

Christ and the Law, Part 3

Scripture: Matthew 5:19

Code: 2211

Matthew 5:17-20 is our text tonight, and we'll be considering a section of Scripture that we've entitled 'Christ and the Law.' Tonight, we'll be looking at verse 19, which is the believer's relation to the law; it's a tremendously important passage. Let's read it.

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men to do so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

There is an old cliché that has hung around since the 1960's that sort of characterizes the spirit of this age, and that is, "Do your own thing." How many times have you heard that? Freedom has been equated with doing what you want, expressing yourself. As a corollary to this kind of mentality of 'do your own thing' has come an almost anti-law attitude, which we could call antinomian, or anti-law.

There is almost a spirit of lawlessness that rides as a corollary to the concept of doing your own thing. Don't let anybody tell you what to do; not God, not the Bible, not the government, not your school, not your husband or wife, not your boss or anyone else. This kind of antinomian ideal is reminiscent of a time in biblical history which provoked God's vengeance, because the Bible says, "Everyone did that which was right in his own eyes." This is nothing more than doing your own thing - it's the same idea.

In our secular world, this antinomianism, this rebellion, this 'do your own thing' mentality has really revealed itself in two areas that stretch into many other areas. First of all, it has bred a sort of personal existentialism. Existentialism is a philosophy that says, "You've got to fill this moment with everything you want to cram into it. It's all you've got; live for the here and now. Forget the sweet by and by, and grab on to the here and now." Existentialism says, "Do what you want now. Grab it while you can get it; take advantage of it now." So there has come out of this attitude a personal existentialism.

Secondly, it has also been the legacy of this particular antinomian do-your-own-thing attitude that the function or the right of the state to legislate morality or to say what is right and wrong is gradually being removed from the state. In other words, the first thing that happens in an antinomian, existential philosophy is that everyone does that which is right in his own eyes. The natural next step is that they don't let anyone tell them what is right. So you begin to see not only a personal existentialism, but a breakdown in government in terms of its function to try and keep a lid on morality.

So what we hear today is, "Let everyone alone morally. If they want to be a homosexual, have a bunch of wives, or commit all kinds of various personal crimes that are supposedly called 'victimless crimes,' let them alone. We don't need any government legislating morality, we don't need any God telling us what to do, we don't need any antiquated, biblical Victorianism to put down a suppressing palm on what men want." Consequently, what you have in the natural decline of man is a speeding-up process when he attunes himself to this kind of thinking.

Even in the church of Jesus Christ, there has been this same attitude. The church has been infiltrated by, in many cases, an immorality and even an amorality. It has become tolerant of sexual activity. I heard of one church recently, a gentlemen was an elder there and told me that they had elders there who were swapping wives. They decided to do nothing about it in the church because it might create some problems. We are very much aware of churches where homosexuals are being given certain rights, and on and on it goes. Churches are afraid to discipline people because they feel it might make waves. So even in the church of Jesus Christ, a kind of removing of the authority of the Word of God or of the power of the church to act on sin is slowly taking place.

There are other people who have an antinomian spirit based on a false interpretation of the concept of justice or justification. They feel that since we have been justified by faith alone, since we have been made just by God, since He has declared us saved, and since the Bible says we are no longer under the law, now grace is so magnanimous, so full, and so far-reaching, we can do whatever we want and not even worry about it.

I know of one church in our country, and know of it very well, where they believe that the individual Christian is really two parts: you are the new creature and the old man. When you sin, it's the old man. So you expect that if you have the old man, he's going to sin, so sin is just the old man doing his thing. It doesn't do any good to discipline the old man, he's rotten anyway, so don't worry about it. So there is no reason to discipline sin, no reason to deal with sin, that's just the old man who will be around, doing his thing anyway. This is nothing but a rebirth of philosophical dualism and it is anti-biblical.

There will always be people in society who want to kick over the traces, to throw out God, His standards, His Word, and His law, and it's amazing that can even become a problem in the church.

There are people who have written books about grace, about justification, about the magnanimous forgiveness of God, who have traded on that forgiveness and lived dissolute, sinful, evil, vile lives.

That's not what the Bible teaches. The Bible never teaches that we are to be lawless, to live against a divine standard, that grace frees us from responsibility to obey God's laws, that God has altered any of His moral standards. That, in effect, is what Jesus is saying in this passage.

