sense.

τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων. Matthew mentions the scribes and Pharisees, in that order, nine times. Together they represent Jewish theology and piety.

εἰσελθῆτε. This verb means to come into, go into, enter, or share in. The phrase, "enter into the Kingdom" occurs in Mark 9:27 (where Matthew 18:9 reads "into life"). Hence one may be entering a quality of life. Meier believes that the phrase here with εἰσερχομαι is built upon Old Testament images, one of which has to do with Israel's entrance into the promised land, historically (Dt. 4:1) or at the end of time (Ps. Sol. 11:2-6). The condition for entrance was observance of the Law.<sup>64</sup>

The foregoing material has been necessary as a basis for establishing the objective, textual meaning of Matthew 5:17-20. Even though we would argue the primacy of cotext and context in determining meaning, nevertheless, words and phrases cannot have a completely indeterminate meaning or else communication would be impossible. In this chapter we have delimited the possible meanings and uses of terms in Matthew 5:17-20. In other words, we have determined semantic ranges of words. Furthermore, by examining syntactical issues, it is possible to determine how language

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<sup>64</sup>Meier, op. cit., p. 113.

is used, how it is expressed, enabling us to determine more accurately the meaning of the text here.

The next task, which overlaps with matters in this chapter to some degree, is to analyze the cotext of Matthew 5:17-20, the passages surrounding that pericope as well as the entire Gospel of Matthew. Combined with context, the social, religious, and cultural background contemporaneous with the text, we will be able to narrow the meaning of the text (Mt. 5:17-20) by closing the gap between the 20th century reader and the first century writer and his audience.

## Chapter 5: The Cotext of Matthew 5:17-20

By the term "cotext" is meant "the sentences, paragraphs, chapters, surrounding the text [Mt. 5:17-20] and related to it."<sup>1</sup> In examining the cotext of Matthew 5:17-20, it is hoped that the text itself will be elucidated. But again we must bear in mind that the objective meaning of the text itself as well as the context of this pericope also have a critical role in interpretation.

Broadly speaking, we may define two cotexts, which are overlapping: (1) The Gospel of Matthew and its theology and (2) the pericopes surrounding Matthew 5:17-20, that is the Sermon on the Mount. The latter cotext is a subset of the former and itself may be divided: (1) Matthew 5:13-16, the Salt and Light pericope and (2) Matthew 5:21-48, the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount. Below we will examine these cotexts.

### A. The Theology of Matthew's Gospel

In some ways an examination of the theology and content of Matthew's Gospel requires the inclusion of the context of the Gospel, its sociological and historical setting shared by the writer and his audience or the speaker (Jesus) and

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<sup>1</sup>See Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation. Downer's Grove, Ill. Inter-Varsity, 1989, p. 16.

his audience.<sup>2</sup> But discussion of context in this chapter will only be general and somewhat limited in scope. The major discussion of context will be reserved for the following chapters. Nevertheless, as a by-product of the examination of the Gospel of Matthew we will of necessity learn something about Jesus, Matthew, and their audiences, e.g. disciples, Pharisees, the common people. We will then be in a better position to determine what Jesus would have meant by the words of Matthew 5:17-20, and what his audience would have understood.<sup>3</sup>

Matthew reveals a significant interest in Judaism.<sup>4</sup> The belief that Matthew belongs in a Jewish Christian context has generally been supported by noting some of its distinctive linguistic, cultural, and theological features, and special emphases.<sup>5</sup> For one thing, Matthew uses untranslated Hebrew terms such as ῥακά (5:22), μαμωνάς (6:24), and κορβανάς (27:6).<sup>6</sup> In addition, there are numerous references to Jewish customs of the Pharisaic period: handwashing at meals (15:2), phylacteries and

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>3</sup>We will assume oral transmission tradition of Mt. 5:17-20 for at least 35-40 years, but this assumption need not in any way diminish the accuracy of the tradition.

<sup>4</sup>Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction, rev. ed., Leicester, England, Apollos, 1990, pp. 28 ff.

<sup>5</sup>See R.T. France, Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher. Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989, pp. 192 ff, and Ibid., pp. 29 ff.

<sup>6</sup>See France, op. cit., p. 97.

tassels (23:5), burial customs (23:27), Sabbath travel (24:20).<sup>7</sup> The terms and customs are mentioned without elucidation.

Another distinctive of Matthew's Gospel is its frequent use of the Old Testament.<sup>8</sup> Old Testament passages are quoted both from the LXX and from the Hebrew.

Other Jewish characteristics include the use of a genealogy focusing on David and the monarchy of Judah, the use of "Son of David" as a title for Jesus (1:1, 9:27, 12:23, 15:22, 20:30-31 and others), the restriction of Jesus' mission to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:5-6), the apparent exclusion of Samaritans from Jesus' mission, the approval of Jewish scribal teaching (23:2-3, 23), and general teaching focusing on Jewish concerns and practices.<sup>9</sup> The whole tone of the Gospel seems calculated to present Jesus in terms understandable to a Jew.<sup>10</sup>

The latter two characteristics above deserve elaboration because of their potential relevance for the interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20. It has already been said that Jesus appears in Matthew to approve of Jewish scribal teaching and that his teaching focused on Jewish concerns

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.; see also Guthrie, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

<sup>8</sup>Guthrie, pp. 28-29; see also R. Gundry, The Use of the Old Testament in Matthew's Gospel. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967.

<sup>9</sup>France, op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.



and practices. These facts seem particularly true with regard to the Mosaic Law. The Scribes and Pharisees are said to occupy the seat of Moses and their instructions are to be observed (23:2 ff).<sup>11</sup> One is to do what they say, indicating a commitment to the Old Testament Law, but one is not to imitate the scribes and Pharisees. In addition, we note that in Matthew 23:23, Jesus condemns these rulers, not because they keep the Law but because they do not practice the "weightier matters of the law." They do not keep the whole Law.

Furthermore, the Jewish temple tax is paid (17:24), in accordance with the commandment of Exodus 30:13. The disciples are expected to keep the Sabbath, and bring offerings in accordance with Jewish tradition (12:8, 24:20, 5:23 f).<sup>12</sup> At least Jesus does not condemn the Law on these points.

Having placed Matthew's Gospel in a Jewish setting, we must still deal with the issue of Matthew's theology. At least one scholar has remarked that "Matthew turned out to be the most systematic and didactic of all the Gospels."<sup>13</sup> While many would probably not agree with such an assessment,

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<sup>11</sup>See Guthrie, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>Frederick Dale Bruner, The Christbook: A Historical/Theological Commentary, Matthew 1-12. Waco, TX: Word, 1987, p. XV.

it does give some confidence for the writing of this chapter.

Scholars who have examined Matthew's overall theology have tended to agree that the Gospel emphasized the following themes: (1) fulfillment; (2) Christology; (3) the Law; and (4) the people of God or the church.<sup>14</sup> D.A. Carson agrees with these theological emphases and adds eschatology, related to fulfillment, as another theme.<sup>15</sup> Of course, other themes, such as mission, miracles, the disciples' understanding, and faith, also may be observed in Matthew.<sup>16</sup> But the theological issues mentioned initially appear to be the most critical and require more detailed attention.

#### 1. Fulfillment and Eschatology

Under this heading, one might more properly begin by speaking of prophecy since fulfillment would imply a previous prophetic aspect. But prophecy in the New Testament is more complex than mere "propositional prediction" followed by the coming to pass of the

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<sup>14</sup>See R.T. France, Matthew. Leicester, England: Inter Varsity, 1985, pp. 38-56; also see R.T. France, Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher. Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989, Chs. 5-8. David Hill, The Gospel of Matthew, NCBC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, pp. 66-67, adds discipleship to Law and co-themes.

<sup>15</sup>See D.A. Carson, Matthew, Vol. 8, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. by Frank E. Gaebelin. Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1984, p. 32.

<sup>16</sup>See Ibid., pp. 36-38.

prediction.<sup>17</sup> This is no less true of the Gospel of Matthew. Carson elaborates on the difficulties in Matthew.<sup>18</sup> France also deals with Matthew's emphasis on prophetic fulfillment and asserts that "the essential key to all Matthew's theology is that in Jesus all God's purposes have come to fulfillment."<sup>19</sup> Matthew is said to emphasize this idea in a remarkable way; everything is said to be related to Jesus.<sup>20</sup>

Carson begins his analysis by pointing out the peculiarities in Matthew's prophecy and fulfillment motif. Sometimes the fulfillment bears no contextual relation to the Old Testament prophecy (e.g. Mt. 27:9-10). The appeals to the Old Testament are therefore argued to be "vehicles," the arbitrary use of words to make the author's own point.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, some of Matthew's quotations are introduced by a unique formula using the passive form of  $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\omega$ .<sup>22</sup> These "formula quotations" are said to be

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>France, Matthew, p. 38.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>France, Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher, p. 181. See also C.F.D. Moule, The Origin of Christology. Cambridge: University Press, 1977, pp. 127-134.

<sup>22</sup>Carson, op. cit., p. 27.

"asides of the evangelist, his own reflections."<sup>23</sup> But what is it that Matthew wishes to convey with his Old Testament references in the context of fulfillment?

France believes that the fulfillment idea is Matthew's overriding theological motif, related to his Christology, ecclesiology, view of the Law's place, and soteriology.<sup>24</sup> Matthew "wishes to show Jesus as the point at which all the rich diversity of God's relations with his people in word and deed converges."<sup>25</sup> The Old Testament was preparing the way for Christ "anticipating him, pointing to him, leading up to him."<sup>26</sup> We are therefore talking about fulfillment of Old Testament predictions about the Messiah, but more importantly, fulfillment of Old Testament history and religion.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the fulfillment is, in a sense, an eschatological event and takes place in Christ himself. It is Christ who is the fulfillment in many cases, not an event, though the event of his coming is also fulfillment (see Mt. 12:3-8, 40-42). Jesus is the turning point of history, in the arrival of the Kingdom in his person (Mt. 4:17, 10:7). The idea of Jesus himself as fulfillment has

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>France, Matthew, p. 41.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Carson, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>27</sup>France, Matthew, p. 40.

interesting implications for the interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20.

## 2. Christology

Matthew's theology is doubtless focused on Jesus himself.<sup>28</sup> Scholars agree that Matthew gives us much material about who Jesus is but they do not agree that Matthew had worked out a consistent, systematic Christology.<sup>29</sup> To understand Matthew's concept of Jesus, it is convenient first to mention briefly his Christological titles: (1) Christ; (2) Son of Man; (3) King; (4) Son of God and (5) Son of David. In the past Christology has been a study of titles for Jesus, more or less.<sup>30</sup> We will examine titles only to the extent that they help to convey something about Jesus which will be useful in later exegesis. Each title does, however, point one to some important aspect of Matthew's thought, but none itself gives the full picture of Jesus.<sup>31</sup> France summarizes the areas of thought the Christological titles point to: (1) Jesus' mission and (2) Jesus' person.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>France, Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher, p. 279.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>See Ibid., pp. 280-298.

<sup>31</sup>In agreement with Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

The titles "Christ" (χριστός) and "Son of Man" appear to portray God's eschatological action for his people.<sup>33</sup> "Christ" and "Son of David" point to fulfillment of Israel's hope. Jesus is the one who is to come and has come (ἦλθον).

Titles such as "Son of Man," "King," "Son of God," and "Lord" are said to tell us something about who Jesus is. To some degree, "Son of Man" also describes Jesus' mission.<sup>34</sup> In these titles one sees an assumption of more than mere human authority. For example, the Son of Man at the last judgement is the judge of all men (Mt. 25:31-46). In the same passage he is called "the King" (25:34). There is an equivalence between Jesus and God.

Some writers have also seen in Matthew an interest in ontology - the divine nature of Christ.<sup>35</sup> For example, in 19:16-17, the term "good" (ἀγαθός) is used possibly in reference to Jesus. In Matthew 9:1-8 there is reference to forgiveness of sins. Finally, in Matthew 18:20 and 28:20, there is said to be the rudiments of a concept of omnipresence. To be sure, some scholars do not agree that these passages indicate an interest in ontology.<sup>36</sup> Rather they speak of functional Christology.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 298-299, the same issue may arise regarding the use of "Lord" (κύριος).

<sup>34</sup>France, Matthew, p. 43.

<sup>35</sup>See E.G. Hill, op. cit., pp. 64-65.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

The relevance of Matthew's Christology to Matthew 5:17-20 seems to be in the ideas of Jesus' status and mission. As King equivalent to God, Jesus is Lord over the Sabbath, a fact which ought to have implications for the role and content in the Mosaic Law (Mt. 12:8). Regarding Jesus' mission, Matthew's Christology makes it clear that Jesus has come ( $\hat{\eta}\lambda\theta\omicron\nu$ ) for a specific purpose as the fulfillment of Israel's hope. Jesus is the  $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ , the Messiah. The Kingdom has arrived in the person of the King. With the arrival of the Kingdom a new age has dawned bringing with it a change in the Mosaic Law.

#### B. The Law in Matthew

This theological topic in Matthew naturally has great relevance to the interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20. Yet it is also, like our pericope, a difficult issue to discern the attitude of Matthew's Gospel toward the Law. Several places in Matthew one sees a strident defense of the Mosaic Law (e.g. Mt. 8:4, 19:17-18).<sup>37</sup> The authority of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law to interpret the Law is also defended (23:2-3). In addition, Matthew appears to soften Mark's antinomian statements (e.g. in Mk. 7:19b, ". . . Jesus declared all foods clean," which is omitted in Mt. 15:1-20).<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, the formal precepts of the

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<sup>37</sup>Carson, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

old Testament Law appear to be superseded in some passages (e.g. 5:33-37). Other passages in 5:21-48 also seem to negate the Mosaic Law.

Until recently, most scholars emphasized Matthew's conservatism with regard to the Law.<sup>39</sup> This was especially the case in comparing Matthew to Mark's "radicalism." The problem with this solution is that it creates a conflict between Matthew and Mark that calls into question the authority of Scripture.

Another explanation of Matthew's apparent strong validation of the Law is to assert that Matthew was attacking an antinomian faction in his community.<sup>40</sup> This group apparently thought Jesus abolished the Law. Matthew was alarmed enough to react strongly in reaffirming the validity of the Law.<sup>41</sup> The problem of this view is that it necessitates too much editorial activity on Matthew's part or even creation of words Jesus never uttered.

In any event, one might be premature to label Matthew as conservative on the Law if one examines the Antitheses of 5:21-48 (see later in this chapter). But again there is debate about how to interpret these seemingly radical

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<sup>39</sup>France, Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher, p. 191.

<sup>40</sup>G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, and H.J. Hold, Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew. London: SCM, 1963, pp. 159-164.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.



passages.<sup>42</sup> One could argue that Jesus' objection in some of the Antitheses is to a minimalizing interpretation of the Law rather than against the true sense of the Law.<sup>43</sup> In addition, in 5:38-42, Jesus' reaction could have been against the use of the Law as intended originally for judicial resolutions as a personal ethical precept.<sup>44</sup> The charge that Jesus abrogated part of the Law might possibly be averted. But we are yet in a quandary. Jesus' attitude to the Law is still not clear. Matthew's theology of Law is still ambiguous.

One important observation to make is that, outside of 5:17-48, Jesus seems to be in constant debate with the Pharisees and scribes over matters of the Law.<sup>45</sup> These groups view Jesus as something of a radical antinomian in relation to sabbath observance, fasting, ritual purity, divorce, and sacrifice.

To attempt to solve this apparent conflict some recent scholars have reevaluated Matthew's supposed conservatism relating his view of the Law to "fulfillment." Jesus certainly does not abolish the Law, but on the other hand he does not say he came to "enforce" it.<sup>46</sup> Nor does Jesus

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<sup>42</sup>France, Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher, p. 193.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>See Ibid. for a discussion.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

assert that he came to obey the Law as it stands. Beyond that one need not go for now but will pick up this idea again in the exegetical section. We may say for now that Matthew's (Jesus') theology of Law exhibits a certain tension, but the tension is not between the extremes of abolition on the one hand and complete unchanged obedience on the other. Rather the tension is between relative degrees of change with the coming of Jesus to fulfill the Law.

To summarize this section, Matthew's themes of fulfillment and eschatology, christology, and Law can all be related to each other.<sup>47</sup> The concept of fulfillment in the person of Jesus implies the inauguration of a new eschatological age with his coming. Harkening back to Chapter 3, one may say the Kingdom has arrived. This new period of salvation - history, overlapping with the Old Age, further implies change in the Law, but not abolition. The use and content of the Law may change but not the essential validity of the Mosaic Law.

### C. The Sermon on the Mount

According to Robert Guelich, the Sermon on the Mount stands within the complex of Matthew 5-9.<sup>48</sup> Chapters 5-9

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<sup>47</sup>We are excluding here a discussion of Matthew's ecclesiology since it is not directly relevant to this thesis.

