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Relevance of the scripture.

Matthew 5:17-20, *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. ¹⁸For 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. ¹⁹Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men 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. ²⁰For 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.*

Freedom has been equated with doing what you want.

Freedom has been equated with expressing yourself.

Do your own thing has come an almost anti-law attitude, which we could call antinomian – that means anti-law.

There is almost a spirit of lawlessness.

Deuteronomy 12:8, *“You shall not at all do as we are doing here today—every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes-*

Judges 21:25, *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

If they want to be a homosexual, let them alone.

If they want to have a bunch of wives, let them alone.

If they 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.

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 an immorality, and even an amorality. It has become tolerant of sexual activity.

Churches where homosexuals are being given certain rights. Churches that are afraid to discipline people because they feel it might make waves.

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 in sin is slowly taking place.

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

There will always be people in society who want to throw out God, and the Word of God.

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

That's not what the Bible teaches.

- The Bible never teaches that we are to be lawless.
- The Bible never teaches that we are to live against a divine standard.
- The Bible never teaches that grace frees us from responsibility to obey God's laws.

- The Bible never teaches us that God has altered any of His standards morally.

This is what Jesus is saying in this passage.

What is the Christian's relation to the law of God?

We have been saved by faith.

What does the Bible mean when it says we are still obligated to obey?

What is the believer's relationship to the law?

V 19, Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men 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.

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 regarding the Old Testament.

He was not like the Judaism that was extant at the time. He was so different from what they were defining 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.

V 17, Jesus spoke about the law pre-existed.

V 18, about the imperishability of the Scripture.

V 19, is about the consequences or the relevance of the Law.

Jesus exalts the law of God.

It was authored by God.

It was affirmed by the prophets.

It was accomplished by Christ.

V 18, The Jews were looking for a more relax system, they were looking to drop the standards, and Jesus lifts the standard higher than the leaders of Israel had even done. The word of God is imperishable.

If the law is preeminent, and if the law is permanent, then the law lays a claim on our life!

What is your responsibility to God's divine law is a critical issue?

This will determine whether you are the least or great in the kingdom.

Jesus warns them about setting aside, or disannulling, even the least of God's moral standards.

The Bible doesn't make suggestions, it gives commands.

Big difference.

We are responsible to listen to the law of God because of its character.

What you 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.

Two categories:

- Those who break the least command even and teach men to do it will be called least in the kingdom of Heaven.
- Those who do and teach the commandments will be called the 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.

The negative consequence.

V 19, Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven;

The word "break" is the word **luō** means "to loose," "to release," "to nullify," or "to destroy."

If you lose yourself or release yourself from an obligation to obey God's least command, you will be called the least in the kingdom.

Jesus said, "*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets.*"

This is another form of that same word **luō**.

Jesus said, "I did not come to lose the law. If you, do it, you will be considered the least in the kingdom."

Jesus used a more intense word.

Jesus used the same verb, only with a kata on the front, which intensifies it.

What Jesus is saying is this that I did not come to destroy but if you even loose one little part of it, you will be called the least in the kingdom.

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 them aside when they don't accommodate what we want to do."

That's a very common problem.

It is impossible for Christ to set it aside, but it is possible for Christians to do it.

It is possible for Christians to set the law aside for selfish reasons like

- disobedience,
- ignorance,
- misrepresentation, and
- manipulation.

You have ceased to be Christlike when you sin.

V 19, *Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven;*

Are there degrees in the commandments?

Yes.

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.

248 positive commands and

365 negative ones, one for every day of the year.

613 total commands.

They used to have big arguments about

- which were the heavy ones, and which were the light ones,
- which were the important ones, and which were the less important,

Because they would be 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.

Jesus was saying that He upheld every single part of God's law in its proper place.

There were parts of the Old Testament law – ceremonial parts, and civil, and judicial parts that would have fulfilment in Christ's time.

When they were fulfilled, they ceased being 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 lose, no one.

Acts 20:27, *For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.*

Why?

Because the whole counsel of God is binding.

There were some parts of the ceremonial law, and judicial law related to Israel that Christ would fulfil.

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 torn into 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 had never been Jewish sacrifices since.

So, when Christ came, there were some things that were fulfilled judicial, and ceremonial things. But the moral law of God hasn't changed.

Are there some commandments are more important than others?

Matthew 22.

The Pharisees and Sadducees are involved. The Pharisees came, and one of them who was a lawyer, asked Jesus a question, testing Him.

Matthew 22:34-40, *But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, ³⁶“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” ³⁷Jesus said to him, ““You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”*

They wanted to know what the most important commandment.

We want to keep those. It’s kind of hard to keep some of the little ones.

The Lord Himself grading the commandments.

Number one: Love the God with all your heart, soul, and mind.

Number two: Love your neighbour as yourself.

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.

Matthew 23:23, *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin,*

and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

Anise is a plant.

Cumin is a seed.

There are nine little plants for me, and one for God.

There are nine little herbs for me, and one for God.

There are nine seeds for me, and one seed for God.

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.

Jesus said if you even lose your obligation from the least commandment and teach somebody else to do it, you will be called the least in the kingdom.