So we pose the question, "What is the Christian's relation to the law of God?" We've been saved by faith; the Bible talks about being free from the law, but what does it mean when it says we are still obligated to obey? What is the believer's relationship to the law? Are we free from it or are we not free from it?

I really believe verse 19 is an excellent answer. "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach me so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Here, our Lord gives us, in one verse, a very simple and direct answer. I'll remind you that our Lord is speaking about His attitude toward the Old Testament. The Jews of this time who were listening to Him were very curious about what He thought about the Old Testament. He was so new, so different, so unlike their system, so unlike the Judaism that was extant at the time. He was so different from what they defined as religion that they wanted to know whether He had made a clean break with the past, whether He had overthrown the Mosaic law, whether He was setting aside the Old Testament. So our Lord, in this passage, tells us His view of the Old Testament law.

First of all, He reiterates the preeminence of it in verse 17, the permanence of it in verse 18, the pertinence of it in verse 19, and then the purpose of it in verse 20. They were looking for a king, and He was a King, but they were looking for a political king who would bring an external kingdom. But He was a spiritual King who would bring an internal Kingdom. So instead of talking about a new economy, or a new politic, He kept talking about new character - that's what He was talking about in the Beatitudes. Instead of changing the outside, He wanted to change the inside.

Here, He tells them that the key to a change on the inside, the key to qualifying to fulfill the responsibility to be in His Kingdom, is the Old Testament Word of God. "It still stands," He says. "Righteousness is still defined on God's terms. God hasn't changed His mind." So He lifts up the law of God. He says, "Do I believe in the Old Testament? Do I ever! In fact, I hold it higher than any of you ever thought of." So this passage is surely the single most wonderful New Testament passage on the exaltation of the Old Testament, God's law.

Remember that we talked about, in our first week's study of this passage, the preeminence of the law in verse 17. Just to remind you, the Lord said, "Think not that I have come to destroy the law or the

prophets. I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill." We talked about the fact that Jesus saw the law as preeminent; in other words, it ascended above anything else. It was far beyond the rabbinic traditions or anything that they were defining as religion on their own terms.

He exalts the law of God for three reasons. First, it was authored by God; it was The Law. Secondly, it was affirmed by the prophets; and thirdly, it was accomplished by Christ. Those three things give it its preeminence. Then our Lord moved to the permanence of the law. It was not only preeminent in that time, it is preeminent now in its permanence.

Verse 18. "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or tittle shall in no way pass from the law until all be fulfilled." The Jews were looking for a more lax system, they were looking to drop the standards. Jesus lifted the standard higher than even the leaders of Israel had done. He said, "It will stay and abide until every single small letter is fulfilled."

Then, tonight, we come to the pertinence of the law. In verse 19, the Lord says, "If the law is preeminent and permanent, then the law lays a claim on your life." Frankly, this is one of the most basic, definitive studies that a Christian could ever do; to comprehend and understand in your spiritual mind what is your responsibility to God's divine law is a critical issue. It will determine whether you are the least or the greatest in the Kingdom, whether you come in by the hair of your chinny-chin-chin or whether you're loaded down with rewards.

Our Lord warns His hearers in verse 19 about setting aside, or disannulling, even the least of God's moral standards. There are several reasons for it, and this is the outline that I want you to follow.

First of all, He says that the law is pertinent to us because of its character. What does that mean? Look at the beginning of verse 19, "Whosoever therefore." What's the 'therefore' there for? To take you backwards. "Therefore," He says, "Because it is preeminent." Since God wrote it, the apostles affirmed it, and Christ fulfilled it, it's preeminent.

"And since it is permanent, therefore it is pertinent." Anything that is preeminent, that is, anything that stands above any other written truth in the history of the world, anything that is exalted as the very Word of God, anything that is upheld by God's mouthpieces (the prophets), anything that is fulfilled by the very Christ Himself is preeminent. Because it is preeminent and because it is permanent, therefore it is binding. God doesn't put out whimsical things; the Bible doesn't make suggestions, it gives commands. There is a big difference. So the first point is that we are responsible to listen to the law of God because of its character.