<sup>48</sup>Robert A. Guelich, The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding. Waco: TX: Word, 1982, p. 27.

with the respective introduction (4:23-25) and closing (9:35) are said to set forth Jesus as Messiah.<sup>49</sup> Luz takes the Lord's Prayer (6:7-15) as the central text of the Sermon with the concept of the "kingdom of heaven," governing the entire sermon.<sup>50</sup> The Sermon on the Mount is the first of five great discourses in Matthew, and is itself contained in Chapters 5-7.

As for the theology of the Sermon, Guelich asserts that "above all else, the Sermon on the Mount makes a Christological statement."<sup>51</sup> The coming of Jesus Messiah fulfills the Old Testament for the coming of the age of salvation and the coming into history of the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>52</sup> Such a theme is consistent with Matthew's overall theology. The ethical conduct demanded by the Sermon is evidence of one's relationship to the Father or of God's sovereign rule.<sup>53</sup> Such conduct is that of a disciple, but is not the means of achieving the new relationship of salvation.<sup>54</sup> Bad conduct means simply that there is, to that extent, no evidence of the New Age.

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ulrich Luz, Matthew 1-7: A Commentary. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 213.

<sup>51</sup>Guelich, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

Also in the Sermon there appears to be a tension between the present and the future.<sup>55</sup> Eschatologically the sermon seems to indicate the dawn of the new age of salvation. Jesus declares the subjects of the Beatitudes "blessed" now and he demands conduct now befitting a member of the Kingdom, implying the Kingdom presence.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, the Sermon speaks of a future consummation of the Kingdom (5:19-20, 29-30; 6:2-6, 16-18; 7:15, 13-14, 19, 21-23, 24-27).

Ulrich Luz adds that the Sermon on the Mount aims at Christian practice.<sup>57</sup> He argues further that the Sermon's ethics are actually practicable.<sup>58</sup> But although its ethics are demands, grace also occurs. Human resolve is not therefore the basis of behavior for disciples.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, the Sermon does express God's will fully and in an uncorrupted manner.

#### 1. Matthew 5:13-16: Salt and Light

Matthew 5:13-16 is the immediately preceding cotext of Matthew 5:17-20, and stands also within the Sermon on the Mount. A question immediately arises about the relationship

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<sup>55</sup>See Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>57</sup>Luz, op. cit., p. 214.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

between these two pericopes. Some have treated the two as separate, independently circulating logia which Matthew placed together to suit his theological purpose. Such a view seems somewhat overstated, but even so, it would be unwise to press the significance of this context too far. Jesus himself may have simply changed subjects.

Nevertheless it is appropriate to seek a connection, if one can be found, in order to illuminate Matthew 5:17-20.

At first reading Matthew 5:13-16 does not seem at all related to 17-20. But upon further reflection one might discern a connection. Several scholars see this pericope as speaking of discipleship in the Kingdom.<sup>60</sup> Guelich goes further to assert that vv. 13-16 deal with the disciples' mission in the world.<sup>61</sup> In 5:13, Matthew uses the salt metaphor. The disciple stands before God with a mission for the earth (ὡμείς εἶστε τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς). The disciple is salt metaphorically. As such he has a responsibility to do what salt would do for food.<sup>62</sup> One may become "useless" (μωρανθῆ) as a disciple. It is even possible that one may cease being a disciple and stand under judgement (5:13 b,c).

Matthew 5:14-16 uses the metaphor of light (φῶς) to describe discipleship. As a city on a hill cannot be hidden

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<sup>60</sup>For example, see Carson, op. cit., pp. 138-240, and Guelich, op. cit., pp. 119 ff.

<sup>61</sup>Guelich, op. cit., pp. 125-126.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

or a light hidden under a bowl, so the disciple ought to take his calling seriously. He is to bring light into a world in darkness because of sin.<sup>63</sup>

The disciple's "light" is to shine with a certain quality of life and conduct (good deeds = καλὰ ἔργα).<sup>64</sup> This life and conduct manifest the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Kingdom norms work out in the lives of Kingdom heirs to produce Kingdom witness.<sup>65</sup>

The link between 5:13-16 and 5:17-20 is in the nature of the disciples' mission as set out in 5:14-16; especially v. 16. "Good deeds" or works are synonymous with the "greater righteousness" called for in 5:20.<sup>66</sup> The "light" of 5:14 is good deeds. The conduct and life of the disciple are indicative of the presence of salvation.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, far from obviating the Law, discipleship and concomitant καλὰ ἔργα are consistent with the Law.

## 2) Matthew 5:21-48: The Antitheses

Matthew 5:21-48 contains the so-called Antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount, so-called because six times Jesus' demands stand in contrast to the requirements of the Old

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 128; and Carson, op. cit., p. 139-140.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., pp. 128-129.

<sup>65</sup>Carson, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>66</sup>See Guelich, op. cit., p. 130.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., pp. 130-131.

Testament Law. Each Antithesis begins with a formula ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη; and follows with an antithetical response, ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν.<sup>68</sup> But some writers have correctly observed that the term "antitheses" may be more appropriate for some of these constructions than for others.<sup>69</sup> In three of the passages, the counterstatement surpasses rather than opposes the initial Mosaic Law premise (5:21-22; 27-28; 33-37). Even 5:38-39 may not be a true antithetical construction. Finally, in 5:31-32 and 5:43-44 the counter-statement may not be negating the Law per se but some misuse of it by the Pharisees.<sup>70</sup>

Various opinions have been set forth about the Antitheses. Some have seen them to be a new law from a New Moses. Others view them as representing Jesus' final interpretation of the Law or a "Messianic Torah." Still others see the Antitheses as the early church's attempt to radicalize the Law. A fourth view is that the Antitheses are the revelation of the true will of God the Father in Jesus Christ.<sup>71</sup> In all cases the demands of 5:21-48 "set

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<sup>68</sup>See Ibid., pp. 176-177, and Davies and Allison, op. cit.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>70</sup>There are many differing opinions among scholars on these Antitheses. For example, see Ibid., pp. 224-226 on 5:43-44. See also Luz, op. cit., p. 274 and Davies and Allison, op. cit., p. 504.

<sup>71</sup>See Guelich, p. 256 for a discussion of each view. See also Davies and Allison, op. cit., pp. 506-509.

standards of ethical conduct that either supersede or set aside those of the Law.<sup>72</sup>

Many have believed that the ethics of the Antitheses are impossible to carry out and have made them irrelevant in various ways or postponed them to the future. What exactly do they say and are they relevant? First, the Antitheses bear witness to who Jesus is and belong to the "Gospel of the Kingdom."<sup>73</sup> They indicate that God is acting in history to establish his rule in Christ.

Second, ethically the Antitheses "point out the fallacy of believing that a legalistic keeping of the Law qualifies one for the Kingdom."<sup>74</sup> Positively, the Antitheses call a disciple to a new kind of life, which concurs with the present "age of salvation." The Antitheses are serious ethical demands but must be "used" correctly.

Third, the Antitheses are indeed "ethics of the kingdom."<sup>75</sup> But the Kingdom is present in the person of Jesus, and the New Age has arrived. God's redemptive rule has come into history in Jesus Christ. The "greater righteousness" of 5:20 in fact corresponds to this ethic -

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 261.



life lived in terms consistent with the presence of the Kingdom.<sup>76</sup>

Finally, the Antitheses "demand conduct indicative of the presence of the Kingdom as the necessary prerequisite for entering the Kingdom in the future."<sup>77</sup> The Antitheses, which may be the "greater righteousness" of 5:20 are both the product of the Kingdom's presence and the basis for future entrance into it (see also Mt. 7:21). This creates a tension in the use of the Antitheses, but not a legalistic tension between a legalistic Mosaic Law-keeping of a new law of Jesus.<sup>78</sup> The Antitheses, as Luz has said, are both demand and gift.<sup>79</sup>

The relevance or connection of 5:21-48 for 5:17-20, in light of the foregoing analysis, seems fairly straightforward. For many scholars 5:17-20 is a preface to the Antitheses.<sup>80</sup> The Antitheses elaborate upon Jesus' statement in 5:17 (ἡλθὼν . . . πληρῶσαι) as well as the ἐγὼ λέγω ὑμῖν of 5:18, 20.<sup>81</sup> Another way to say this is to say

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid.; the Antitheses are the product of the presence of the Kingdom.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>78</sup>See Luz, op. cit., p. 215.

<sup>79</sup>See Luz., op. cit., p. 215.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>81</sup>See Davies and Allison, op. cit., p. 565 and Neil McEleney, "Principles of the Sermon on the Mount" CBQ 41 (1979), p. 555.

that the righteousness of 5:20 is unfolded in 5:21-48.<sup>82</sup> A similar statement about the standard of life and conduct comes at the end of the Antitheses: Ἔσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλει ὡς ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τέλειός ἐστιν (5:48). Thus, the Antitheses are "framed" by an introduction and a summary.

This examination of the cotext(s) of Matthew 5:17-20 in a sense has been left incomplete since it has omitted much discussion of the meaning of 5:17-20 itself. But 5:17-20 is the subject of this thesis and is the pericope to be interpreted. Such a dilemma points out the relationship of text to cotext in exegesis (much like the relation of a single word in a pericope to all other words). The text gives meaning to the cotext just as the cotext contributes meaning to the text. Therefore the conclusion of this chapter must of necessity be taken to be tentative.

Furthermore, we have not yet examined the context of Matthew 5:17-20, the task of the following chapters. Social, cultural, and historical-religious factors will complete our three-fold base of exegesis and enable us to discern authorial, textual, and perceived meaning of 5:17-20 - all of which should converge consistently to give overall meaning.

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<sup>82</sup>Meier, op. cit., p. 123.

Chapter 6: Context I  
Context of Matthew 5:17-20  
The Mosaic Law in Judaism with its Verbal  
and Conceptual Parallels to Matthew 5:17-20

This chapter is the first of two chapters dealing with the concept of context, the sociological (cultural) and historical setting of a text.<sup>1</sup> Although it is possible to examine total context with reference to the broad scope of New Testament period backgrounds, for purposes of the exegesis of Matthew 5:17-20, it is only necessary to extend our analysis to prevailing thought about the Mosaic Law in first century Judaism and the New Testament. Specifically, we are interested in this chapter in the Jewish view of the perdurability, content, and character of the Law both before the Messianic Age (the Intertestamental period) and after its coming.

To attempt to discern these views we are compelled, for the most part, to rely on writings from the post-New Testament era. These include the Rabbinic literature and the Pseudepigrapha. But we will also refer to the Apocryphal books and the pre-New Testament Pseudepigraphical literature. These extra-Biblical sources may give very important insight into the meaning of Matthew 5:17-20. But great caution must also be exercised.

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<sup>1</sup>See Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation. Downer's Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1989, pp. 16, 39-44.

First, we must bear in mind the differences, not merely the similarities, between Christianity and Judaism. Because the New Testament is a Christian collection of writings, the ideas within it are not simply "adapted Judaism." Likewise because the Rabbinic literature for example tells us something about the Law that is verbally similar to Matthew 5:17-20, this does not mean it is necessarily conceptually parallel.

Second, one must be critical in the use of extra-Biblical literature because of dating problems. Sandmel, for example, has warned that in using Rabbinic literature, parallels to the New Testament, as presented lead to the comparison of first century Hellenistic literature with fourth and fifth century Jewish literature.<sup>2</sup> It has even been suggested that some of the Jewish literature has been "corrupted" by Christian redactors. Rabbinic literature, though generally not tampered with, was transmitted, written, and edited between about 200 B.C.E. and 500 C.E. and is extremely diverse in form and content.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, one must use discretion in sorting out and utilizing this literature. With these warnings in mind, we will begin our survey below.

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<sup>2</sup>See Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," Journal of Biblical Literature 81 (1962), pp. 9-10. See also Mikeal Parsons, "The Critical Use of the Rabbinic Literature in New Testament Studies," Pers Rel St 12/2 (1985), pp. 85-102.

<sup>3</sup>Parsons, "Critical Use," op. cit., p. 90.

### A. The Character and Content of the Law

The issue in this section is whether the Mosaic Law, in the period under review, is thought to be rigid or flexible. In other words, was the Law considered susceptible of selective modification or even abolition? Implied in this issue is the question of whether the Mosaic Law was considered a unity, that is, an indivisible whole, or a divisible set of statutes, something capable of being "carved up," in which case some parts could be discarded and/or replaced and others modified to reflect differing circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

#### 1. Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

In the intertestamentary literature the Law is said to have assumed a pre-eminent place.<sup>5</sup> Righteousness is increasingly viewed as equivalent to Law-keeping (see e.g. Tobit 14:9). In addition, ritual commandments appear to be emphasized: sabbath (Jud 8:6; 1 Macc 1:39; 2 Macc 6:4-6); feasts (1 Macc 4:59; 2 Macc 1:9); sacrifices (Jud 4:14; 2 Macc 1:8); tithes (Tobit 1:6; Jud 11:13); dietary laws (Jud 11:12; Tobit 1:10-11); circumcision (1 Macc 2:46; 2 Macc

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<sup>4</sup>As we shall argue, the "differing circumstances" referred to here are related to the coming of the Kingdom, the "New Age" and the overlap of the Old and New Ages with Christ's coming.

<sup>5</sup>Robert Banks, Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition. Cambridge: University Press, 1975, p. 50.

6:10); and ablutions (Jud 12:7).<sup>6</sup> Banks asserts that in particular the books of Tobit, Judith, and 2 Maccabees show tendencies towards the later Pharisaic interpretation and use of the Law, while 1 Maccabees inclines towards Sadduceanism.<sup>7</sup>

This same concern for the Law is found in Apocalyptic literature, both Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal (2 Bar 38:4; 44:3,7; 54:14). References to ceremonial commandments are again frequent, especially in the Testaments, 2 Baruch, and Jubilees.<sup>8</sup> But one does also find νόμος linked with social virtues in much of this literature.<sup>9</sup> Again one finds a significant emphasis on ceremonial commandments, but other factors are said to have inhibited the drift toward nomism.<sup>10</sup> In addition, this wisdom literature, especially 4 Maccabees and the Letter to Aristeeas, also emphasizes the "ethical character of the commandments."<sup>11</sup> In other words, there is also some emphasis on inward motives and love for

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<sup>6</sup>See Ibid., pp. 50-51. In my own survey I noticed an increasing tendency to elevate ceremonial commandments.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>8</sup>See e.g. Test Rev 3:8-9; Test Jud 18:3-6; Test Iss 5:1 ff; Test Dan 5:1 ff; Test Gad 3:1 ff; Jub 36:3 ff; Sib Or 3.237 ff; 1 Enoch 91:3 ff; 2 Enoch 9:1 ff, 10:4 ff, 34:1 ff, for examples of lists of moral virtues associated with the Law.

<sup>9</sup>Sometimes wisdom = law (Ecclus, Prologue, 15:1, 19:20, 21:11).

<sup>10</sup>See Banks, Jesus and the Law, p. 54.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

God.<sup>12</sup> So although the Law is increasingly central, we do not see the Law in its casuistic nature in these writings, at least not as we will see it in later Judaism.<sup>13</sup>

Regarding the unity of the Mosaic Law during this period, there appear to be two views. One claims that the Law is not thought of as a collection of commandments, but as a whole. Sin is defined generally as apostasy rather than transgression of individual commandments.<sup>14</sup> Sanders asserts that the unitary nature of the Law is the standard Jewish view during this time.<sup>15</sup>

Others have opposed the unitary view, pointing to the emphasis on single (especially ritual) commandments.<sup>16</sup> But in response to this, one could argue that since the whole Law came from God (as Judaism believed) then to break any part is to break the whole.<sup>17</sup> Therefore the Law would be considered as a piece of glass which when struck at one

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 55. See Ep Ar 168; 229 for example.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>See e.g. D. Rossler, Gesetz and Geschichte. Neukirchen, 1960, noted in Banks, Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>15</sup>E.P. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985, p. 56.

<sup>16</sup>Banks, Jesus and the Law, op. cit., p. 53. (Ass Mos 3:12; 8:5; 9:4, 6; 12:1 ff; Jub 1:9, 14, 24; 2:33; 3:31; 23:16; 24:11; 32:10; Test Reu 3:8; 6:8; Lev 9:6-7; 14:4 ff; Jud 13:1; 16:3-4; Zeb 3:4; Haph 8:7 ff; Ash 4:5; 5:4; 6:1, 3; Enoch 59:3 ff; 68:6 ff; 2 Bar 5:7; 35:4; 44:3; 48:22; 57:2; 61:6; 66:2 ff; 77:4; 79:2; 82:6; 84:17 ff; 86:2 to mention a few).

<sup>17</sup>Compare James 2:10.

point breaks at every point. We should also note that this issue is not unrelated to that of the future status of the Law in the Messianic Age. If the Law could be modified or added to, then it would not be considered unitary.