We would all agree that murder was a worse sin than missing the Sabbath observance. But for a Jew in the Old Testament, that was serious.

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 honour and reward in the kingdom.

"Least in the kingdom"

Two ways interpret this part of the verse:

First:

Grateful for one thing.

It doesn't say He will throw you out.

Even when you fail and you lose yourself from God's law, and you go right ahead and do what you want anyway, and you just turn your back on God, and you disobey Him as flagrantly and openly as you want, all you can do is be the least.

But you are 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. But what will happen is you will become a person that God cannot use, or bless, or reward.

Some of you may be thinking that in the past I have been very faithful for a long time and this is just a final fling.

2 John 1:8, *Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.*

You can spend the first half of your Christian life gaining it, and the second half giving it back up.

So, the Bible says, “Even the least commandment, when violated, makes you the least individual.”

Reason: If you break any part of God’s law, you have broken the whole thing.

James 2:10, *For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble 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.

Second:

Jesus is talking to the scribes and Pharisees, and He includes them in the kingdom only in a visible sense. They were false.

They are the tares among the wheat.

What Jesus is saying to them is that you people who take a physical place in the kingdom, externally and do not obey God's laws are going to be the least in the kingdom. The implication being ultimate judgment is going to put you out of the kingdom.

They will be like John 15, branches cut off and cast into the fire.

We 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, and then contrasts the "you" with the scribes and Pharisees.

Or on the other hand, if He's engulfing all the crowd, and He's saying that you are all attached externally and visibly, but you are going to be the least in when the judgment comes down, and the least are going to be cast out.

Personally, I go with the first interpretation because of the pronoun "you," I think He is directing His talk more to those who have made a commitment.

V 19, *Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men 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.*

If you think it's serious to break God's law, I think it's more serious to teach somebody else to do that, to teach somebody else to do that.

James 3:1, *My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.*

If God didn't call you into the ministry, run a million miles away from it. You don't want the responsibility.

You can teach by what you say, and you can teach by what you do.

If the words aren't right, and the example isn't right, and you are breaking the commandments by which you are just decreasing your place in His kingdom.

Isaiah 9:15, *The elder and honourable, he is the head; The prophet who teaches lies, he is the tail.*

If you are going to teach, teach the truth or don't teach.

If you are in the kingdom, live it, don't break it.

So, though Christ did not come to abolish the law literally and totally. Then they teach others to do it. Pharisees were guilty of that. So are many others.

So are many people today.

Acts 20:29-31, *For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.³⁰ Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.³¹ Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.*

The church has always been attacked by heretics on the outside and heretics on the inside.

The positive side.

V 19, *Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men 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.*

Again we see the two things:

- Doing and teaching,
- precept and pattern,
- life-living and life-teaching,
- what you are and what you say.

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. They were still under the Old Testament judicial law of Israel, and they needed to keep every bit of it.

They were also still under the ceremonial law.

They were also still involved in all the sacrifices, feasts, Sabbaths, and all the other things. Because Christ hadn't yet died, the church was not born yet.

So, at the time Jesus spoke, they were under the civil law, they were under the ceremonial law, and they were under the moral law, and it was all still binding on them. Nothing had changed for them.

The Judicial law, the law that duly constituted Israel as a nation, has been fulfilled.

Ceremonial law, the law that set up a sacrificial system and a priesthood, has all been fulfilled. We have a new priest, and a new sacrifice, and a new temple not made with hands.

The only law left for us is the moral law. The law that is the extension of God's character, the law that is the extension of God's nature.

1 Thessalonians 2:10-12, *You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; ¹¹as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and ¹⁰charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, ¹²that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*

Paul says that you know we lived a holy, and a just, and an unblameable life among you, keeping God's standards. Nothing changed for the moral law of God.

1Thessalonians 4:7, *For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.*

Nothing has changed. The moral law of God is still binding on us.

1 Timothy 4:11-12, *These things command and teach. ¹²Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*

1 Timothy 6:11, *But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.*

The ceremonial law, fulfilled in the cross.

The judicial law fulfilled in the birth of the church.

Israel being set aside, and a new people carved out for God's use. But the extension of God's nature, and His moral and ethical law, is still the same!

We are to obey it because of its character, and its consequence.

Conclusion:

The apostle Paul looked forward to going to heaven, because he knew he would receive a crown.

- Paul knew that awaiting him there was a crown of life.
- He knew that awaiting him there was a crown of righteousness.
- He knew that awaiting him there was a crown of rejoicing.
- He knew that awaiting him there was a runner's crown.
- He knew that awaiting him there was an incorruptible crown.
- He knew of at least five crowns awaiting him in heaven.

Why?

Because he had not broken God's law, not wilfully and unrepentantly. But he had upheld God's law, and he had taught others to keep God's law.

We are to obey because of its character, and because of its consequence, and then because of its clarification.

Did the cross end our obligation to the law?

Was it all finished at the cross?

Not on your life!

The Epistles make this abundantly clear.

The Epistles teach two paradoxical truths.

Principle number one:

Paul's, James', Peter's, John's, and Jude's.

The Epistles teach that in some sense, the law has been fulfilled and is no longer binding.