Secondly, we are to listen to the law because of its consequence. What you and I do with God's moral law will bring upon our lives a direct effect. How we deal with God's law will directly affect us. There are two categories; those who break even the least command and teach others to do it will be

called least in the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who keep the commandments and teach them will be called the greatest, or great, in the Kingdom of Heaven. In other words, by what you do with the law, you will be designated as the least or the greatest.

Let's look first of all at the negative result, the negative consequence. We are to obey God's law because of its character as permanent and preeminent and because of its consequences. The first one, the concept of 'least,' is negative. Verse 19 says that if you break this or teach others to do it, you are the least.

Let me help you understand this thought. The word 'break' is a very interesting word; it is the word luo, a very common word in the Greek. It means 'to loose, to release, to nullify, to destroy.' The idea here would be that if you loose yourself or release yourself from an obligation to obey God's least command, you'll be called the least in the Kingdom. It's kind of interesting to see the word here because of the word that went with it earlier in verse 17.

There, Jesus said, "Think not that I have come to destroy the law." This is another form of that same word luo. Jesus said, "I did not come to loose the law, and if you do it, you'll be considered the least in the Kingdom," only Jesus used a more intense word. Jesus used the same verb, only with a kata on the front, which intensifies it. What He is saying is this: "I did not come to utterly nullify, I did not come to utterly destroy, I did not come to utterly devastate and abrogate the law. But if you even loose one little part of it, you'll be called the least in the Kingdom." In other words, Jesus is saying, "I did not come to destroy at all, but the temptation to the believer is going to be to fool around with parts of it, and set aside what doesn't accommodate what they want to do."

That's a very common problem, you know. It's very possible for a Christian to do that; it is impossible for Christ to set it aside, but it possible for you to do it. Isn't that interesting? It is possible for you and I, by disobedience, ignorance, misrepresentation, or by manipulation for selfish reasons, to set the law of God aside and just do what we want. It's very possible. But if you're doing it, let me tell you, you're doing something that Jesus would never do. You have ceased to be Christlike when you sin.

Notice that He says, "One of the very least commandments." Are there degrees? Yes. I think there are some sins more severe than others. The Jews believed that. The Jews had divided the Old Testament and their laws into two categories: positive and negative. They said that there were 248 positive commands and 365 negative ones - one for every day of the year. So there were 613 commands, and they used to have big arguments, big debates, over which were the heavy ones and which were the light ones, which were the important and less important ones. They were more concerned with concentrating on the more important ones. Yes, there were some greater and some lesser in their minds, and no doubt in the mind of God.

However, Jesus is saying, "If you take one of the very least of these, one of the very minor ones, and flagrantly and openly set it aside and loose yourself from the obligation to that law, you will be called the least in the Kingdom." Jesus was saying that He upheld every single part of God's law in its proper place.

Keep in mind that there were parts of the Old Testament law, ceremonial, civil, and judicial parts, that would have fulfillment in Christ's time. When they were fulfilled, they ceased to be binding on us. But at any point in redemptive history, whichever part of God's law was for that time, whichever part was still binding in that time, no one had a right to loose. No one. That's why in Acts 20:27, the Apostle Paul said to the Ephesian elders, "I have not failed to declare unto you the whole counsel of God." Why? Because the whole counsel of God is binding.

That's why I love being in a church. That's why I desire to be here, because I feel that I need to teach people the whole counsel of God. I used to have 10 suits and 10 sermons and just move, just keep moving. But I can never get it all done. When you land in one place and pour your life into the Word of God, then you can teach the fullness of the counsel of God.

Remember, there were some parts of the ceremonial law and civil (or judicial) law related to Israel that Christ would fulfill. In other words, when Christ set Israel aside and built His church, then the civil law related to the nation of Israel was set aside. When Christ died on the Cross, the ceremonial law was set aside; the veil was rent in two, the holy of holies was wide open, the sacrificial system came to a screeching halt. A few years later, the whole city of Jerusalem was wiped out, the temple was flattened, and there have never been Jewish sacrifices since. So when Christ came, there were some things that were fulfilled, judicial, civil, and ceremonial things. But the moral law of God hasn't changed.