## 2. Rabbinic Sources

Caution is again urged in relying too heavily on Rabbinic literature, given its late date. We do not know to what extent the thinking on the Law in Jesus' day may have been modified later. In any event, it is argued that for the rabbis, the Law not only moves into the central position, but it becomes the sole object of concentration.<sup>18</sup> The whole of Scripture comes to be regarded as Torah so that parts of the Pentateuch not having legal character are also called  $\pi\tau\tau\acute{\iota}\lambda$  (See Sif. Deut 1.1; 11.21).  $\pi\tau\tau\acute{\iota}\lambda$  may even be used to refer to non-Pentateuchal writings (See Sif. Deut. 11.26; Mek. Ex. 15.8), although apparently the Pentateuch was considered supreme.<sup>19</sup>

All of life is covered by the Law in the Rabbinic literature. This does not mean that only the study and philosophical speculation about commandments is the primary

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<sup>18</sup>Banks, Jesus and the Law, op. cit., p. 58. Note Pirque Aboth 1.2 in Charles Taylor, Sayings of the Jewish Fathers Comprising Pirque Aboth. New York: KTAU, 1969, p. 12

<sup>19</sup>See The Mishnah, ed. by Herbert Danby. Oxford: University Press, 1933, which has extensive discussions centering on the Pentateuch.



goal. Rather the doing of practical deeds must flow from study of תורה.<sup>20</sup>

Also during this period of the Rabbinic literature, the Oral Torah came to be thought of as on par with the written Law (see Pirque Aboth 1.1). In fact, many believed the Oral Torah had arisen from Moses himself. This "fence" around the Torah, represented by the traditions grew into a complex network of legal regulations.

Furthermore righteousness is defined in accordance with the standards of תורה.<sup>21</sup> All legal requirements are considered of equal importance, though there seems to be some notion of almsgiving, ritual commands, and Sabbath-keeping as claiming greater priority.<sup>22</sup>

This is not to say that there is in the Rabbinic writings no concern for motives or intentions or that there is an absence of exhortation to a heart-devotion toward God. Obedience to the Law is sometimes spoken of in terms of love for God (Pirque Aboth 1.2; Tract Derech Eretz-Zuta 1.5). One also sees the emotion of joy connected to obedience to Torah (See Tract Derech Eretz-Zuta 4.3). Despite the presence of elements of inner devotion however, the

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<sup>20</sup>See Shmuel Safrai, The Literature of the Sages. First Part: Oral Torah, Halakha, Mishna, Tosefta, Talmud, External Tractates. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987, p. 106.

<sup>21</sup>See Banks, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

necessity of absolute obedience to each commandment remains.<sup>23</sup>

Robert Banks asserts, however, that despite the casuistry of the Rabbinic literature, the severity of the Law was held in check by two factors.<sup>24</sup> First, provision was made for "amplification of the Law to meet new or changed circumstances" including a relaxing or even an annulling of some legislation (See e.g. Gittin 4.3 ff; Ger 9.5). Second, some areas of life, e.g. philanthropy and filial piety, were left to the conscience and were not regulated by Torah.<sup>25</sup>

Related to this issue is the idea of relaxation and/or annulment of specific commands in the Messianic Age. Since the Law was given by God to Moses, it was believed to be immutable. Nevertheless, in the Rabbinic literature one does see the anticipation of modifications to the Law in the Messianic Age. W.D. Davies has conveniently classified these changes:<sup>26</sup>

- 1) Passages suggesting cessation of certain enactments concerning Festivals, etc. (Lev Rab 9.7; Yalqut on Prov. 9.2).

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<sup>23</sup>See Banks, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>26</sup>W.D. Davies, Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come. Philadelphia: SBL, 1952, pp. 54 ff.

- 2) Passages suggesting changes in the laws concerning things clean and unclean, etc. (ritual commandments) (Lev Rab 13.3; Midrash Tehellim 196.7).
- 3) Passages implying or expressing the expectation of changes in the Torah, though the precise nature of the change is ambiguous. These modifications were to occur within the context of the existing Law and presuppose its continuing validity.<sup>27</sup>
- 4) Passages suggesting a New Law in the Messianic Age (see again Lev Rab 13.3 which is subject to more than one interpretation).<sup>28</sup>

Besides passages indicating possible modifications in Torah, there are many indications that in the Messianic Age the Torah would be better explained and comprehended, but not changed in content (See e.g. Numbers Rabbah 19.6).<sup>29</sup> Such a view is consistent with an interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20 that would make πληρῶσαι refer to the idea of explication.

Finally, passages in the Rabbinic literature should be mentioned which apparently refer to abrogation of the Law in the Messianic Age.<sup>30</sup> Two such passages in the Babylonian

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<sup>27</sup>See Ibid., pp. 64-66.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 59-60. See Sifre Deut 33.21.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 66 ff.

<sup>30</sup>See Ibid., pp. 78 ff.

Talmud are Sanhedrin 97b and Abodah Zorah 9b in which the "period of the Torah" is contrasted with the "period of the Messiah." A mutual exclusion of the two periods is clearly implied, though not all scholars agree on such an interpretation.<sup>31</sup> This idea is consistent with some interpretations of Matthew 5:18 with their ambiguous εως clauses implying that the Law period may end in the future Messianic Age.<sup>32</sup>

The evidence in support of a modification of the Law in the Messianic Age is both ambiguous and conflicting in the Rabbinic literature. More than likely this fact is merely an indication that Judaism had not yet become uniform during this period or that the passages cited are by nature ambiguous. The nature and character of Torah in the Messianic Age is therefore open to debate. But at least one can see that Jewish thought may not have been monolithic. If more than one line of thinking about the Law existed then the interpreter of Matthew 5:17-20, and the rest of the New Testament for that matter, should not be too quick to create an antithesis between so-called Jewish legalism or casuistry and a definition of πληρῶσαι in Matthew 5:17 which would have Jesus' mission to be to internalize the Law, effectively abolishing its external commands.

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<sup>31</sup>See Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>32</sup>Since Jesus spoke these words, the εως clauses might be said to refer to his death and resurrection inaugurating the New Age.

## B. The Division of the Mosaic Law

The question in this section is whether the literature of Judaism viewed the Mosaic Law as a unity, an indivisible whole, or whether the Law was considered susceptible of division or classification. This issue is related to the previous section since modification of the Law implies that some "parts" remain valid while others fall away as less important or fulfilled. The issue of unity is important because of its bearing upon the interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20. If the Law is considered indivisible then it is less plausible, though not foreclosed as an option, to speak of Jesus' mission to reiterate the "moral" aspect of the Law while abolishing ceremonial commandments.<sup>33</sup> If the Law was considered divisible then one may be justified in asserting that Jesus' statement that he did not come to abolish the Law refers to the moral law only (and possibly the civil aspect of the Law). The ceremonial commandments would be abolished.

Of course, the analysis here is of Jewish thought, not necessarily Biblical teaching. As we cautioned earlier one must be aware of possible discontinuities between Judaism and Christianity. One cannot uncritically transfer the Jewish teaching into the Christian New Testament and make the New Testament passage fit Judaism. Nevertheless,

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<sup>33</sup>Implying a traditional distinction among moral, ceremonial, and civil law.

Judaism does represent an important social-religious context for Matthew 5:17-20 and must therefore be taken seriously.

### 1. Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

In the intertestamental literature one finds references to both individual commandments and to the Mosaic Law as a whole, as we have already indicated. Regarding the unity of the Law, it is possible to find evidence of the Law as an indivisible whole (see e.g. James 2:10-11 is the light of this idea) with sin being defined generally as apostasy and not the breaking of individual commandments. Some scholars, however, have pointed to the emphasis on single commandments, especially ritual commandments, implying a divisibility of the Law (See e.g. Ass Mos 3.12; 8.5, 9.4, 6; 12:10 ff; Jub 1.9, 14, 24; Test Rev 3.8; 6.8; Lev 9:6-7; 14.4 ff; Jud 13.1; 16.3-4; Zeb 3.4; Naph 8.7 ff; Ash 4.5; 2 Enoch 59.3 ff; 2 Bar 5.7; 35.4; 66.2 ff).<sup>34</sup>

If then one sees an emphasis on single commands, is it possible to argue from this fact to a division in the Law which Jesus observed and which would be applicable to Matthew 5:17-20? It has been argued that Jesus opposed the "ritual" commands while upholding the "moral" law. Sanders argues, however, that from the time of Jesus onward there was no exception to the idea of the Mosaic Law as unitary

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<sup>34</sup>See e.g. A. Nissen, "Tora und Geschichte im Spätjudentum," New Testament 9 (1967), pp. 241-277.

and indivisible, though different groups emphasized different parts.<sup>35</sup> But the passages under review here are pre-Rabbinic. It is possible that prior to Rabbinic times, the Law was viewed as divisible at least for purposes of emphasis if not in contemplation of abolition of parts.<sup>36</sup> Ultimately it will be argued that even if the Law is considered divisible into its constituent "aspects," this is not an adequate solution for explaining Jesus' strong statement in Matthew 5:17 as opposed to other instances where he apparently opposed certain statutes (e.g. food laws and Sabbath commandments).

## 2. Rabbinic Literature

We have noted already that scholars have developed conflicting views regarding the unity of the Mosaic Law in Jesus' day and in the Rabbinic literature.<sup>37</sup> Some argue, based on Jesus' opposition to Sabbath and food laws, that Jesus distinguished ritual and moral commandments.<sup>38</sup> If he did, then Matthew 5:17 may be interpreted to mean that Jesus

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<sup>35</sup>E.P. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985, p. 247, and note 13, p. 397.

<sup>36</sup>In fact, as we have already seen, some Rabbinic literature made de facto distinctions in the Law anticipating modification or abolition of some statutes. Sanders, *Ibid.*, p. 248, contends that these Rabbinic interpretations did not deny individual statutes.

<sup>37</sup>See *Ibid.*, pp. 248-249.

<sup>38</sup>J.D. G. Dunn, Jesus and the Spirit. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975, p. 43.

did not come to abolish the moral law, consisting of timeless, transcendent principles, but he did oppose the ceremonial law which was temporal.

Sanders has, as we have seen, objected to this conclusion. He asserts that in the Rabbinic literature there is no warrant for making distinctions in the Mosaic Law.<sup>39</sup> The Jews allegorized parts of the Law so as not to keep it literally and some aspects were "interpreted away," though not by asserting that the Law was wrong.<sup>40</sup> But the Law is still considered adequate. In fact, the expansion and reduction of different parts of the Law was seen as necessary to address new issues and questions as they arose in Jewish life.<sup>41</sup> Could Jesus "sovereignly" have made distinctions in the Law even though these were not envisioned by Pharisaic Judaism?<sup>42</sup> Of course, this is a possibility, but if Jesus did divide the Law, the practice probably could not be explained by reference to Jewish practice.<sup>43</sup> There seems to be no explicit warrant in late Judaism for dividing the Law into its moral, ceremonial, and

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<sup>39</sup>Sanders, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-249, esp. p. 248.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>41</sup>See Shmuel Safrai, ed., The Literature of the Sages, note 20, pp. 51-52.

<sup>42</sup>As Dunn, Jesus and the Spirit, *op. cit.*, p. 43, argues.

<sup>43</sup>And some, e.g. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-249, argue that Jesus did not oppose the "ceremonial" statutes in any event.



judicial components. This is not to say that the Law was not divided and some commandments explained or interpreted away or modified by subtle and somewhat dubious exegetical methods. But the results of Jewish methodology were a different kind of division than that of the later Christian church.

### C. Conclusion

By the time of Jesus, the Law in Judaism had become central in the life of Israel. Furthermore, both the written and oral Torah were venerated and treated as equal. In addition, the focus had shifted to a more casuistic approach to the Law, though devotion to God was not totally abandoned. It would be a mistake to view Judaism of this time purely as a "works religion." Nevertheless, the Law has the place of primacy.

It also appears that the Mosaic Law or  $\pi\lambda\acute{\alpha}\tau\eta\sigma$  was viewed as more or less indivisible, that is, as unitary, at least in theory. In practice, we cannot be entirely certain since the evidence is ambiguous. The Law is said to be eternal and all of it adequate. Yet through various interpretational devices, individual commandments were either modified or dropped altogether. Nevertheless, we do

not see any systematic division of the Law into classes of commandments as in the later church.<sup>44</sup>

What are the implications of these findings for the interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20? First, we must understand that Jesus, though of a divine as well as human nature, did not live in a social-religious vacuum. Therefore, one cannot a priori disconnect Jewish attitudes toward the Law from Jesus' attitude. Of course, Jesus is not required to follow Jewish thinking on the Law and it appears that he does not do so in every case. But we must take seriously the Jewish "theology" of the Mosaic Law.

More specifically, and with the previous statement in mind, we will consider the ramification of the Jewish (especially Rabbinic) conception of the character and content of the Law for the meaning of Matthew 5:17-20. For Judaism the Law was considered basically eternal. However, modifications were foreseen in the Messianic Age. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus, consistent with Judaism, asserts that he had not come to abolish this same Law.<sup>45</sup> He continues in 5:18 that not even a part of the Law will pass away (be abolished?) "until heaven and earth pass away" or "until all things come to pass." These two <sup>of</sup> clauses may relate to

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<sup>44</sup>As e.g. Melancthon, Corpus Reformatorum, XXI, p. 587 who makes a threefold distinction of "leges morales, ceremoniales, et forenses iudiciales" (See his Loci Communes, 1555 ed., trans. and ed. by Clyde Manschreck. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965, pp. 83 ff.

<sup>45</sup>Although it appears that Judaism comprehended both written and oral Torah.

the Messianic Age. Of this we cannot be sure. Still, the possibility must be taken seriously.

Finally, we have seen that Judaism did conceive of a certain "selective annulment" of specific commandments with the coming of the Messianic Age. But it also treated the Law as essentially indivisible or unitary. The traditional division of the Law into moral, ceremonial, and judicial commandments appears to have been unknown. It would not therefore be premature to question those interpretations of Matthew 5:17 which view Jesus as retaining only the moral law while he abolishes the ceremonial law in other places in the gospels.

Chapter 7: Context II  
The Mosaic Law in the New Testament Generally

The New Testament represents a broader context for Matthew 5:17-20. It will not be possible to deal fully with every instance in the New Testament where the Mosaic Law is at issue. Nevertheless, we will treat the more critical passages and attempt to develop an overall theology of the Law in the New Testament. The doctrine of inerrancy does not permit an interpreter to treat the other New Testament writings as mere developments or even contradictions of Jesus' teaching. They are authoritatively equivalent to the synoptics and to Matthew 5:17-20 and may therefore help to clarify our own pericope.

The following sections will examine the Law in the Synoptics, John, the Pauline epistles, and James.<sup>1</sup> Again, this division is not intended to convey the notion that the New Testament writers contradict each other on the Law, but is merely a convenient methodological convention. It should also be mentioned that some of the passages considered are themselves very controversial and difficult to interpret. Even after these passages have been examined we may be no closer to clarifying their meaning and they may not therefore contribute significantly to the understanding of Matthew 5:17-20.

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<sup>1</sup>Including Hebrews under Paul's writings.

### A. Law in the Synoptic Gospels

The term νόμος occurs eight times in Matthew, nine times in Luke, and is absent in Mark's Gospel. It generally refers to the Pentateuch, in particular to its legal content (See e.g. Mt. 7:12; 12:5; 22:36-40; 23:33; Lk. 2:22, 23, 24, 27, 39; 10:26; 16:17). The term may also refer to the prophetic aspect of the Law (e.g. Mt. 11:13), but it never refers to the oral law, which is described as ἡ παράδοσις τῶν πρεσβυτέρων (Mt. 15:2f; Mk. 7:15f).<sup>2</sup> Despite the paucity of the term νόμος itself in the synoptics, the Law problem is a significant issue even where the term does not occur. The Law problem arises in the context of Jesus' attitude to customs and traditions of the Pharisees and in debates over table fellowship, the Sabbath, and purity laws, as well as the divorce issue.<sup>3</sup>

Examining first those passages where νόμος is used, we may eliminate five instances as irrelevant (Lk. 2:22, 23, 24, 27, 39 in the Infancy Narrative). This leaves, besides Mt. 5:17-18, Matthew 7:12; 12:5; 22:36, 40, 23:23; Lk. 10:26, and 16:17. Matthew 7:12, referring to the principle of reciprocity, tells us nothing about Jesus' attitude to the Law. Matthew 22:36,40 and Luke 10:26 are parallel

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<sup>2</sup>See Robert Banks, Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition. Cambridge. University Press, 1975, p. 89.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 91 ff.

passages and may be treated as one. We are now left with only four instances.

In Matthew 12:5, the issue is over the Sabbath. Jesus' disciples were scolded by the Pharisees for picking grain on the Sabbath when they became hungry. In verse 5, Jesus mentions approvingly that the priests in the temple "break (=  $\beta\epsilon\beta\eta\lambda\acute{\omicron}\omega$  = desecrate or profane) the Sabbath and are innocent." In vv. 6-8, Jesus tells the Pharisees that he is greater than the temple, that he desires compassion over casuistry, and that the "Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (12:8). The service of priests was a recognized exception to the Sabbath law (Lev 24:8f; Num 28:9f) but the disciple's conduct was by no means parallel. Rather, it appears that since Jesus thought of himself (rightly) as greater than the temple, his disciples, in the service of this greater one, could also "break" the Sabbath.<sup>4</sup> The parallel passage in Mark also includes the statement that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath (Mk 2:23-28).