The judicial law.

It was for a limited people, place, purpose, and for a limited time. That law which was given to Israel has passed away.

Example:

Most of the law given to Israel judicially and civilly was to keep them separate from other nations.

They had different dietary,
They had different clothing laws,
They had different rituals.
They had been given by God as a way to keep them apart.

What happened when Christ created the church?

Ephesians 2:14-16, *For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.*

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. No more dietary laws, no more cooking laws, no more kosher laws, it was all gone.

Acts 10th chapter, Peter sees the sheet, and in the sheet are clean and unclean animals, and the Lord simply says, “Rise, Peter, kill and eat, and don’t you dare call unclean what God hath sanctified.” There is no more difference. 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.

Colossians 2:14, *having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.*

So, the Epistles definitely teach that the judicial/civil law came to an end.

The ceremonial law:

Mark 15:38, *Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*

Ceremonial law is over!

Colossians 2:16-17, *So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, ¹⁷ which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.*

Those are a shadow of things to come. But the body is Christ. The ceremonial law came to an end.

If you have any doubt on this ceremonial law, read the book of Hebrews. At least twenty 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.

The moral Law:

What does the Epistles teach that the moral law?

Second:

is no longer binding?

Yes, in one sense.

Colossians 2:14, *having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the 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 God put them on Jesus, nailed them to the cross, and He paid the penalty.

Now in that sense the law isn't binding on you.

Only on the penalty of the law.

You are not under the penalty of the law.

Who paid the penalty for you?

Christ.

So, you will not suffer the consequence of your sin in terms of ultimate penalty.

Romans 6:14, *For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.*

What does this mean?

You never have to do anything anymore?

You don't have to live a moral life?

You don't have to obey God?

No.

You are no longer under the power of the penalty of the law.

It can't kill you anymore because you can only die once.

Christ died on the cross, and you, by faith, died in Him. That pays the penalty.

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. Christ took the penalty.

Romans 10:4, *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

We never have to obey it?

No.

Only in the sense that He pays the penalty, and we are no longer under its curse.

Galatians 5:18, *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

If you are led by the function and the operation of the Spirit in your life then 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, penalty of the law.

You can fulfil the law by the energy of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 3:24-25, *Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.*

We don't need the law anymore to whip and to 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.

Galatians 3:10, *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does*

not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."

You were cursed and Jesus came took your curse on Him.

Now that's the sense in which the moral law is no longer binding.

The Epistles teach that, in some sense, we are not under the moral law.

Only in one sense: we are not any longer under its penalty.

We don't need to be under its power either!

Because if we walk in the Spirit, we will freely energize, by God's Spirit, fulfil the law in a positive way.

Some people say that the gospel overthrows the law.

No, it doesn't.

The gospel exalts the law. In order to save you, Christ had to fulfil 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.

Romans 7:1, *Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?*

The law has dominion over a man as long as he lives, and that's all. When you die, that is it.

Paul gives an illustration.

Romans 7:2-3, *For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. ³So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.*

The laws of marriage are binding until you are dead. When you are dead, they are no longer binding. That's all.

Romans 7:4, *Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to 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. You have risen in new life, no longer under the law in that sense.

Romans 7:6, *But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.*

The Epistles also teach a second truth.

The Epistles teach that the law is still binding on the believers in some sense.

Free in terms of penalty, and its dominating power over you. But then the law is also binding in another sense.

1 Corinthians 9:21, *to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law;*

Now look back at Romans 7 for a minute.

Somebody's going to come to verse 6 and say, "We are not under the law anymore. Fantastic. We can really live it up."

Romans 7:7, *What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."*

If you have a clumsy person, you are never going to reveal it until you command him to do something. You say, "Listen, would you go over and get that?" and he gets up out of the chair, knocks the chair over, runs into the lamp, breaks it, trips on the rug, and knocks over a vase, 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 isn't the law's fault, it's you.

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."

The law reveals sin.

Romans 7:8, *But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.*

Once there was a law, God set a standard, it just made my sin obvious. It stimulated and aroused my sin.

When God makes a rule, why did You make that rule?

It is like the sign that says, "keep off the grass," and you see the little kid going down the street and just stick his foot over, you know, just to defy the sign. Just make a law, and watch people work hard to try to break it. It's just the way human nature goes. So, the law provokes sin.

Romans 7:9, *I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.*

The law is not sin, it just reveals it, provokes it, and condemns it.

Romans 7:12, *Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.*

The law is not the problem, but you are.

Should we keep the law?

Yes.

Paul says later in this chapter that he wants to do God's law so much, that he wants to keep God's law.

Romans 7:22-24, *For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. Paul gives us the solution.

Romans 8:4, *that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

What do the Epistles teach?

The Epistles teach the clarification of Matthew 5:19.

On the one hand, in some sense, the law passes away, is no longer binding ceremonially, civilly, and in the sense of its moral consequence, in the penalty.

But in another sense, the law is still binding.
So that Paul can say, "I delight in the law of God."

Fulfil His law. Don't break even the least of His commandments.

Why?

The law is preeminent.

The law is imperishable.

The law is relevant.