Regarding the question of whether some commandments are more important than others, just to give some insight, let's look at Matthew 22. Here we have what must be the tail-end of such a discussion about what is the most important part of the law of God. The Pharisees and Sadducees are involved here. The Pharisees came, and one of them who was a lawyer asked Jesus a question, testing Him, saying, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" This indicates that this was their discussion. They wanted to know what the most important commandment was; what are the heavies, you know? We want to keep those; it's kind of hard keeping the little ones, but if we could just zero in on the big ones, that'd be good.

Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. The second is like it; love your neighbor as yourself. On these commandments hang all the law and the prophets." There it is, folks; the Lord Himself was grading the commandments. Number one, love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind. Number two, love your neighbor as yourself. Numbers three, four, five, six, seven, and so forth come under those.

So even the Lord acknowledged that there was variety of intensity and degree of importance to the various commands. So it is possible that if there is a great command, there is also a lesser one.

In Matthew 23:23, it says, "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you pay tithe." Now tithing was right, wasn't it? Weren't they supposed to pay tithe to the nation of Israel of all that they grew and all they they had? He says, "You pay your tithe of mint and anise [a plant] and cumin [a seed] and minced herbs." Here they were, saying, "Here are nine seeds for me, and one for God. Nine little plants for me and one for God. Nine little herbs for me and one for God." They were doing it with little, tiny, minuscule things. But He says, "You have omitted the weightier matters of the law." Yes, it was important to tithe, but not nearly as important as justice, mercy, and faith.

So in God's law, there were degrees. There were greater commandments and there were lesser ones. That is just a footnote to help you understand that it is possible to violate what the Lord would see as a less important command, a least important command, perhaps. But lest you feel yourself off the hook for the little ones, Jesus said that if you loose your obligation from the least commandment and teach someone else to do it, you'll be called the least in the Kingdom. Let's go back to Matthew 5.

I think we'd all agree that murder was a worse sin than missing the Sabbath observance, but for a Jew in the Old Testament, that was serious. I think in our time today, we would say that murder is worse than failing to give to the Lord what is rightfully His in your giving one week or another, but to violate even the least of God's standards is to take a place of lesser respect and honor and reward in the Kingdom.

Some say that when it says 'least in the Kingdom' that this is what other people will think about you. Some commentators say, "Everyone will think you're the least in the Kingdom; you'll get a bad reputation." I don't think that's what it's saying. I don't think it's least in a subjective sense, where someone thinks you're the least. I think it's least in an objective sense; I think that if you break God's commandments, God is going to make you least in His Kingdom.

I'm gratified about one thing: it doesn't say He kicks you out. Aren't you glad that even when you fail and loose yourself from God's law, and go ahead and do what you want anyway, and turn your back on God, and disobey Him as flagrantly and openly as you want, all you can do is be the least? But you're still going to be in the Kingdom. But I feel it's a place of blessing, a place of fruitfulness, a place of usefulness, and a place of reward.

If you go around breaking God's command, you won't necessarily be kicked out of His Kingdom - that's not the idea. What will happen is you'll become a person He can't use, bless, or reward. You may say, "I'm just failing now. In the past, boy, I really racked it up. I've been faithful for a long time; this is just a final fling." That's why John said, "Look to yourselves that you lose not the things that

you have wrought, but that you receive a full reward." You can spend the first half of your Christian life earning it and the second half giving it back up.

So the Bible says, "Even the least commandment, when violated, makes you the least individual." You see, the reason is this. If you break any part of God's law, you've broken the whole thing, right? In James 2:10, it says, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." You offend in one point, and you show an irreverence for the whole law of God! Jesus is saying, "If you violate the principle at any point, then you have shown a disregard for the totality of the law of God, which is a disregard for the holiness of God." Such a person would be the least.

There is another possibility in this passage also, and that is that He's talking to the scribes and Pharisees, and that He includes them in the Kingdom only in a visible sense. They are the phonies, they aren't real at all, so what He's saying to them is, "You people who take a physical place in the Kingdom, who attach yourselves to the Kingdom externally and don't obey God's laws are going to be the least in the Kingdom." The implication is that ultimate judgment will put them out of the Kingdom to be like John 15, branches cut off and cast into the fire.