Is Jesus radically abolishing the Sabbath laws? Certainly Jesus possesses personal authority over the Sabbath.<sup>5</sup> One could argue in several directions here: (1) Jesus was merely castigating Rabbinic legal interpretations; (2) Jesus was affirming the essential character of the Law but allowing its temporary aspects to fall away; (3) Jesus

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<sup>4</sup>See Ibid., pp. 116-119.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

abrogated the Sabbath; (4) Jesus was allowing for occasional breaches of Sabbath regulations for special needs; (5) Jesus employed his authority over the Sabbath to bring into focus its fundamental and intended purpose.<sup>6</sup> With the last interpretation, Jesus' presence has inaugurated a new situation, a new era. It is very difficult to adopt a decisive interpretation regarding this pericope. One should not, however, see an outright abrogation of the Sabbath, but rather an elucidation of its original purpose and an indication that Jesus' teaching takes precedence.

Matthew 22:36 and forward is concerned with the Love Commandments. After stating the importance of the command to love God and to love one's neighbor, Jesus asserts in verse 40 that "the whole Law and the Prophets" depend on these commandments (literally κρέματα<sup>1</sup> = hangs). In this passage, Jesus does not abrogate the Law but appears to summarize it.<sup>7</sup>

Matthew 23:23 is in the context of Jesus "woes" against the Scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 23:1-36). Besides verse 23, the entire passage is of some use for interpretation of Jesus' attitude toward the Law. Jesus begins his polemic in verse 2 by stating that the scribes and Pharisees "have seated themselves in the chair of Moses" (that is, as

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>7</sup>But see Ibid., pp. 168-169. One should be careful here not to see reductionism in the Law.

authoritative interpreters of the Law). As a result, in verse 3, Jesus commands to do what they say, but not to follow their example of conduct. At first glance this appears to be an endorsement of either the Mosaic Law as a whole or of the Pharisaic teaching on the Law.<sup>8</sup> In light of later statements Jesus cannot be endorsing the Pharisaic interpretations wholesale.<sup>9</sup>

This brings us to verse 23 where Jesus speaks of the custom of tithing, which is grounded in the Mosaic Law (See Lev. 27:30; Num. 18:21; Deut. 12:6; 14:22). The Rabbinic literature also included the tithing of dill (<sup>ν</sup>ἀνηθον) and cumin (κ<sup>ι</sup>κκμινον).<sup>10</sup> In concentrating on these minutiae, Jesus alleges that the Pharisees have neglected the "weightier provisions of the law" such as justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These more important foci of the Law were to be observed (23:23c) "without neglecting the others [κακείνα = those ones]." The upshot of this verse is that the Pharisees have concentrated on insignificant elements of their tradition while neglecting the Mosaic Law in its

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 176-177.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 178.



essence.<sup>11</sup> Jesus does not criticize the Law itself, but regulations derived from it.<sup>12</sup>

Before leaving the Synoptics we will examine three other passages dealing with the Law where the term *vomos* is not explicitly used. These are Mark 3:1-6, Matthew 9:3-12 (parallel Mark 10:1-12) and Mark 7:1-23. In Mark 3, the issue centers on the healing by Jesus on the Sabbath of a man with a withered hand. The Pharisees were watching Jesus to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath. After he heals the man, Jesus asks the Pharisees whether it is "lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?" (3:4). In Rabbinic practice one could be treated on a Sabbath only if his life were in danger.<sup>13</sup>

Some have thought that this passage presents an abrogation of the Mosaic commandment.<sup>14</sup> Others see this example as "a casuistic justification for healing on the Sabbath."<sup>15</sup> Still others bypass the issue by asserting that no work was done.<sup>16</sup> Finally, at least one writer also

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<sup>11</sup>See *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>12</sup>We will bypass Lk. 16:17 for now since it is a parallel verse to Mt. 5:18.

<sup>13</sup>See Strack-Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch. Munich: Oscar Beck, 1922, I, pp. 623-629.

<sup>14</sup>See e.g. G. Barth, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law" in Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew. London: ET, 1963.

<sup>15</sup>See Banks, Jesus and the Law, op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>16</sup>E.P. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism, op. cit., p. 266.

bypasses the Law by making this incident a call for decision with respect to Jesus' own person and work.<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to note that at Jesus' trial the Sabbath issue did not arise, possibly indicating that to the Pharisees he had not broken the Sabbath law.<sup>18</sup>

Moving to Matthew 19, for the first time we see an apparent conflict over a "moral" commandment. Jesus is asked about his stance on divorce. Jesus' answer (in 19:9) seems to be to forbid divorce except for the case of *πορνεία*. The Pharisees seem to have argued that divorce was freely allowed upon fulfillment of certain procedural conditions (see 19:7). Going back to the basis of this issue, Deuteronomy 24:1-4, it appears that there was no Mosaic statute providing for divorce, but that Deuteronomy 24 was a bare concession whose central purpose was to deal with the propriety of an ex-husband re-marrying his former wife after divorcing her. Even if one takes Deuteronomy 24:1-4 as a statute, it is only a permissive law. In forbidding divorce, therefore, Jesus simply went beyond the Law. Greater strictness than the Law requires would not be illegal.<sup>19</sup> Hence Jesus did not abrogate the divorce law. Rather, either the Pharisees were wrong in their

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<sup>17</sup>Banks, Jesus and the Law, op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>18</sup>See Ibid., but this idea is somewhat speculative.

<sup>19</sup>See E.P. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism, op. cit., p. 256.

interpretation, as some have suggested (based on Gen. 2), or Jesus extended the Law without abrogating it.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, the issue of ritual impurity arises in Mark 7:1-23 (parallel Matthew 15:1-20). Some of Jesus' disciples were eating bread with κοιναῖς χερσίν (= unclean hands), or unwashed hands (Mk. 7:2). Verses 3 and 4 explain the background of this transgression but place it in the τῆν παράδοσιν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων (= tradition of the elders). In other words, the purity regulations are not originally a part of the Mosaic Law. We should also note that Jesus himself was not accused of law-breaking.

In verse 20, Jesus is said to declare all foods ritually clean. Is Jesus abrogating a ceremonial portion of the Mosaic Law here? If one reads Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 one will quickly see that the purity laws there dealt with eating of and contact with certain life forms or contact of those forms with certain utensils. They were not concerned with routine washings which apparently were a Rabbinic extrapolation. If this is the case, Jesus did not criticize the Law itself but an interpretation of it.<sup>21</sup>

In conclusion, in no instance was there a clear abrogation of any part of the Mosaic Law. The Sabbath issue is the most difficult to address, and it is at worst

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 256-257.

<sup>21</sup>But see E.P. Sanders, Ibid., p. 264.

ambiguous. In the Synoptics, therefore, the evidence seems to point to either a positive view of the Law or a neutrality toward it, with the possibility that the Messianic Age and the person of Christ himself have brought about certain modifications. Abrogation of the Law seems to be an inappropriate term, as does radicalization, or completion.<sup>22</sup> Three other alternatives do recognize both the continuity and discontinuity with the Old Testament. One is that Jesus transcended the Mosaic Law without abrogation. A second view is that Jesus legislated a new Messianic Torah which chronologically replaced the old law. A third possibility is that Jesus fulfilled the Law by means of his obedience to the cross.<sup>23</sup>

#### B. The Law in John

In John's Gospel the term νόμος is used thirteen times while the term does not appear at all in 1, 2, or 3 John (Jn. 1:17, 45, 7:19, 23, 49, 51; 8:5, 17; 10:34; 12:34; 15:25; 18:31; 19:7). Eight of these references are to halakic portions of the Pentateuch, three equate portions of the Psalms with the Law in a prophetic way (10:34; 12:34; 15:25), and in two passages (8:17; 18:31) the reference is to "your law" (see also 10:34), in relation to the Pharisees

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<sup>22</sup>See Banks, Jesus and the Law, op. cit., p. 172, for a summary of these alternatives.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

(8:17) or the Jews generally (18:31, spoken by Pilate). The occurrence in 8:17 could refer to a Rabbinic distortion of the Mosaic Law, but is probably related to Deuteronomy 17:6. In every case, according to Severino Pancaro, John uses νόμος in the "consecrated Jewish sense."<sup>24</sup> The references are to the Old Testament Jewish Law.

We should also mention John 5:45 where the term Μωϋσῆς (= Moses) is a synonym for the Law, and John 9:16 and John 7:53 - 8:11, where the Law issue arises although there is no use of the term νόμος. In these three passages, Jesus is accused of breaking the Sabbath regulations by healing (5:45; 9:16) and encounters the woman caught in adultery (7:53 ff).

What is Jesus' attitude toward the Mosaic Law in the Johannine corpus? If one first accepts the foundational presupposition that Jesus' and John's attitudes on the Law do not differ then several observations may be made upon examination of the relevant pericope.

First, there are instances where Jesus apparently clearly sets himself over against the Sabbath law of Judaism (Jn 5; 7:23, 9). One should be cautious here, however, since the Sabbath law of then current Judaism might have differed from the original commandment. On the other hand,

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<sup>24</sup>Severino Pancaro, The Law in the Fourth Gospel: The Torah and the Gospel, Moses and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity According to John. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975, p. 514.

Jesus may have asserted his authority over the Sabbath.<sup>25</sup> Finally, the coming of the Messiah in the person of Jesus and the inauguration of the New Age of salvation may have tacitly transformed the Sabbath.<sup>26</sup>

Second, a few passages seem to distance Jesus from the Mosaic Law or some distortion of it, those where he called it "your Law" or "their Law" (Jn. 8:17; 10:34; 15:25). Such statements might lead one to conclude that Jesus has abolished the Mosaic Law. But such a conclusion is premature on two grounds: (1) the existence of Matthew 5:17-18 and Luke 16:17 and (2) the otherwise non-hostile manner with which Jesus speaks of the Law.

Thirdly, nowhere in the passages in John's Gospel does Jesus denigrate any commandment of the Law dealing with moral behavior or principles, except possibly in the debatable passage concerning the woman caught in adultery (Jn. 7:53-8:11). In those instances where Jesus' authority seems to supersede the Law, only ceremonial or ritual commands are involved, although the Sabbath (Jn. 5) is difficult to "classify."

Beginning with John 1:17 one sees an apparent contrast between Law which was  $\delta\iota\alpha\ \mu\omega\upsilon\sigma\acute{\alpha}\iota\omega\varsigma\ \acute{\epsilon}\delta\acute{o}\theta\eta$  and "grace and truth" which have come through Jesus Christ. At first

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 492.

<sup>26</sup>See Samulle Bacchiocchi, "John 5:17: Negation or Clarification of the Sabbath?," Andrews Univ. Sem. St. 19 (1981), pp. 3-19.

glance this verse appears to indicate a "new order" in grace with the coming of Jesus. The Law is superseded and invalid. Nevertheless, the importance of the arrival of the Messianic Age in Christ should not be ignored. The "new order" in Christ, it is argued, certainly does affect the Law in some way, but not to abolish it.

In John 5 one sees another healing on the Sabbath. In this passage Jesus more clearly appears to break and even to abolish the Sabbath. When the Pharisees confront Jesus about his healing he replies, "My Father is working until now, and I myself am working," implying the irrelevance of the Sabbath (See Jn. 5:17). Verse 18 even seems to state (in a narrative portion) that Jesus was breaking the Sabbath, though this is only a report of the Pharisee's accusation. Jesus himself does not address the issue of his relation to the Sabbath in this passage.

In summary, T.F. Glasson is undoubtedly correct in asserting that in John the central concept is Christ himself, even in those passages involving the Mosaic Law.<sup>27</sup> Clearly also Jesus is viewed as having lordship over all that belongs to man.<sup>28</sup> Pancaro also is correct in attributing great importance, in assessing the relevance of

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<sup>27</sup>See T.F. Glasson, Moses in the Fourth Gospel. Naperville, Ill: Alec R. Allenson, 1963.

<sup>28</sup>Pancaro, op. cit., p. 492.

the Law, to the New Age inaugurated in Jesus Christ.<sup>29</sup> John seems to be exclusively concerned with the meaning and value of the Law after the coming of Christ. Jesus, not the Law, becomes the central figure in the Messianic Age. But the Law remains relevant.<sup>30</sup> Finally, although clearly not salvific (the salvation in John is never related to Law-keeping), the Law appears to have an important and continuing moral use which John does not attack. Whether the "moral law" is to be equated exclusively with the Mosaic Law John does not say. Nor is he concerned about a civil function of the Law.

#### C. Paul and the Mosaic Law

The immediate problem in Paul's writings is how to reconcile his alleged antinomianism with Jesus' favorable statements about the Law. One may discern three possible approaches to Paul's position on the status of the Mosaic Law in Christianity: (1) discontinuity;<sup>31</sup> (2) continuity;<sup>32</sup> and (3) mediating positions.<sup>33</sup> There is much

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 492 ff.

<sup>30</sup>Contra Herman Kleinknecht and W. Gutbrod, Law: Key Words from Kittel's TWNT. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1962, who believe the Law is at the same time abolished and fulfilled; listening to the Law leads to faith in Jesus, p. 130.

<sup>31</sup>W. Wrede, Paul. Lexington: American Library Association Committee on Reprinting, 1908, reprint 1962, who argues that Paul's rejection of the Mosaic Law was radical and complete.

<sup>32</sup>E.P. Sanders, Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983.



debate and uncertainty among scholars regarding the interpretation of Pauline texts on the Law.

Paul uses the term νόμος 68 times in Romans, 8 times in 1 Corinthians, 32 times in Galatians, 4 times in Ephesians and Colossians, 2 times in 1 Timothy, and 14 times in Hebrews. He also uses the term in a variety of contexts. The focus will upon Law in Romans and Galatians.<sup>34</sup> Paul mostly appears to use νόμος in a plural sense, comprehending the whole Law as a unity rather than a series of commandments.<sup>35</sup> In other cases, Paul uses the term in a non-legal sense to mean "principle" or "force" (Rom 7:21) or in reference to a writing (equivalent to γραφή) or the canon (Rom 3:19a, 1 Cor. 9:8-9).<sup>36</sup> In its general and most common sense, νόμος is used by Paul of a body of demands.<sup>37</sup> In its legal sense, νόμος is used in two ways: (1) general rule or authority (Rom 2:14d) and (2) a divine Law (See Rom. 2:14 ab).<sup>38</sup> Under the second category, Moo distinguishes

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<sup>33</sup>See C. Thomas Rhyne, Faith Establishes the Law. Chico, CA: Scholar's Press, 1981, pp. 19ff, who has an excellent discussion on this view and who makes the convenient threefold distinction used here.

<sup>34</sup>One cannot hope to solve the Law issue in Paul in a single chapter of a thesis. The best one can hope for is to set some parameters for interpretation.

<sup>35</sup>Douglas J. Moo, "'Law,' 'Works of the Law,' and 'Legalism in Paul,'" Westminster Theol J. 45 (1983), p. 75.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

still further three uses of νόμος in Paul: (1) a general divine law; (2) the divine Law in its Mosaic form; and (3) the divine Law in its New Testament form (e.g. Gal. 6:2, the law of Christ).<sup>39</sup> Of these three uses of νόμος connoting divine law, the most common is said to be that of the Mosaic Law.<sup>40</sup> Texts cited to represent this sense include Romans 2-7 and Galatians 2-4, which are asserted to be salvation-historical in Paul's thought.<sup>41</sup> When Paul uses νόμος in this sense he means the commandments of God mediated through Moses. These commands are "torah" with sanctions and one is bound to "do" them.<sup>42</sup>

What is Paul's attitude toward this Mosaic Law? Does Paul condemn or affirm the Law? Or is his approach somewhere between outright condemnation and complete affirmation? In Romans 2, Paul begins to speak about the Mosaic Law (2:12-29), contrasting it with natural law (2:12-15) without condemning it, and relating the Law to circumcision, again without condemning the Law itself (2:25-29).<sup>43</sup> In Romans 3:21, Paul asserts that "now the

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 80; Moo goes on to demonstrate this assertion (see pp. 80-82).

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 82-83.

<sup>43</sup>See also Rom. 2:17-24. According to Cranfield, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1985, vol. 1, p. 155, the "doers" of the Law (2:13) obey the commandments of the Law out of gratefulness, not to earn

righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law . . ." Man cannot be justified in God's sight "by works of the law" though the law does produce a "knowledge of sin" (3:20). In the context of justification, Paul's statement that God's saving work is manifested apart from the Law cannot be construed as an abolition of the Law but merely a confirmation that the new age of salvation has come (in Jesus), to which the Law and the prophets witnessed.<sup>44</sup> Paul reiterates in 3:28 that "a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law."<sup>45</sup> Paul is clear in 3:31 that this "New Age" does not overthrow (καταργούμεν) the Law. Rather, the Law is actually upheld (that is "we establish" or "cause to stand" the Law = (ἵσταίνουμεν).<sup>46</sup>

Moving to Romans 4:13-16, Paul again brings up the idea of the Law, here in connection with the "promise to

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justification. The Law itself is valid and useful. Furthermore, it concerns all men.