I don't know specifically which one our Lord was referring to here, I don't know anyone who does. I think both have a wonderful message for us to listen to. If He's talking about the true citizens of the Kingdom, as some commentators think He is, because He says 'you' in verse 20, then contrasts the 'you' with the scribes and Pharisees, as if He's talking about His disciples. They think what He's really saying is, "You'll be in the Kingdom but you'll be the least blessed, the least useful, the least rewarded." That's a tremendous message for us. Or on the other hand, if He's addressing all of the crowd, He's saying, "You're all sort of attached externally and visibly, but you're going to be the least in this whole deal when the judgment comes down, and the least are going to be cast out." Personally, I like the first interpretation better. Because of the pronoun 'you,' I think He's directing His talk more to those who have made a commitment.

If you think it's serious to break God's law, I think it's more serious to teach someone else to do that. James also said in James 3:1, "Stop being so many teachers, for theirs is the greater condemnation." I tell young men all the time, "If God didn't call you into the ministry, run a million miles away from it! You don't want the responsibility." I can remember four years ago when I came as close to leaving the ministry as I ever will in my life. I had this terrible inward feeling that I didn't want the responsibility to stand up and give the Word of God because I knew my own human frailty and weakness, and I didn't want to be responsible for leading anyone astray.

"If you break the least of these commandments or teach anyone else to do it," and you can teach two ways, beloved. You can teach by what you say and you can teach by what you do. If the words aren't right or the example isn't right and you're breaking the commandments, you're just decreasing your place in His Kingdom. As Isaiah 9:15 puts it, "The ancient and the honorable, he is the head.

The prophet that teaches lies, he is the tail." If you're going to teach, teach the truth or don't teach. If you're in the Kingdom, live it, don't break it.

So though Christ did not come to literally and totally abolish the law, there are believers who, by their own self-will and sin, set it aside. This is something Christ Himself wouldn't even do. Then they teach others to do it. The Pharisees were guilty of that, and so are many people today. In Acts 20, Paul said, "The thing I fear when I leave is that grievous wolves will come in, not sparing the flock, and of your own selves shall teachers rise, teaching perverse things." The church has always been attacked by heretics from the outside and heretics from the inside. Oh, how they are condemned in Scripture. No, Jesus says we can't set it aside.

There is another consequence; we are to take the law of God as pertinent to us because of its character. God wrote it, the prophets affirmed it, and Christ fulfilled it. Secondly, we are to take the law of God as pertinent because of its consequence. Consequence number one: if you break it, you're the least. Consequence number two: if you keep it, you're the greatest. This is the positive side.

Look in the middle of verse 19, "Whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Here, again, we see the two things: doing and teaching, precept and pattern, life-living and life-teaching, what you are and what you say. He says, "All God's laws are still in vogue, all His standards are still there."

At the time Jesus was talking, Israel was still a nation. They were still a duly constituted nation and were being offered the Kingdom. Consequently, they were still under civil law, still under the Old Testament judicial (and I'm using 'judicial' and 'civil' synonymously) or civil law of Israel, and they needed to keep every bit of it. They were also still under the ceremonial law, right? They were also still involved in all the sacrifices, all the feasts, all the Sabbaths, and all the other things, because Christ hadn't yet died. The church hadn't yet been born, so at the time Jesus spoke, they were under the civil law, the ceremonial law, and the moral law. It was all still binding on them.

Nothing had changed for them. Now for us, the civil law, the law that duly constituted Israel as a nation, has been fulfilled. The ceremonial law, the law that set up the sacrificial system and a priesthood, has all been fulfilled; we have a new priest, a new sacrifice, and a new temple not made with hands. The only law left for us, really, is the moral law. The law that is the extension of God's character and His nature, beloved, that is still binding on us.

In I Thessalonians 2:10, Paul says, "You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe, as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." Paul says, "You know we lived a holy,

just, blameless life among you, keeping God's standards." Nothing changed for the moral law of God.

I Thessalonians 4:7 says, "God has not called us to uncleanness but to holiness." Nothing has changed. The moral law of God is still binding on us. I Timothy 4:11 says, "These things command and teach: be an example of the believer in word, conduct, love, spirit, faith, purity." Nothing changes; keep God's standards. I Timothy 6:11 says, "Thou, O man of God, flee these things. Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith." So the idea is that the ceremonial law was fulfilled in the Cross; the civil/judicial law was fulfilled in the birth of the church and Israel being set aside. A new people was carved out for God's use. But the extension of God's nature, and His moral and ethical law, is still the same. So we are to obey it because of its character and consequence.

I want to close with a third reason. We should obey it because of its clarification. The Apostle Paul looked forward to going to Heaven because he knew he would receive a crown. He knew that awaiting him there was a crown of life, a crown of righteousness, a crown of rejoicing, a runner's crown, an incorruptible crown. He knew of at least five crowns awaiting him in Heaven. Why? Because he had not broken God's law willfully and unrepentantly, but he had upheld God's law and taught others to keep God's law.

So we are to obey because of its character, consequence, and clarification. What I mean by that is just this. People say, "Well, yes, verse 19 does say that, however, that was in the old dispensation. That was in the past, and now that isn't in vogue. It was before the Cross." You'd be surprised how many people say that. "It was before the Cross, so we don't have to worry about it. We can just free-wheel it from here on in, and break a few here and there. After all, it's just the old man doing his thing; what are you going to do about it? Romans 7 says that sin that is in me, I can't do anything about it, and I have to let it do its thing. But the real me, the good me, I just really don't care to do that. I don't know how to handle that old nature - the Lord will have to deal with that in my resurrection body." That's a cop-out.

You see, you can't dispensationalize away Matthew 5:19 because of its clarification. I mean that it is repeated through all the epistles of the New Testament - that's where it's clarified. That is a very important point. We can't stop here, we have to go on to the clarification. Did the Cross end our obligation to the law? Was it all finished at the Cross? Not on your life, and the epistles make this abundantly clear. They teach two paradoxical truths, which I'll give and illustrate to you. They are tremendously important.

Principle number one we find in the epistles of Peter, Paul, John, James, and Jude. What they're effectively saying is that in some sense, the law has been fulfilled and is no longer binding. Hang on to that. They teach that in some sense, it has been fulfilled and is no longer binding; I'll admit that.

First of all, the civil/judicial law we've already talked about. It was for a limited people for a limited place and purpose and time. That law which was given to Israel has passed away. For example, most of the judicial and civil law given to Israel was to keep them separate from other nations. They had different dietary and clothing laws, different rituals, and all kinds of things that had been given by God to keep them apart.

Do you know the first thing that happened when Christ created the church? It says in Ephesians 2:14: "For He is our peace who has made both Jew and Gentile one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition." The first thing He did was break down the middle wall. What was the wall? It was the civil, judicial law that set Israel apart from the Gentile world so that when God gave birth to the church, the wall came crashing down and Jew and Gentile became one. There were no more dietary laws, no more cooking laws, no more kosher laws, it was all gone. In Acts 10, Peter sees the sheet, and in the sheet are clean and unclean animals. The Lord simply says, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat, and don't you dare call unclean what God has sanctified."

There is no more difference; there is no more civil differences, there is no more judicial identification of Israel as a separate entity. There will be a blending of Jew and Gentile in the church. The barrier was broken down. That very term, in the Greek, of breaking down the barrier is the same term used of the law in Colossians 2:14. In that passage, it talks about the ordinances, or the law, that was against us. There, it talks about a moral element, but it was the civil, judicial law that separated. So the epistles definitely teach that the civil/judicial law came to an end.

Now what about the ceremonial law? The ceremonial law was for a limited time. Mark 15:38 says that the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom and the ceremonial law was over. Look at Colossians 2:16. It says, "Let no man judge you in your food, drink, or in respect of a feast day." Don't worry anymore about Passover, Feast of Lights, Feast of Weeks, Pentecost, all that. "Or of a new moon, or a Sabbath. Those are a shadow of things to come, but the body is Christ. And when the body comes, don't mess with the shadow." So what Paul is saying is that the ceremonial law came to an end.

In Ephesians 2:14, he says the civil law came to an end. By the way, if you have any trouble on this ceremonial law thought, read Hebrews. I won't take the time now, but I found at least 20 verses that show that the ceremonial law is not binding on us. So the epistles do teach that there is a sense in which the law is no longer binding on us. That is, in its civil or judicial sense as identified with Israel as a nation and in its ceremonies.