<sup>44</sup>Note the use of νῦν in 3:21 which may indicate the arrival of the New Age.

<sup>45</sup>There is some debate as to whether ἔργα νόμου is referring to a Jewish distortion of the Mosaic Law. Given the contrast with justification by faith, we would contend that the term refers to the Law itself; in this context, it has to do with one seeking to be "righteous" before God merely by having or keeping the Law.

<sup>46</sup>See C.E.B. Cranfield, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Vol. I. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, (1975), p. 224. See also Leon Morris, The Epistle to the Romans. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988, p. 189 where Morris asserts, regarding this passage, that the Law itself is not the way to salvation, but that it is the divine preparation for the way of salvation in Christ. The Law also sets a standard which is produced by the Spirit's work. But the Law itself is valid.

Abraham." This "promise was not given on the condition of its being merited by fulfillment of the law but simply on the basis of the righteousness of faith."<sup>47</sup> Salvation is not merited by keeping the Law but is through faith. Again, Paul has not denigrated the Law, but only made its limitations clear.

In Romans 5:20 Paul sets forth a purpose of the Mosaic Law, that is "to increase the trespass." This is consistent with Romans 6:8-9. Without Law "sin is dead."

Romans 7 is the most important passage by Paul on the Law (though Romans 10:4, to be discussed below, may be the most critical single verse). In essence, Paul in this chapter "frees" man from the Law.<sup>48</sup> Man is "now" (see  $\nu\nu\nu\iota$  in Rom. 7:6) under grace not Law (Rom. 6:14; 7:6). What does Paul mean? In the light of the text and its context (Rom 3-6), Paul seems to mean that the believer is free from the Law insofar as the Law condemns him.<sup>49</sup> Romans 7:7 shows a positive stance toward the Law and also indicates

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 239;  $\delta\iota\alpha$  here is taken as instrumental. See also Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, op. cit., p. 207.

<sup>48</sup>See Ibid., p. 330. See Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 269, who argues that Romans 7 is primarily about the place of the Law for Paul. The Law establishes man's guilt (p. 280) but cannot mediate salvation.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid. See generally, especially pp. 174ff where the author discusses Galatians 3:19-25, regarding the purpose of the Law. The Law and the promise are not opposed in principle, but have differing purposes. See above on Galatians 3:19ff. See also Heikki Raisanen, Paul and the Law. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986, pp. 128-133.

its condemning function. The Law itself is "holy and just and good" (Rom. 7:12). The whole of Romans 3-6 has reiterated that the Law brought death through the instrument of sin. Christ and the New Age have brought man out from this existence "under law." It appears that in some sense, the believer is no longer subject to the Law although the Law itself remains valid and this same Law continues to have some authority for the believer.

Finally, in Romans 10:4, we see a much-debated verse: *τέλος γὰρ νόμου χριστὸς εἰς δικαιοσύνην παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι.* Christ is the τέλος of the Law concerning righteousness to everyone who believes. Does this statement abolish the Law unequivocally? In light of previous context one must argue that it does not abolish the Law. Furthermore, τέλος is a word susceptible of several possible senses: end, termination, conclusion, but also outcome, result, goal, aim, fulfillment. With such a broad semantic range, one cannot say with certainty that Christ "ends" the Law as a valid system. Even if the Law does end, in what sense does it end? Finally, when one reads the following context (Rom. 10:5-11) it seems clear that the issue is not abolition of the Law but the basis of righteousness and its implications for salvation of Gentiles who do not have the Law and for Jews.

In Galatians 2-4 we come to another concentration of verses dealing with the Law (particularly Gal. 2:14-4:31).

We will also consider Galatians 5:2-7 and 5:18, since these are relevant for Paul's view of the Mosaic Law. Paul states in Galatians 2:16 that a "man is not justified by works of the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ." But the issue is the basis of one's righteousness before God (see also Gal. 2:21). Paul consistently contrasts "works of the law" with justification or its equivalent receiving of the Spirit (Gal. 3:2) as alternative bases of righteousness. The Law "does not rest on faith" (Gal. 3:12). Furthermore Christ "redeemed us from the curse of the law," which is taken to be death.<sup>50</sup> The Law itself is good.

Galatians 3:19ff gives the purpose of the Law. It could not produce righteousness (3:21) but it did reveal God's will in order to produce a recognition of sin (3:22). Galatians 3:23-29 may be taken as "salvation-historical," indicating the transition to the New Age in Jesus Christ. Chapter 4 continues this heilsgeschichte language about the Law, but, again, does not abolish the Law altogether. A more specific analysis of Galatians 3:19ff may be helpful here. In Galatians 3:1-14, Paul has emphasized that righteousness, that is, a right standing before God, comes by faith, not works of the Law or the Law (3:2, 5, 11, 12). Furthermore, Christ is said to have redeemed believers from the Law's curse or condemnation (3:13). Christ's redeeming

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<sup>50</sup>See Stephen Westerholm, Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988, p. 206.

work brought righteousness to the Gentiles through the removal of the curse of the Law.

In Galatians 3:15-29, Paul deals with the purpose of the Law. Specifically, he begins by raising the issue of the relationship of the Law to "the promise" (3:15-18). Paul shows that God's promise to Abraham preceded in time the Sinaitic Covenant and therefore the Law. This fact supports the argument that justification or righteousness is by faith alone.<sup>51</sup>

In verses 19-22, the purpose of the Mosaic Law is specifically set out by Paul. One would tend to think that if the Law came later, it would serve no purpose and would thus be irrelevant. Paul says the law was added "because of transgressions . . . until (ἄχρις οὗ) the seed should come to whom the promise has been made" (3:19). The Law was not added (προσέτεθη) to the promise as a supplement, but to the human situation for a purpose different from that of the promise.<sup>52</sup> But the Law could never mediate righteousness (3:21).

Galatians 3:24-25 continues Paul's thought on the Law in its relationship to the "coming of faith" in Christ. Before faith (i.e. Christ) men (all men) were prisoners to the Law or the law principle. In salvation-history the era

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<sup>51</sup>See Ronald Y.K. Fung, The Epistle to the Galatians, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 153.

<sup>52</sup>F.F. Bruce, Commentary on Galatians, NIGTC (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1982 repr. 1990), p. 176.

of faith, the New Age, arrived in Jesus Christ. In the Old Age, the Law was a tutor (παιδαγωγός) εἰς χριστόν, that "we may be justified by faith" (3:24). This verse has been the source of much interpretational perplexity, which it is impossible to solve here. Nevertheless, it is possible to say a few important things about the verse. The term παιδαγωγός was generally used of the attendant of a Greek boy, one who escorted him to and from school and who exercised discipline and moral oversight.<sup>53</sup> Law then was essentially a disciplinarian, a moral or ethical disciplinarian.

The phrase εἰς χριστόν has been translated variously as "until Christ" or "up to Christ" or "to Christ."<sup>54</sup> Whether the εἰς should be taken temporally (=until) or "pregnantly" (as to someone) is debated by scholars.<sup>55</sup> Apparently the function in view here of the Law is not as a teacher to lead men to Christ since earlier (3:23) it is said to shut men up to sin. Rather the Law in its disciplinary function was designed to lead to righteousness by faith, as indicated by the ἵνα clause. When the New Age arrived in Christ, men are no longer under the tutor (ὑπό παιδαγωγόν ἐσμεν). But this

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<sup>53</sup>See Donald Guthrie, Galatians, NCBC (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1974), pp. 108-109; the educative idea was not dominant (the term would have been διδασκῶλος).

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>55</sup>See Ibid., p. 109 and Ernest De Witt Burton, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1921), p. 200.



does not mean that the Law has ceased to have any function, only that one of the ways it functioned has now ceased. The thought here is salvation-historical, not personal for individuals.

In Chapter 5, Paul's language appears to create an antithesis between the Law and the Spirit, specifically dealing with the ceremonial precept of circumcision. Christ and the Mosaic Law of circumcision seem to be mutually exclusive. But one must notice that Paul only denigrates one aspect of the Law here and even that only as a basis of justification, not in itself.

A life of the Spirit adequately fulfills the Law's demands and those demands, either no longer perceived to serve a purpose (e.g. circumcision) or misused, are ignored or criticized, but not abolished.<sup>56</sup> For Paul, the Christian ethic is determined by the Holy Spirit (in some sense), but it is not capricious and the need for ethical instruction does not disappear.<sup>57</sup> Paul does not abolish the Law but seems to view it in a new way in the New Age. Christians are indeed said to fulfill the whole Law (e.g. Gal. 5:14).<sup>58</sup> Can Paul and Jesus be reconciled? On grounds of inerrancy they must at least be reconcilable even if one cannot easily do so. Paul nowhere specifically

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

abolishes the Mosaic Law and he calls it good at several points. At specific points however, Paul does criticize "works of the law" as well as certain aspects of the Law (e.g. circumcision), but probably to say that as a basis of personal righteousness the Law is invalid. The general principle would then apply to the specific (circumcision). Possibly too Paul may view circumcision as well as other precepts of the Law as irrelevant in the New Age and limited to Jewish custom but not compelled for Gentiles nor abolished for Jews (so long as they are not considered salvific). In some places also Paul speaks of the "curse" of the Law as being abolished in Christ, but not the Law itself.

Before leaving this section it will be important to treat those important passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews which bear upon the Mosaic Law. This is not to assume uncritically that Hebrews is Paul's letter, but for the sake of convenience these passages are subsumed under the Pauline letters. The two most important passages are Hebrews 7:11-19 and 8:6-13.

In 7:11, the author speaks of a change in priesthood. But the change in the Levitical priesthood is apparently such that a change in the Law takes place also. The phrase in 7:12b reads *καὶ νόμου μετάθεσις γίνεται* (= a change of law also takes place). The change in priesthood is from one order to another and the change (*μετάθεσις*) in the Law is

also in a sense from one order to another in that the function of the Mosaic Code in its cultic aspect is superseded. This does not mean that the Law is abrogated in the sense that it is replaced. Rather, as verse 19 states, it "made nothing perfect" but now (in the New Age) there is something that could "make perfect," at least in a relational sense. There has been a change in the relationship of man as believer to the Law.<sup>59</sup> Again, this is not to argue that the Law is abrogated, even in its ceremonial aspects but that its use in a cultic sense is rendered completely irrelevant such that in effect the cultic aspects drop away.

Moving to Hebrews 8:6-13, the author first speaks of the old and new covenants. In fact this is the main theme of the pericope. The old covenant is said to be imperfect and the new covenant in Christ is said to be "better" (see Hebrews 8:6-7). How is this idea of covenant related to the Mosaic Law? The Old Covenant is apparently the Sinaitic Covenant (8:9) including the Mosaic Code. The New Covenant involves the coming of Jesus Christ to inaugurate it (the New Age).<sup>60</sup> In his coming Christ fulfills the Law and one

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<sup>59</sup>See Philip E. Hughes, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 258 and F.F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 145. See also William Manson, The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Historical and Theological Reconsideration (London: Hudder & Stoughton, 1961), p. 114.

<sup>60</sup>See William Manson, op. cit., p. 127.

aspect of this fulfillment is his one ablation on the cross. Such a sacrifice, being so much superior to the sacrificial system, renders that aspect of the Mosaic Code irrelevant. But one ought not to argue that this old aspect was actually perverse for that would imply that the Law itself was imperfect in some way, impugning the basic goodness of the Mosaic Law. Rather the "fault" of the Old Covenant and the Old Law in its cultic aspect was, as always, its inability to justify fallen man. In essence the problem lay on man's side.<sup>61</sup>

This brief analysis is by no means adequate to settle the issue. But it should serve to make the point that the Law itself has not been abrogated in any of its "aspects." Rather its function or use has been transformed or changed with the coming of the New Age in Christ. Hence the Mosaic Law is to be applied differently or not at all in some cases. But it is not all in some cases. But it is not all in some cases. But it is not to be thought of as abrogated as a judicial act of God.

In conclusion of the analysis of the Pauline view of the Mosaic Law it must be said that, as is obvious, there has been little interaction with Pauline scholarship. Such a methodology has been deliberate. A complete treatment of the Law in Paul, including interaction with scholarly views, would make this chapter excessively long and in any event is

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<sup>61</sup>See Philip E. Hughes, *op. cit.*, pp. 297-298.

not believed to be essential. The only purpose of this chapter is to establish the parameters for the exegesis of Matthew 5:17-20, not to give a full exegesis of the relevant Pauline (and non-Pauline) passages. For fuller treatment of Paul and the Law the reader is referred to the relevant literature.<sup>62</sup> The attempt here has admittedly been somewhat apologetic, to show that Paul and other New Testament writers do not criticize the Law per se or view it as abrogated or abolished. Hence, consistency is established with Jesus' statements.

#### D. James and the Mosaic Law

James uses νόμος 10 times in his epistle (four times in James 4:11). Taking the four occurrences in James 4:11 as one, νόμος clearly is used of the Mosaic Law three times in James. Since James is considered quite Jewish in tenor one would expect to see parallels to Matthew's Gospel, as indeed

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<sup>62</sup>See e.g., Peter J. Tomson, Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostles to the Gentiles. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1983; Stephen Westerholm, Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988; C.T. Rhyne, Faith Establishes the Law. SBL Series. Chico: Scholar's Press, 1981; H. Hübner, Law in Paul's Thought, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1984; F.F. Bruce, Commentary on Galatians, NIGTC, Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1988, esp. pp. 151f; C.E.B. Cranfield, "St. Paul and the Law," Scottish Journal of Theology 17 (1964), pp. 43-68; E.P. Sanders, Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983; F.F. Bruce, "Paul and the Law of Moses," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 57 (1975), pp. 259-279; Douglas J. Moo, "'Law,' 'Works of the Law,' and Legalism in Paul," Westminster Theological Journal 45 (1983), pp. 73-100.

some scholars posit.<sup>63</sup> One would also expect to see a "conservative" Jewish approach to the Mosaic Law, even apparently opposing Paul.<sup>64</sup> James 1:25 uses the phrase νόμον τέλειον τὸν τῆς ἐλευθερίας (= the perfect law which is the law of liberty). Oesterley believes this is a reference to the Mosaic Law.<sup>65</sup> Others see the phrase as referring to a sort of natural law or as "Christian law."<sup>66</sup> There is no conclusive evidence one way or the other.

James 2:8-12 presents a clearer picture however. James 2:8 uses the phrase νόμον βασιλικὸν (= royal law) followed by the love commandment from Leviticus 19:18 (and Jesus' teaching). Verse 11 then mentions two commands from the Decalogue following language in 2:10 about the unity of the Law. These references seem to speak of the Mosaic Law. James is not saying anything negative about the Law; in fact he seems to confirm some positive use of it. Peter Davids believes that James' attitude toward the law in 2:8-12 is

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<sup>63</sup>See e.g. Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., "The Epistle of James and the Gospel of Matthew," Journal of Biblical Studies 75 (1966), p. 40.

<sup>64</sup>See Brevard Childs, The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984, pp. 436-437.

<sup>65</sup>W.O.E. Oesterley, "The General Epistle of James" in The Expositor's Greek New Testament, ed. by W. Robertson Nicoll. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; 1910, Vol. 4, pp. 432-434. Also J.H. Ropes, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1916, p. 178, who cites Rabbinic sources equating the Mosaic Law with freedom or liberty.

<sup>66</sup>See Roper, op. cit., p. 180.

similar to Matthew's attitude.<sup>67</sup> The validity of the Law is said to be assumed and worked from, not defended or argued.<sup>68</sup>

It is interesting that in James 2:8-12, James uses as examples only so-called "moral" commandments. He is not concerned with ritual aspects of the Law. Could James, along with Paul, have a salvation-historical conception of the Law in the New or Messianic Age? Ceremonial commandments are not specifically criticized but neither are they emphasized, an interesting fact considering James' alleged "Jewishness."<sup>69</sup>

Finally, in James 4:11-12 νόμος is used four times. A few scholars see this as dealing with the Mosaic Law of slander.<sup>70</sup> Moreover this passage does recall the teaching in Matthew 7:1-15.<sup>71</sup> The person who speaks against another is not a doer of the Mosaic Law but sets himself up as a judge against it. Again James assumes some positive use of the Law without actually addressing the Law issue. Also again, he is concerned with the ethical aspect of the Law.

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<sup>67</sup>See Peter Davids, Commentary on James, NIGTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983, p. 47.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>See Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>70</sup>Sophie Laws, The Epistle of James. Cambridge: Harper and Row, 1980, p. 186. See Lev. 19:16; Test Iss 3:4; Test Gad 3:3; 5:4.

<sup>71</sup>See Shepherd, "The Epistle of James and the Gospel of Matthew," op. cit., p. 46.