That leaves the moral area. Do the epistles teach that the moral law is no longer binding? Yes, in one sense. This is tremendous. This is the sense, Colossians 2:14. When Christ died on the Cross, it says here what happened. "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, He took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross." God had a moral law, and every

time you broke that moral law, God wrote it down, until against you was a handwriting of broken laws. Then do you know what God did with all of those? He put them on Jesus, nailed them to the Cross, and He paid the penalty. In that sense, and in that sense alone, the law isn't binding on you. You know what sense it is? The sense of the penalty of the law; you are not under the penalty of the law. Who paid the penalty for you? Jesus. So you will not suffer the consequence of your sin in terms of ultimate penalty.

The same thing is said in Romans 6:14, and we could spend forever on this principle. "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law." What does he mean, that you don't have to do anything any more? Do you not have to live a moral life or obey God? No! What he means is that you are no longer under the power of the penalty of the law. It can't kill you anymore; you can only die once. That's all, only once. Christ died on the Cross, and you, by faith, died in Him. That pays the penalty, so in that sense, you are no longer under the law. That is, the law has no power to slay you. The law had a penalty, the wages of sin is death, and Christ took the penalty.

Romans 10:4 says, "Christ is the end of the law to everyone who believes." In what sense? Do we never have to obey it? No. Only in the sense that He paid the penalty. We're no longer under its curse. It says the same thing in Galatians 5:18, "But if you are led by the Spirit," that is, the function and operation of the Spirit in your life, "You are not under the law." If you possess the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God is moving in your life, you are giving evidence of having been born again, which means you have been taken out from under the curse of the law and penalty of the law. In an additional sense, you literally can fulfill the law by the energy of the Holy Spirit.

This is something that is repeated many times in Galatians, and we don't have the time to go through it. Galatians 3:24 says, "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, but after faith has come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." In other words, we don't need the law anymore to hit us, whip us, strap us, beat on us; we don't need the law to ply its curse on us, because Christ has borne all of that. The law had a penalty: "Cursed is he that does not abide by all things written in the book of the law," says Galatians 3:10. You were cursed, but here came Jesus and took your curse on Himself.

That's the sense in which the moral law is no longer binding. So what do we see? The epistles teach that, in some sense, we are not under the law. Civilly? No. Morally? Only in one sense - we are no longer under its penalty, and frankly, we don't need to be under its power either, do we? Because if we walk in the Spirit, we will freely energize, by God's Spirit, to fulfill the law in a positive way. We don't need to feel the guilt that comes when we violate that law.

Some people say that the Gospel overthrows the law, but it doesn't. The Gospel exalts the law, because never forget that for Christ to save you, He had to fulfill the whole penalty of the law for every man who ever lived.

The person who is trusting Christ is no longer under the condemnation of the law. Look at Romans 7:1 for the last word on this point. It says, "Do you not know, brothers, that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?" That's all; when you die, that's it. If you're going to your funeral in the back of the hearse, and you're in your pine box, and the guy is going too fast, they won't give you the ticket. The law has no power over you.

Then he gives an illustration in verse 2, "For a woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband for as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So, if while her husband is alive, she marries another, she is an adulteress." She's also a polygamist, "But if her husband is dead, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, even though she has married another man."

In other words, he says, "The law is only good until you die. For example, marriage - the laws of marriage are binding until you're dead. When you're dead, they're no longer binding." That's all. Verse 4 says, "Wherefore my brothers, you also have become dead to the law by the body of Christ," and I believe he means the crucified body of Christ, "That you should be now dead to the law and married to another, even Him who was raised from the dead that we should bring forth fruit unto God." When you put your faith in Jesus Christ and were united with Him in His death, then you died to the law in terms of its power and penalty, and you have risen in new life. You are no longer under the law in that sense, so verse 6 says, "We are now delivered from the law."

There are some people who go crazy at this point and say, "See, we don't have to keep the laws or the rules." One guy said to me, "I don't have to confess my sin; that's all old stuff. I don't have to worry about what I do; I'm in grace and can just let it all go." No, because the epistles also teach a second truth. This is the clarification; the epistles teach that the law is still binding on the believer in some sense. We are free in some sense, in the sense of penalty, the sense of its dominating power over us. But the law is also binding in another sense.

For example, in I Corinthians 9:21, it says, "Though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ." Isn't that great? When you become a Christian, you aren't lawless, you're under the law of Christ. Look back at Romans 7 for a minute. Someone will come to verse 6 and say, "We're not under the law anymore; fantastic! We can really live it up!" That's exactly what Paul figured they'd say, so he says this, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. The law is not sin, the law only reveals sin. I would not have known sin but by the law, because I wouldn't have known I was coveting unless the law said, 'You shall not covet.' Don't blame the law for your sin. It isn't the law that's the problem, it's you!"

I mean, if you have a clumsy servant who is a real clod, you'll never reveal it until you tell him to do something and say, "Will you go get that?" and he gets up out of the chair, knocks over the chair,

runs into the lamp, breaks the lamp, trips over the rug, knocks over a vase, and shatters the television set. You see, it wasn't the command that was the problem, it was the clumsy oaf that tried to obey it.

Don't blame God's law if you can't keep it; it's not the law's fault, it's you. That's what Paul is saying, "Don't blame the law. If the law couldn't justify you, if by the deeds of the law, no flesh could be justified, if you couldn't save yourself by keeping God's law, don't blame God's law, blame you. You just are a clumsy slave. So the law reveals sin, and secondly, the law provokes sin.

Verse 8. "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of coveting, for apart from the law, sin is dead." In other words, once there was a law, once God set a standard, it just made my sin obvious. It stimulated and aroused my sin. You know how that goes? When God makes a rule, you just wonder why He made that rule and think, "There must be something interesting there." It's like the sign that says 'keep off the grass' and you see a little kid, sticking his toe over just to defy the sign. Make a law, then watch people work hard to try and break it; it's the way human nature goes. The law provokes sin, and condemns sin.

Verse 9. "I was alive apart from the law once," I didn't know God's rules, so I thought I was fine. "Then the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." In other words, once I found out about the law, it condemned me. So what Paul is saying is, "The law is not sin, it just reveals it, provokes it, and condemns it." He summarizes in verse 12, "God's law is holy, and the commandment is holy, just, and good." The law is not the problem, you are.

You say, "Should we keep the law?" Oh, yes. Paul says later on in this chapter that he wants to keep God's law so much. Verse 22, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and it is bringing me into captivity to the law of sin." What's he saying? "I'm not under the law anymore, in terms of its penalty and power to dominate my life, because I've been freed by the Cross and given a greater power in the Holy Spirit. But that doesn't mean that I don't have to keep it anymore. I delight in God's law and will keep it. The law of God is good, the problem is me."

Verse 24. "Oh, wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? Who will get me out of this mess? It's not God's law, it's me. I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." He says, in effect, "I know it's in Christ that the answer comes, but I just don't know what the answer is, so with my mind, I serve the law of God, and with my flesh, the law of sin." He doesn't give the solution until chapter 8. In verse 4, he learns to walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Let me summarize: what do the epistles teach? They teach what I call the clarification of Matthew 5:19. On the one hand, in some sense, the law passes away. It is no longer binding ceremonially, civilly, and in the sense of its moral consequence and penalty. But in another sense, the law is still binding, so that Paul can say, "I delight in the law of God. So the righteousness of the law is fulfilled

in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." He's saying, "I delight in it," in chapter 7 and, "I fulfill it," in chapter 8. Beloved, that's the message that the Lord was giving there.

Fulfill His law. Don't break even the least of His commandments. Why? Because the law is preeminent, the law is permanent, and the law is pertinent. God, help us to be obedient Christians. I don't know about you, but I don't want to be the least in the Kingdom. What kind of an answer is that to someone who has given all for me? Ask yourself that question. Let's bow in prayer.

Lord, we've had a great time already tonight, in singing and sharing, and our hearts have been wonderfully blessed in so many ways. I just ask You to take these simple thoughts that maybe didn't sum up all that needed to be said and somehow apply them to our hearts, at least in one way. Help us to know that You have done so much for us, given so much for us - dying on a cross, bearing our sin. In You, it was all fulfilled, and You've given us the power to walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, so that we too could fulfill Your law. How incredible, Father, that apart from Jesus Christ we could never keep it no matter how hard we tried, but because of Jesus Christ, He keeps it in us by His Spirit as we yield.

We don't want to be libertines, we don't want to be legalists, we just want to be law-abiding believers. We want to take what is rightfully ours to obey, and with the spirit of obedience that cherishes the privilege, we want to say 'yes' to Your commands. For that, we give You praise, that we should have such a privilege to be counted worthy to hear Your voice, and let alone obey it. In Christ's name, Amen.

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