#### D. Conclusion

This treatment of the Law in the New Testament has been of necessity somewhat superficial. Its main purpose has been to show that Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:17-20 does not conflict with the rest of the New Testament and to indicate the limitations placed upon the Law and uses of the Law. This latter purpose will be helpful in interpreting Matthew 5:17-20.

The Mosaic Law in the New Testament as a whole, we would argue, has not been abolished. Rather it has been transformed by the breaking in of the New Age in Jesus Christ. Those passages where the Law has apparently been abolished should be seen in this light. It is not claimed however, that this brief, sweeping survey is flawless. But this author does believe that a careful study of those passages dealing with the Law issue will bear out our overall conclusion (if not every detail).



## Chapter 8: The Meaning of Matthew 5:17-20

This chapter is concerned with the meaning of Matthew 5:17-20. The previous chapters have established the necessary foundations for accurate interpretation: examining the text itself, its words, phrases, and syntax, examining the cotext of Matthew 5:17-20 (since texts do not exist in literary isolation), and finally, attempting to understand something of the context of this pericope, its sociological, historical, cultural, and religious setting including Judaism and early Christianity. In addition, we have considered the salvation-historical concept of the Kingdom as a methodological key for interpreting Matthew 5:17-20. The simultaneous present and future aspects of the Kingdom in the person of Christ, we will argue, play a critical role in accurate interpretation.

The actual exegesis of Matthew 5:17-20 will proceed verse-by-verse, but at the same time will not ignore the fact that this pericope is also a unit of meaning and must also be treated as a whole. In considering meaning as a whole it will be useful to look at three aspects of total meaning: (1) authorial meaning, involving authorial intent, in this case--Jesus' intended meaning of the words in Matthew 5:17-20;<sup>1</sup> (2) the perceived meaning of Jesus' audience; and (3) the objective meaning of the text itself.

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<sup>1</sup>We will not address the issue of whether Jesus' intended meaning differed from Matthew's. We are assuming that they agree.

The first two aspects of meaning are subjective in that only the speaker/author and audience respectively can "ultimately and authoritatively respond to one's confusion if he fail to perceive [the] communication."<sup>2</sup> The last element of meaning, the textual meaning, is as was stated, objective, but not necessarily obvious since the words and phrases are far removed in time from the original discourse situation. Fortunately, cotext and context are able to clarify some of the ambiguities of a text.

#### A. The Meaning of Matthew 5:17

Matthew 5:17 reads μή νομίσητε ὅτι ἦλθον καταλύσαι τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας οὐκ ἦλθον καταλύσαι ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι.

The first thing to note about this verse is that it appears to be a "programmatically statement," that is a purpose or mission statement.<sup>3</sup> Such a view would be confirmed by the presence of ἦλθον (= I came) twice in verse 17. As we have already noted, ἦλθον occurs elsewhere in Matthew in sayings having particular Christological significance.<sup>4</sup> Carson mentions that ἦλθον may also speak of coming into the world

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<sup>2</sup>Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation. Downer's Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity, 1989, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup>See D.A. Carson, "Matthew," in The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. by Frank Gaebelin and J.D. Douglas, Vol. 8. Grand Rapids: Regency, 1984, p. 142.

<sup>4</sup>See Robert Banks, Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition. Cambridge: University Press, 1975, p. 205.

and is related to Jesus' divine origins.<sup>5</sup> Whichever alternative is chosen, and both are plausible, one must connect Jesus' mission with the inauguration of the Messianic Age.

As we have seen, the theme of the Kingdom of God (or of Heaven) is a prominent one in the New Testament. In the person of Jesus, the Kingdom is both present and yet future and the Messianic Age inaugurated. At the same time there is a future ("not yet") aspect to the Kingdom. The Messianic Age is not a completely consummated Kingdom. Hence there is an overlap of the Old Age and the present and the future (not post) Messianic Age, an overlap which implies simultaneous elements of both the Old Age and the Messianic Age. It is Jesus' coming (<sup>ἦλθον</sup>) which has initiated this new epoch of salvation history.

With this in mind we may proceed to an examination of the rest of verse 17. Jesus clearly states that he did not come to abolish (<sup>καταλύσαι</sup>) the Law or the Prophets.<sup>6</sup> Law (<sup>νόμον</sup>) and Prophets (<sup>προφητάς</sup>) together constitute the Scriptures, with <sup>νόμον</sup> alone probably referring to the

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<sup>5</sup>Carson, "Matthew," op. cit., p. 142.

<sup>6</sup>Where <sup>καταλύω</sup> is used with <sup>νόμος</sup> in pre-Christian passages it means "abolish" or "annul" (2 Macc 2:22; 4 Macc 5:33). See Robert Banks, Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition. Cambridge: University Press, 1975, p. 207.

Pentateuch.<sup>7</sup> Jesus' mission did not include doing away with the Law.<sup>8</sup> To support the contention that at the very least the Law would not be abrogated wholesale in the Messianic Age, one may point first to the obvious objective meaning of the text itself. Furthermore, in examining Matthew 5:21-48, the rest of Matthew as well as the other synoptic Gospels, John's Gospel, the Pauline Epistles, and James, one does not find any indication that the Mosaic Law per se as a whole is now evil or is no longer valid. In the synoptics we saw that Jesus was not critical of the Law itself at any point, but rather wished to emphasize his sovereignty over it and to criticize the Pharisee's misuse of the Law. Neither do we see in late Judaism the expectation that the Law would be abolished by the Messiah. In fact, in the phrase  $\mu\eta\ \nu\omicron\mu\acute{\iota}\sigma\eta\tau\epsilon$  (= do not think), Jesus is probably countering a real misunderstanding and associated criticism that he did teach an abolition of the Mosaic Law.<sup>9</sup> If Jesus' audience was the "Scribes and Pharisees" (see Mt. 5:20), then it is more likely he would be countering their unfavorable impression that Jesus abolished the Law in word or action, something unthinkable to the Jew of his day.

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<sup>7</sup>See W.D. Davies and Dale Allison, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988, p. 484.

<sup>8</sup>See Carson, "Matthew," op. cit., p. 142.

<sup>9</sup>Davies and Allison, Matthew, op. cit., p. 483.

On the other hand, also indicated in our examination of late Judaism as well as the rest of the New Testament, it must be said that Jesus' coming has in some way resulted in a change in the character and/or use of the Mosaic Law. This was seen in Jesus' treatment of the Sabbath and of dietary statutes as well as Paul's discussions about the Law. What exactly then was Jesus' purpose with respect to the Law?

The answer is probably to be found in the term πληρῶσαι in Matthew 5:17b. Unfortunately, this answer is somewhat ambiguous as attested by the many interpretations of this word. We may begin to determine the meaning of πληρῶσαι by observing first that it is set in contrast to καταλῶσαι of 6:17a, which we have already concluded has the sense of "to abolish."<sup>10</sup> If Jesus did not come to abolish the Law then his mission in relation to the Mosaic Law must have had a positive aspect. As we saw earlier, there are several possibilities for the sense of πληρῶσαι.<sup>11</sup> Keeping in mind that Matthew's theology is strongly eschatological and Christological, the range of meanings for πληρῶσαι can be narrowed considerably.<sup>12</sup> The most obvious sense is that of "to fulfill." But this meaning in itself is even ambiguous.

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<sup>10</sup>Note also the adversative ἀλλά contrasting two ideas.

<sup>11</sup>See Ibid., pp. 484-485 for a brief survey.

<sup>12</sup>See Robert Guelich, The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding. Waco, TX: Word, 1982, pp. 27-33, 54-61.

Other possibilities include "to establish, validate or confirm."<sup>13</sup> Carson objects to these alternatives on various grounds, including the focus of Matthew 5 on Jesus' teaching, not his actions, as the sense of "to establish" would imply.<sup>14</sup>

Others argue that the term connotes "to fill up" by providing the full, intended meaning of the Law.<sup>15</sup> This is not implausible given the following antitheses, but it tends to ignore Jesus' apparent modifications of the Law.<sup>16</sup> Still others wish to make the term mean that Jesus came to extend the demands of the Mosaic Law "to some better or transcendent righteousness".<sup>17</sup> Carson objects to this sense also because it does not allow for some abolition of precepts which he believes is assumed in Matthew and other parts of the New Testament.<sup>18</sup> Carson may however be premature to suppose that selective abolition of parts of the Law is assumed. One must consider that Jesus, for

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<sup>13</sup>e.g. Jewish scholars. See A. Dalman, Jesus-Jeshua: Studies in the Gospels. London: SPCK, 1929, pp. 56-57.

<sup>14</sup>See Carson, "Matthew," op. cit., pp. 142-143.

<sup>15</sup>R.C.H. Lenski, Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1932 repr. 1961, pp. 206-207.

<sup>16</sup>Carson, "Matthew," p. 143 apparently thinks this sense of *πληρῶσαι* involves the idea of some selective abrogation, and he therefore disagrees with it. I am less dogmatic here.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid. A representative proponent is W. Trilling, Das Wahre Israel Studien zur Theologie des Matthaus-Evangeliums. Munchen: Korel, 1964, pp. 174-179.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

example, in his relation to the Sabbath, might only have been asserting his sovereignty over it. In addition, Paul does not necessarily criticize the Law itself but its use, notwithstanding the obsolescence of Old Testament cultic regulations.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, D.A. Carson suggests that "Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets in that they point to him, and he is their fulfillment."<sup>20</sup> He gives πληρῶσαι the same meaning it has in the fulfillment quotations (Mt. 2:15; 2:17-18; 2:23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35, 21:4-5; 27:9-10).<sup>21</sup> Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament Law by his teaching, though he does not abolish the Old Testament as canon in any sense.<sup>22</sup> The nature of the valid continuity of the Law is established only with reference to Jesus and the Kingdom. At this point the concept of salvation-history becomes prominent again. Jesus is said to be announcing that the period during which men were related to God under the terms of the Old Testament Law has ceased with John.<sup>23</sup> As the eschatological judge Jesus exercises authority of God even

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<sup>19</sup>See Heb. 7, 9-10, esp. 10:1-10. In Heb 10:9 the writer says, "he [Jesus] abolishes the first order to establish the second." No mention is made of abolition of the Law.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 143-144.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>See Douglas J. Moo, "Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law," Journal for the Study of the New Testament 20 (1984), pp. 28-29.

over the Law and the Law must be understood as being placed under the condition of its fulfillment.<sup>24</sup> Jesus becomes the sole authoritative interpreter of the Law.

This view is mainly consistent with the recent work of Vern Poythress who asserts that Jesus is claiming in Matthew 5:17 that his teaching "fulfills the teaching of the Law."<sup>25</sup> "What the law foreshadowed and embodied in symbols and shadows [in the Law] is now coming into realization."<sup>26</sup> Jesus' teaching is not merely a reiteration of the Law, though it is that too, but a step forward--a dynamic fulfillment.<sup>27</sup> "All is transformed by the supremacy and weightiness of God Himself coming to save. The law also undergoes transformation."<sup>28</sup> Poythress associates this fulfillment with the words of Jeremiah 31:33-34 which speak of a new law written in the heart.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>See Carson, "Matthew," op. cit., p. 144; Moo, Id., p. 29 and Herman Ridderbos, The Coming of the Kingdom, trans by R. Zorn. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962, p. 308.

<sup>25</sup>Vern Poythress, The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses, Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, 1991, p. 264.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>See Ibid. Poythress also claims as support John Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, 3 vols. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d., vol. 1, p. 277, and John Murray, Principles of Conduct. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957, p. 150.



We may here introduce again and integrate the concept developed earlier regarding the coming of the Kingdom of God in Christ and its effect on the Law. We are in agreement basically with Carson, Moo, Ridderbos, and Poythress who take seriously the Law in salvation history. πληρωσαι conveys the idea of the inauguration or initiation of the New or Messianic Age in the person of Christ. By virtue of his person, Jesus "transforms" the Mosaic Law. But we must also consider that, according to our earlier scheme, the Kingdom is both now and not yet simultaneously.<sup>30</sup> The Old Age exists alongside the New Age which has "broken in." Hence there are two sides to this discussion, not only the concept of the New Age. Since the two ages overlap, it is not surprising to find that the Law is not abolished but is in some way transformed. Jesus gives a new meaning and use to the existing Law. In fact some commandments, while not annulled, drop away because they are no longer relevant to the New Age (e.g. ritual precepts). The Law remains intact as the will of God, but takes on a new dimension. It is always unlawful to murder, commit adultery, etc., but the New Age has "deepened" these moral precepts. This idea is also consistent with Oscar Cullmann's "fulfillment ethic" which is the "ethic of redemptive history in the sense also

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<sup>30</sup>Recall the discussion in Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time, trans. by Floyd V. Filson. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964, pp. 81-85.

that it applies to the Old Testament commandments the idea of the 'fulfillment' of the times."<sup>31</sup>

We will complete our discussion of Matthew 5:17 by mentioning that some interpretation of πληρῶσαι make Jesus refer only to moral law, making the distinction of the Law into moral, ceremonial, and civil aspects and abolishing the ceremonial and civil law.<sup>32</sup> This distinction is old, but probably does not appear before Aquinas,<sup>33</sup> and in any event, though it explains why some commands appear to fall away, it appears arbitrary and seems to imply partial abolition which goes against Matthew 5:18. More will be said about this methodology in the concluding chapter.

#### B. The Meaning of Matthew 5:18

Matthew 5:18 may be divided into four parts:

5:18 a Ἀμην γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν

b ἕως ἂν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ

c ἰὼτα ἓν ἢ μίᾳ κεραΐᾳ οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>32</sup>See e.g. D. Wenham, "Jesus and the Law: An Exegesis on Matthew 5:17-20," Themelios 4 (1979), pp. 92-96.

<sup>33</sup>See R.J. Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Medieval Church in the West," in From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation, ed. by D.A. Carson. Grand Rapids: Academie, 1982, p. 305. Such a distinction was also held by most of the Reformers.

ἄ εως ἂν πάντα γένηται.<sup>34</sup>

This verse has an apparent parallel in Luke 16:17, the only verse in this pericope to have such a parallel.<sup>35</sup> In addition, this verse belongs to a group of logia with a common structure (ἀμην) λέγω ὑμῖν + οὐ μὴ + εως (ἂν) + . . .<sup>36</sup> Unlike the majority of such sayings, however, 5:18 is not directly eschatological, but refers to the duration of the Law. This verse has also proven quite difficult for many exegetes.<sup>37</sup> The verse begins with what appears, consistent with 5:17, to be an unequivocal declaration of the eternality of the Mosaic Law (Mt 5:18bc) but ends with a second εως clause which seems to contradict the first. What did Jesus mean by this statement? We will attempt to reconstruct Jesus' intent by examining the objective meaning of the text.

5:18a begins with the fairly common Ἀμην which we have seen means "certainly" and conveys an authoritative

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<sup>34</sup>I have drawn upon John P. Meier, Law and History in Matthew's Gospel. Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976, p. 57 for this scheme.

<sup>35</sup>Some scholars believe Matthew rearranged Lk. 16:17 to arrive at 5:18. See Davies and Allison, Matthew, op. cit., pp. 488-489.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 487.

<sup>37</sup>See A.M. Honeyman, "Matthew V.18 and the Validity of the Law" New Test St 1 (1954), p. 141.

message.<sup>38</sup> The term expresses Jesus' authority, a theme already established in our examination of 5:17.<sup>39</sup> Already, therefore, Jesus' status vis a vis the Law has also been established. Considering now 5:18 b and c together, the apparent implication is a stronger elaboration of 5:17. Not only is the Law not abolished by Jesus, but its permanence is emphasized. 5:18b begins with  $\epsilon\omega\varsigma$ <sup>c/</sup> which has been shown to have a temporal force and hence to mean "until." The bare word "until" would seem to demand some end to the validity of the Mosaic Law by virtue of some event or the passage of time. In this case the Law seems to maintain its validity until the world ends or until the end of time.<sup>40</sup>

Two alternatives present themselves as possible interpretations of the first  $\epsilon\omega\varsigma$ <sup>c/</sup> clause: (1) the clause is a colorful way to say "never;"<sup>41</sup> or (2) the clause points to the apocalyptic consummation of "this age."<sup>42</sup> The first alternative must be rejected as too fanciful. Rejection of this alternative does not contradict Jesus' words in 5:17

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<sup>38</sup>See H.L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch, 6 vols. Munich: Beck, 1922-1929, vol. 1, p. 242.

<sup>39</sup>See also J. Jeremias, New Testament Theology. New York: Scribner's, 1971, p. 35.

<sup>40</sup>Honeyman, "Matthew V.18," op. cit., p. 141.

<sup>41</sup>See Guelich, Sermon, op. cit., p. 144 and W.C. Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912, p. 46, who adopts this view.

<sup>42</sup>See D.A. Carson, "Matthew," op. cit., p. 145.

since he only stated that his mission was not to abolish the Law. He said nothing in that verse about the duration of the Law. In addition, this first possibility is inconsistent with the seemingly obvious temporal marker in the clause itself, that is, the passing away of heaven and earth.

The second alternative, that the Law lasts "until the end of the age" or "until the end of the world," certainly is consistent with the plain words of 5:18a.<sup>43</sup> It is also consistent with the normal expectation of the function of <sup>ει</sup> εως. Basically the idea then is that the duration of the Law is somewhat less than never, though it remains to determine how much less.<sup>44</sup>

Matthew 5:18a continues with *παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ* as the event marking the "passing away" of the Mosaic Law. What is meant by this phrase? If one accepts an obvious meaning for this event, it would seem to refer to the end of the world. But how does this square with the interpretation of Matthew 5:17 in light of the strong statement of 5:18c during the time of its validity not one part of the Law will pass away? Again, reference must be made to the importance of the concept of salvation-history and within that, the simultaneous present and future aspects of the Kingdom. The

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<sup>43</sup>Carson, *Ibid.*, p. 145, accepts this idea with little comment.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*; contra Meier, Law and History in Matthew's Gospel, op, cit., p. 61.

issue then shifts from that of duration to that of content.

5:18c reads: ἰῶτα ἐν ἧ μία κεραία οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου (= not one jot or tittle shall in any way pass away from the Law). Again, how can this emphatic affirmation of all of the Law be reconciled with the rest of the evidence presented so far? Obviously, Jesus views the Law highly.<sup>45</sup> The simple sense of this clause is that the entire Mosaic Law remains valid, not merely the "moral" aspects, until the end of the world. But redemptive history allows for a transformation of the Law, by virtue of Jesus' authority and mission. Is there a contradiction?

John P. Meier is very helpful at this point.<sup>46</sup> He brings 5:18d into the analysis: ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται. The basic sense of γενηταὶ is said to be an event ("something happens").<sup>47</sup> The idea is connected to prophetic fulfillment in an apocalyptic context.<sup>48</sup> The Law does not lose its validity "until all things prophesied come to pass in the eschatological event."<sup>49</sup> Meier makes the event the

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Meier, Law and History in Matthew's Gospel, op. cit., pp. 61 ff.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

death-resurrection of Jesus, the "turning point of time between the old and new aeon."<sup>50</sup>

Carson agrees in part with Meier on his interpretation, but departs by asserting first that *πάντα* in 5:18d does not have an antecedent. Therefore the "all things" prophesied does not necessarily refer to Jesus' death-resurrection.<sup>51</sup> Rather *πάντα* refers to "everything in the law, considered under the law's prophetic function."<sup>52</sup> Hence 5:18d refers to "the entire divine purpose prophesied in Scripture."<sup>53</sup> God's redemptive purposes, accomplished in Jesus, are revealed in the second *ἔως* clause, along with the eschatological kingdom now inaugurated and one day to be consummated.<sup>54</sup> The precise form of the Mosaic Law may change, according to Carson, "with the crucial redemptive events to which it points."<sup>55</sup>

We are inclined to agree with Carson's criticism of Meier, but also to recognize the basic validity of Meier's approach with regard to salvation history. The Law remains valid in every respect until the end of time, but this end of time, unlike Meier's view is really the eschatological

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>51</sup>Carson, "Matthew," op. cit., p. 145.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

end of time, the end of the world. Nevertheless, because of the overlap of the Old and New Ages in present time, and in redemptive history, the Law as we argued earlier, is transformed. In the process, parts of the Law may become "irrelevant," although they will not be abolished in and of themselves. The Law also takes on new functions as a whole.

It remains to put all the parts of 5:18 together to form a coherent unit. The two <sup>4</sup>εως clauses together give both aspects of salvation-history. That is, they present both the present and future aspects of the Kingdom with respect to its relation to the Mosaic Law. The first <sup>4</sup>εως clause simply refers to the general duration of the Law until the end of the world and therefore gives the aspect of the Old Age in salvation-history. The second <sup>4</sup>εως clause focuses on the inauguration of the New Age by including the idea of Jesus' mission (= death and resurrection), though it also goes beyond to encompass all prophesied events. The Kingdom is "not yet" in its consummation and to that extent the Law remains completely valid. On the other hand, at the same time the Kingdom is "now," and to that extent has been transformed.

### C. The Meaning of Matthew 5:19

The word on which the meaning of 5:19 turns is probably <sup>1</sup>λύση. The rest of the verse is a curse/warning and a praise/blessing respectively for those who would engage in



the activity represented by λύση and for those who are true to the Law. Of course, the terms, τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων (= these commandments) is also important since these are the object of the curse and the blessing. Furthermore the term ποιήση is also important since it may have relevance for the role of the Law in ethics.

But besides the text itself, we must also consider the cotext of 5:19, in particular the two preceding verses to which this verse may well directly relate (note the οὖν = therefore in 5:19).

λύση (from λύω) in 5:19 in the context of the other verbs in the verse and the negative sanction associated with it, probably means something like "set aside" or "break." It is possible that the sense of the verb is referring to a denial of the Law's authority, rather than to selective annulment of commandments. But since διδάξη (= teaches) οὕτως also appears in 5:19, it seems more likely that a "lawbreaker" is contemplated by λύση, someone who denies the Law by his actions.<sup>56</sup> Thus one who breaks the Law and teaches others to break the Law will suffer a curse.<sup>57</sup> This is certainly consistent with Jesus' previous statements about the validity and importance of the Law.

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<sup>56</sup>See Meier, Law and History in Matthew's Gospel, op. cit., pp. 89-90. Note also the contrast with ποιέω.

<sup>57</sup>See Carson, "Matthew," op. cit., p. 146 on the nature of this "curse."

A question arises, however, concerning the meaning of *μίαν τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων ἐλαχίστων* (= one of the least of these commandments). Banks believes the phrase refers to Jesus' teachings, based on the use of *τούτων*.<sup>58</sup> But the context argues against this proposal.<sup>59</sup> Everything so far has referred to the Mosaic Law. Why would Jesus suddenly give sanctions for his own teaching and ignore the Law?

Nevertheless, if the meaning of this phrase is restricted to the Mosaic Law, would not Jesus be contradicting as well as condemning himself, since he apparently did break certain precepts? There are two possible answers to this question. First, it is possible that Jesus did not personally break the Mosaic Law. We have already discussed this possibility.<sup>60</sup> Second, and we believe better, is that when Jesus used *τούτων* to refer to the commandments, he had in mind the Mosaic Law in its transformed state, the Law over which Jesus himself was sovereign, not the Pre-Messianic Mosaic Law of the Old Testament.<sup>61</sup> As Carson has rightly said, "The entire Law and the Prophets are not scrapped by Jesus' coming but

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<sup>58</sup>Robert Banks, Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition, op. cit., p. 222.

<sup>59</sup>See Carson, "Matthew," op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>60</sup>But one must consider the various Sabbath controversies.

<sup>61</sup>See Carson, "Matthew," op. cit., p. 146.

fulfilled."<sup>62</sup> These commandments must be kept, but the nature of their use has been changed already in 5:17-18.<sup>63</sup> The Law points to Jesus and he, by virtue of his authority in the new era of salvation, establishes the degree of continuity the Law has in the New Age.

We have already seen that this situation was anticipated in Rabbinic Judaism. In addition, it fits the immediate context of Matthew 5:17-18. Finally, this solution is consistent with Paul's (and John's) view of the Law in salvation history.<sup>64</sup>

A final issue to be examined in 5:19 is the meaning of ἑλάχιστος (= least) and μέγας (= great) in relation to the curse and the blessing promised to those who either break the Law (and teach likewise) or uphold the Law by teaching and doing. Those who break the Law and teach others (ἄνθρώπους) to do likewise "will be called least in the kingdom of heaven" (κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν). If the language is taken seriously it probably does not imply exclusion but rather rank in the future Kingdom.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid.; and transformed.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>See esp. Herman Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of his Theology, trans by J.R. de Witt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975, pp. 278-288, for an excellent discussion of Paul and the Law in salvation history.

<sup>65</sup>See Carson, "Matthew," op. cit., p. 146, who opposes Pierre Bonnard, L'Évangile selon Saint Mattieu. 2nd ed. Newchâtel: Delachaux et Niestle, 1970.

Luz has noted that the doctrine of rank and reward existed in Judaism.<sup>66</sup> One also finds the idea of rank in the kingdom elsewhere in Matthew (5:12; 10:41-42; 20:23). One's rank corresponds to one's conduct if we accept this view.<sup>67</sup> There is nevertheless some tension in this view, given, for example, passages such as Matthew 5:22 which seems to warn of exclusion from the Kingdom in some cases (see also Mt. 5:29-30) of breaking the Law. This tension, however, is impossible to resolve here.

#### C. The Meaning of Matthew 5:20

Matthew 5:20 begins with the same authoritative formula as in 5:18: λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι (without the ἀμὴν). Jesus is again indicating his authority and is demanding that his following words be taken seriously. The clause following demands a higher righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) of certain people (his disciples: see Mt. 5:1 where they are identified as οἱ μαθηταί) than that of the scribes and Pharisees. What kind of righteousness is called for here? Luz sees this greater righteousness as a "quantitative increasing of the fulfilling of the law--measured on the Torah--and primarily a qualitative intensification of the life before God--

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<sup>66</sup>Ulrich Luz, Matthew 1-7: A Commentary, trans. by Wilhelm C. Linss. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 267, who cites 2 Enoch 3-22 and 3 Baruch as well as Strach-Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, op. cit., vol. 3, pp. 531-533 on the Rabbinic teaching.

<sup>67</sup>With Davies and Allison, Matthew, op. cit., p. 498.

measured by love."<sup>68</sup> One is, according to Guelich, to do the Mosaic Law plus the demands of Matthew 5:21-48, broadening the concept of righteousness; also one is to have proper motives, deepening the concept of righteousness found in the Law.<sup>69</sup> The result of not fulfilling this demand is that one will "in no way enter the kingdom of heaven" (οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθῃτε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν). Here the sanction is exclusion from the eschatological kingdom.<sup>70</sup> Is this a contradiction of Matthew 5:19 which only "demotes" the disciple for failing to obey and teach the demands of the Law?

The answer to this question it seems might come by distinguishing the "righteousness" (or lack of it) in verse 19 from that of the scribes and Pharisees in 5:20. In 5:19 the breaking and teaching concerned the transformed Law of the Messianic Age, as did the doing and teaching. In contrast the Law (or righteousness) spoken of with respect the scribes and Pharisees is the un-transformed Law. The scribes and Pharisees are not even operating on the same plane as those in 5:19. They are blind to God's redemptive activity in Jesus.<sup>71</sup> Their righteousness does not stem

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<sup>68</sup>Luz, Matthew, op. cit., p. 270.

<sup>69</sup>See Guelich, Sermon on the Mount, op. cit., pp. 159-160.

<sup>70</sup>See Davies and Allison, Matthew, op. cit., p. 500.

<sup>71</sup>See Guelich, Sermon on the Mount, op. cit., pp. 171-172 who seems to approximate this view.

from a new relationship between God and his people.<sup>72</sup> This does not solve the problem completely. One might argue that law-breaking is in either case equally culpable (especially as in 5:19 where one may "teach" others to break the Law). Why would the person who teaches others to break this transformed Law be less liable than the one who, like the Pharisees, at least sought to keep some Law? Perhaps the question itself proves fatal to this view.<sup>73</sup> One writer has said that 5:20 "concerns the basic moral commitment of every disciple, so that the reward at stake is one's very entrance into the Kingdom."<sup>74</sup> In contrast, 5:19 is said to concern only Christian teachers and was a warning against "infidelity in minor matters; hence, the lighter sanction."<sup>75</sup> Discipleship is radical, but once one is a disciple the issue in 5:19 may relate to details, not overall commitment. This is a plausible but still not entirely satisfactory solution.

Finally, we must hasten to add that 5:20 should not be read as a statement of reward for meritorious behavior, as a quid pro quo transaction.<sup>76</sup> One would then "fail to

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>73</sup>No writer has satisfactorily answered the question posed.

<sup>74</sup>John P. Meier, Law and History in Matthew's Gospel, op. cit., p. 119.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>See Guelich, Sermon on the Mount, op. cit., p. 160.

recognize the deliberate tension between the presence of the kingdom [now] and the future consummation of the kingdom [not yet] in Matthew."<sup>77</sup> Matthew 5:20 lays out the demand.<sup>78</sup> But this required righteousness is also a gift.<sup>79</sup> One is now in the New Age able to attain to this righteousness demanded of the transformed Law by virtue of the new relationship established between God and his people, a relationship involving the operation of the Spirit in a new way.<sup>80</sup> What we see is both demand (Law) and gift (grace) at work.

D. Conclusion: The Meaning of Matthew 5:17-20

The methodological key to understanding Jesus' meaning in Matthew 5:17-20 is the simultaneous and overlapping existence of two ages of salvation history--the Old Age with the Mosaic Law and the New or Messianic Age with the transformed Law and the person of Jesus. To put it another way, the Kingdom is "now" in the New Age's irruption in Christ, but "not yet" since it is not yet consummated and since elements of the Old Age also are present. This being

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid. See also Carson, "Matthew," op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>78</sup>Carson, "Matthew," op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>79</sup>Guelich, Sermon on the Mount, op. cit., p. 161, and Luz, Matthew, op. cit., p. 271.

<sup>80</sup>This is not to say that grace was absent in the Old Age or the Law is absent in the New Age.

the case, the Mosaic Law in this period of overlap has been transformed in the mission of Jesus.

It is clear that the Mosaic Law has not been abolished (5:17). It is equally clear from our analysis of the rest of the New Testament that the Law does not have the same function or content as it previously did. Some commandments have become irrelevant or unnecessary and have thus been "abolished" de facto if not de jure.<sup>81</sup> The Law has at the same time been deepened (see Mt. 5:21-48). But this whole transformation is not the same as the old method of distinguishing and classifying commandments into moral, ceremonial, and judicial, as the Reformers did, and then arguing that the ceremonial (and sometimes judicial) aspects have been abolished. Rather the particular content of the transformation, rooted in the concept of redemptive history, must be determined on an ad hoc basis. Each precept must be examined on its own merit in light of the totality of Scripture, always considering the effect that the Messianic Age has on its function (but not its validity as God's law).

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<sup>81</sup>This seems to be alluded to in Heb. 7:12 which speaks of a "change in the Law" with the change in "priesthoods." Certainly the sacrificial laws are an example of precepts no longer relevant, although we would argue that sacrifice per se is not unlawful.



## Chapter 9: Conclusions

### A. Exegetical Summary

In Chapter 8 we summarized the exegetical conclusions of our analysis of Mt. 5:17-20. In this chapter we will recapitulate our findings and incorporate those with our theological conclusions, especially with respect to Jesus' attitude toward the Mosaic Law. At the outset of this chapter we should state that the ethical implications of the interpretation of Mt. 5:17-20 are very important. What is the relation of Jesus (the second person of the Trinity) to the Mosaic Law? Is the relation one of continuity, discontinuity or some mediating position? Whatever the relation, the Christian ethical system, both private and public, must be affected by it.

Beginning with 5:17, we found a general, programmatic statement about the Law and Jesus' mission vis a vis the Law. In interpreting this verse and subsequent verses in the pericope, it is important to consider the concept of salvation-history or heilsgeschichte. In acknowledging some degree of discontinuity between the Old Covenant (Old Age) and the New Covenant (New or Messianic Age) we are only acknowledging that in God's redemptive history, all does not continue exactly as it did before Christ the Messiah. The advent, death, and resurrection of Jesus marks a discontinuity in the linear time line of the history of

God's dealings with his people. But it does not mark a break. Therefore, the inauguration of the Messianic Age signals a transition in the role of the Mosaic Law and a modification of that Law, but it does not signal the abrogation of the authority or legitimacy of the Mosaic Law as a unitary whole.

The key term in 5:17 in light of Matthew's view of salvation history is πληρῶσαι. If Jesus did not come to abrogate the Law then what did he do in terms of fulfillment of it and how did his coming affect the Law? We argued, again in light of redemptive history, that fulfillment of the Law implied at least three things: (1) the content of the Mosaic Law has been modified, some commandments being "shadows" of and pointing to Christ, and dropping away; (2) the Law has been more fully interpreted (e.g. Mt. 5:21-48); and (3) the Law now plays a different role in salvation history, no longer functioning as a casuistic set of commandments for a chosen ethnic group, but as an "inner code" primarily, defining the "higher righteousness" demanded of all disciples (Mt. 5:20). This is not to say that later Judaism was devoid of inner devotion as a goal, part and parcel of obedience to the Law. Nor are we prohibited from making use of the "general equity" of the Mosaic Law as a civil code enforceable by the government.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In fact, we would argue that an external, objective civil code is necessary in light of the noetic effects of sin. When we use the term "general equity" we are referring to the Westminster

But we must be careful in using the New Testament to help us interpret such a code.

Matthew 5:18-19, we have seen, is an elaboration of the programmatic statement of 5:17. In this verse also we meet our most difficult problem of interpretation with regard to the perdurability of the Mosaic Law. As we saw, we were faced with two  $\epsilon\omega\varsigma$  clauses, apparently temporal, which could be taken, and have been by some, to be contradictory. On one hand the Law continues valid until the end of human time while on the other hand it lasts "until everything comes to pass." We attempted to reconcile these clauses, in deference to our presupposition regarding the inspiration of Scripture, by showing that they refer to the salvation-history idea of the inauguration of the Messianic Age. Admittedly, this argument seems tenuous for 5:18b which indicates that no part of the Law will pass away "until heaven and earth pass away." This phrase may retain its sense of "until time ends" and still be reconciled with 5:18d if we realize that the inbreaking of the Kingdom in the person of Jesus has profound effects on the use of the Law as it was viewed in the pre-Messianic Age. We are faced with the paradox of "the now and the not yet." The Law is valid (in a sense) but different in its use and, to some

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Confession, Ch. XXI, which seems to limit the precise application of the OT Law to Israel, but permits its principled use in the civil realm. We would further argue that "pure" natural law (= positive law in legal philosophy today) is not a legitimate system.

degree, its content. Another way to explain this idea is to say that salvation-history is not to be thought of as continuous in the sense that all of the Old Testament is to be directly carried over into the Messianic Age.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, πληρῶσαι cannot mean merely "to confirm" though it may include that notion at some points.<sup>3</sup> Rather, we have argued that the term conveys the idea of a discontinuity in salvation-history, though not a radical one (such as the Anabaptist tradition would posit). This discontinuity is only partial and allows for the continued authority of the Mosaic Law but calls for a modified Mosaic Law.

Matthew 5:19 presented a very strong warning concerning one's attitude toward the Law. There would be definite ramifications for those who "set aside" the Law and teach others to do likewise. We argued that this idea of setting aside could be a general reference to denying the authority and validity of the Law. A more difficult problem was how to deal with the phrase μίαν τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων τῶν ἐλαχιστῶν which seems to suggest that every commandment of the Mosaic Law continues valid, even in the Messianic Age. The problem could be resolved by making the phrase refer to

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<sup>2</sup>An example of one who viewed salvation history as essentially continuous was Heinrich Bullinger. See J. Wayne Baker, Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1980); Note also the Puritan theology of Law; see Kevan, The Grace of Law.

<sup>3</sup>Bahnsen, Theonomy in Christian Ethics (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977) devotes a good portion of his book to showing that πληρῶσαι means "confirm" in Mt. 5:17-20.

Jesus' teaching, but this would, we believe, be inconsistent with the overall context of the passage. We could also view this phrase as somewhat hyperbolic, really meaning "do not deny the continuing authority and validity of the Law." In fact, we attempted to discern the meaning of this phrase without attributing unwarranted hyperbole to Jesus' words (though there might be some warrant for arguing that Matthew re-worked the phrase for greater effect).

Finally, in 5:20, we dealt with Jesus' demand for a higher righteousness on the part of his disciples. Here we were required to define the idea of righteousness, as it was used by Matthew. Our conclusion on this transitional verse was that one's righteousness, both a demand and a gift, ought to conform to the Mosaic Law, as that Law is understood in light of the Messianic Age, but the disciple's conduct must be greater than mere casuistic conformity. Hence, Jesus, consistent with 5:17-19, does not annul the Law, but calls disciples to an even higher standard. In addition, since his words are addressed to disciples or potential disciples, he apparently bypasses the entire issue of any civil use of the Law, though he nowhere denies such a possible use.<sup>4</sup>

#### B. Theological Implications

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<sup>4</sup>Except, by implication, possibly in the dubious passage, Jn. 7:53-8:11.

What are the theological implications of the exegesis of Matthew 5:17-20? The broadest implication is that Jesus "does not agree" with either the classical dispensational view of the Law or the more radical Reformed tradition we have labeled Theonomist. Dispensationalism has been called a "hermeneutical scheme" or methodology rather than a theological system.<sup>5</sup> Whatever one may think about the accuracy of this statement it must be acknowledged that dividing sacred history into dispensations (as all theologians do to some extent) results in a unique interpretational principle.<sup>6</sup>

In applying the classical dispensational scheme to Matthew 5:17-20, one notices in some older dispensational analysis a relegation of the Sermon on the Mount primarily to the future millennial kingdom.<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:17-20 especially is "law" and belongs to the dispensation of "Man under Law" while the Christian belongs under the dispensation of Grace following the sacrificial death of Christ. A cleavage is created between law and gospel. The classical dispensationalist will reply that the Sermon on

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<sup>5</sup>See Warren S. Kissinger, The Sermon on the Mount: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1975, p. 61.

<sup>6</sup>As opposed to some Reformers who saw no discontinuities in sacred history.

<sup>7</sup>Scofield Reference Bible. New York: Oxford University, 1909, pp. 999-1000.

the Mount is applicable to believers in this Age.<sup>8</sup> Principles may be drawn from it as well as from all Scripture, even the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, although the principles of the Law are "intensified" as Christ "transfers the obligation from the outward act to the attitude of the heart," as Christ transfers the obligation from the outward act to the attitude of the heart," the Law itself is relegated to the future millennial kingdom and has no relation to the Gentiles.<sup>9</sup> The Law is said to be "done away."<sup>10</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer does allude to a tripartite division of Law into civil, ceremonial, and moral aspects, but immediately dismisses any use of the civil and ceremonial in this age.<sup>11</sup> The moral law reappears in the New Testament reincorporated into the teachings of grace and transferred to the inner life.<sup>12</sup> The external law's purpose was condemnation and it was given only to Israel.<sup>13</sup>

If we should cast the classical dispensational language into that of the Reformers, it becomes evident that the

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<sup>8</sup>See Charles Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today. Chicago: Moody Press, 1974, p. 55.

<sup>9</sup>See Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology. Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948, Vol. IV, p. 220.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 209-210.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 161, 165.

dispensationalists do not recognize a usus politicus or civilis for the Mosaic Law applicable to all men by government.<sup>14</sup> As for a usus spiritualis or theologicus, the function to reveal sin, blindness, wickedness, and the wrath of God,<sup>15</sup> the classical dispensationalist would apparently recognize this as a result of the Law, if not a major function. This use drives one to God whereas the dispensationalist might prefer to rely primarily on grace to draw.<sup>16</sup> A third use of the Law is the usus paedagogus.<sup>17</sup> Whereas the usus theologicus condemns man, the usus paedagogus directs the Christian life as a guide. The only difference it seems between the dispensationalist and the non-dispensationalist regarding this use would be one of emphasis. The Reformed tradition would tend to place great emphasis on this use while the dispensationalist would emphasize the work of the Spirit in the inner life. But both traditions would agree as to the function of the Law on this point. Both traditions would also agree that grace abrogates the curse of the Law for the believer, though the

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<sup>14</sup>See Gerhard Ebeling, Word and Faith. London SCM, 1963, pp. 62 ff for a discussion of the triplex usus legis.

<sup>15</sup>See Edward A. Dowey, "Law in Luther and Calvin," Theology Today 41 (1984-85), p. 150.

<sup>16</sup>Hence there would probably be less emphasis on repentance and more on faith.

<sup>17</sup>See David Wright, "The Ethical Use of the Old Testament in Luther and Calvin: A Comparison," Scot J. Theol 36, pp. 473-974. See also Calvin, Institutes, op. cit., 2.7.12.



dispensationalist tradition appears to obviate the Mosaic Law itself as a normative external standard while the Reformed tradition would retain the Law more or less.

As to the tripartite division of the Law into moral, ceremonial, and civil law, attributed first to Melancthon,<sup>18</sup> the dispensationalist, as we have already seen, would abrogate both the ceremonial and civil law and make them completely non-normative, while intensifying and interiorizing the moral law.

The Reformed tradition including men such as Melancthon and later Francis Turretin, as well as the Puritans of England and New England, agree that the moral law is eternal since it represents the "eternal, unchangeable wisdom and principle of righteousness in God himself."<sup>19</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) is clear here: "The Law . . . while it ceased to offer salvation on the ground of obedience, nevertheless continued to be the revealed expression of God's will, binding all human consciences as the rule of life."<sup>20</sup> Further, "the moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the

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<sup>18</sup>Loci Communes, 1555, ed. by Clyde Manschreck. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965, pp. 83 ff where Melancthon defines the lex moralis (eternal law), lex ceremonialis (ritual law), and lex judicialis (laws about civil government).

<sup>19</sup>See Ibid., p. 84. See also Francis Turretin, Institutio Theologiae Elencticae, in Reformed Dogmatics, ed. by John W. Beardslee. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965, p. 75.

<sup>20</sup>Chapter XIX, Sec. II, Of the Law of God.

obedience thereof. Neither doth Christ in the gospel in any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation."<sup>21</sup> The moral law is clearly not interiorized and is established as a rule of conduct.

The ceremonial law, foreshadowing Christ, is "abrogated under the New Testament."<sup>22</sup> Finally, the "sundry judicial laws" are "not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require."<sup>23</sup> Turretin puts it thus: "In those matters on which it [the judicial law] is in harmony with the moral law and with ordinary justice, it is binding upon us."<sup>24</sup> Otherwise this law was temporally and culturally bound.

Neither the Reformed position nor the Classical Dispensational positions are antinomian in the theological sense of that term. The Classical Dispensational tradition, however, does tend to interiorize the Law, looking more to the Spirit to establish ethical-moral precepts or judicial precepts and de-emphasizing the externality of these precepts. The Reformed tradition on the other hand,

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., Ch. XIX, Sec. V.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., Ch. XIX, see III.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., Ch. XIX, Sec. IV; "general equity" is a terminus probably meaning in accordance with general notions of justice. See Sinclair Ferguson, "An Assembly of Theonomists? The Teaching of the Westminster Divines on the Law of God," in Theonomy: A Reformed Critique, ed. by William S. Barker and Robert Godfrey. Grand Rapids: Academie, 1990, pp. 329-332.

<sup>24</sup>See Turretin, Institutio, op. cit., p. 84, and Melancthon, Loci Communes, op. cit., p. 83.

including its heirs, the Theonomists, would tend to see a greater continuity between the Mosaic system and the present age in terms of the emphasis upon external ethical-moral precepts. In fact, in establishing an ethical system, the Old Testament Law would probably be consulted first, if not exclusively, with less emphasis on the New Testament as bringing a fundamental change in the use of the Mosaic Law. In the Reformed tradition there is a greater emphasis on the external code and less on the "inner code."

As noted at the beginning of this thesis, in recent years a modified Dispensational theology has developed which focuses on the degree of continuity or discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament rather than an absolute position such as complete discontinuity or complete continuity.

The Classical Dispensational position appears to claim that none of the Mosaic Law or precepts are per se universally obligatory on the church or the world today. The modern dispensational position would state this idea in the following way: Christians are bound only by regulations of the Adamic covenant, the Noahic covenant, and the New Testament.<sup>25</sup> God's law and the Mosaic Law are then two separate, but possibly overlapping, bodies of law.<sup>26</sup> But

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<sup>25</sup>See H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse? Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1988, p. 119.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

this analysis of Matthew 5:17-20 has argued that the Law has not in any sense been abrogated. Rather the whole Mosaic Law has been transformed. Because of this transformation some precepts become inapplicable, but no commandments are considered per se abolished (that is de jure abrogated).

On the other hand, the Reformed position is not acceptable because of its arbitrary classification of commandments. For example, how does one classify the Sabbath law? Is it moral or ceremonial (or even judicial) or all three types of law? In addition there seems to be little warrant in Judaism or the New Testament for such a classification. It does not make logical sense to argue that Jesus abrogated the ceremonial commandments in Matthew 5:17 when in the following verses he explicitly asserts the continuing validity of the Law as a whole.

We believe that the conclusions of this thesis force one to abandon both the classical (and even modern) dispensational and the Reformed views on the Mosaic Law. The Law cannot be considered abolished or else we do not take Jesus' assertion in Matthew 5:17-19 seriously. On the other hand, one cannot properly retain the Reformed scheme with respect to the Law, since it tends arbitrarily to "carve up" the Law and then to annul some portions. We have argued that none of the Mosaic Law was annulled per se.

This thesis has explicitly focused on the idea of the simultaneous, overlapping present and future aspects of the

Kingdom of God as the crucial hermeneutical principle, though not the only principle, for interpreting Matthew 5:17-20. The existence of this new order has created a situation in which aspects of the Old Age continue to exist (the Mosaic Law) while the New Age has broken in to transform. Since the Kingdom is not yet consummated, the Mosaic Law remains valid, but it retains its validity in a transformed sense. It is not however the case that certain aspects of the Mosaic Law are abrogated for the redeemed while they remain valid for the unredeemed. The whole Law remains valid for all men but its use is transformed and, for the redeemed, interiorized and heightened. For example, the Jewish ceremonial regulations become irrelevant in the New, Messianic Age, but they are not abrogated as if they were before imperfect or perverse. They are certainly not necessary since Christ's perfect sacrifice and they certainly would never have governed the Gentiles. But in themselves, it is argued, these ceremonial regulations are valid so long as they are not intended to mediate salvation or are forced upon the non-Jew. But it should be added here that the Jewish cultic regulations are one of the easier issues to deal with in the Mosaic Law.<sup>27</sup> It is much more difficult to determine how to use the remainder of the

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<sup>27</sup>This is especially true in light of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Mosaic Law in the church, in the individual's life as a guide, and in the civil realm.

One might legitimately ask at this point, assuming our thesis has validity, whether this framework can be applied meaningfully in the ethical realm to establish an ethical system and to determine what from the Mosaic Law can be appropriately included in it and what ought to be excluded. In answering this question we must first assert the continuing validity in general of the entire Mosaic Law. All we mean by this is that none of the Law is abolished per se or de jure. We do not, however, mean to imply that every commandment would be equally useful in every situation in this Age.

How does one then distinguish among precepts? One must first determine the jurisdiction of his ethical system, whether the church or culture generally or some subset. Then one must establish in Scripture Jesus' basic mission in salvation history. Of course, his basic mission was redemption, a new order, and a new relationship of men to God. In light of this basic mission and the particular realm in question, one will include in his ethical system those commandments or groups of commandments, first that are consistent with Jesus' mission. For example, one would not consider the sacrificial system to be applicable in the

church in light of Jesus' salvific mission.<sup>28</sup> Second, one must take seriously the concept that the Mosaic Law was in part at least a reflection of God's eternal character. If we did not agree on this, we would have no basis to advance any ethical system except pure relativism. Those commandments, therefore, which deal with man's relation to man and God are to be included in any appropriate ethical system. Men are somehow "in the image of God" and so actions (or thoughts) directed against others must be deemed to be also against God himself. If God would not violate these commandments (and He would not be capable) then man must not. This would include actions against the family unit (for example, adultery).

However, we must add here that it is entirely possible that, even if these "moral" commandments were included in some ethical system, for example, a system of civil law established by government, it might not be appropriate to transfer the same punishment as that established by the Mosaic Law. We are on "thin ice" here because it would be difficult to prove adequately why this should be so, except for reference to our broad concept of the breaking in of the New Age to establish a new order. We could resort to a

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<sup>28</sup>One could, however, argue that the sacrificial system is not "wrong" per se, so long as it is not understood to mediate salvation. Of course, in most cultures it would be irrelevant. This principle would also affect other so-called ritual precepts.

natural law view, but this is a tenuous route if not checked by some external standard.

We would finally mention that in light of our analysis here, we do not consider it impermissible in all cases, in designing an ethical system, to include "commandments" (better, principles) not found in the Mosaic Law, so long as they do not violate the eternal aspects of that Law. In other words, it is permissible to be "stricter" than the Law or broader in scope as long as one remains within the broad parameters of the Law as it is to be understood in the New Age.

Two further issues must be dealt with briefly. First, one may legitimately ask what is the "legal standard" for believers in the New Age? Second, does the mission of Jesus in giving the Spirit override any commandment so as to abrogate it? With regard to the believer's standard, as mentioned earlier, the Mosaic Law has been interiorized and intensified for the Christian or at least for the external church. This is taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. But such a change in use for believers does not abrogate the external Mosaic Law. Rather its realm of application changes. With respect to the implications for the Law of Jesus' sending of the Spirit, it is true that the indwelling Spirit was an unparalleled event in salvation history. The Spirit dwelling in believers is part of the new relationship to God in Christ. But it would seem to be inaccurate to say



that this event would override any commandment. Certainly the Holy Spirit empowers believers to obey both the external commandments and the internal ones, but it is also certain that in order to obey God's Law even under the Old Age, one had to be empowered by the Spirit. To argue otherwise would make one Pelagian. Man has never had the autonomy necessary to do what was commanded.

Perhaps this final digression from Biblical studies into ethics has been entirely too ambitious. It must nevertheless be done. Biblical studies is the "raw material" for theological reflection, but theology must ultimately be practiced. Therefore, it is quite appropriate to end this thesis with a discussion of ethics, however rudimentary it may be. Hopefully, this work will cause serious students of Scripture to re-think the issue of the Mosaic Law, on both sides of the "theological fence." Hopefully also this analysis will engender further reflection toward a truly Biblical ethical system, one which mankind generally and the church desperately need.

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