Jesus' Teaching on the Torah (New Testament Figures)

Not one dot abolished, and the only way out is through the cross

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, July 17, 2022
PASSAGES	Matthew 5:17-48; Romans 7:1-4; Romans 6:14; Hebrews 8:7-8; Galatians 3:10; Colossians 2:14
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:14:20 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Christians say we are not under law but under grace, and yet Jesus says not a dot of the law will pass away. In the Sermon on the Mount he does not loosen the Torah; as the God of the Old Testament he rescues its true intent – and that makes our failure plain. The law has not died. We have died to it, through the body of Christ, so that we belong to the risen one. The cross is the only way out, and it is offered for free.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Old Testament law is Scripture and authoritative; the curse of the law still stands, which means the law was never "poofed."
- Wrong answers to the tension: two different gods, laws as squishy guidelines, only the "moral" laws, or an Old Testament that was all external rules and no spirit.
- "You have heard that it was said..." is not Jesus correcting the Torah but rescuing its intent from the add-ons and loopholes that grew around it.
- Love your neighbour was in the law; hate your enemy was not. Divorce, oaths and an eye for an eye all had purposes people had twisted.
- Jesus ought to know what the law meant – he gave it.

- The fault in the first covenant was never in God's word but in us. Read rightly, the Sermon on the Mount should prick us.
- Under grace means we died to the law in Christ's body and now belong to him. That already happened, so our trust can be celebratory.

▶ 1:14:20

Continuing the series on Jesus, Matt turned to the Sermon on the Mount and what he called a collision course. Christians know we are not under law but under grace; yet he has spent months insisting the Old Testament is Scripture, and that the Ten Commandments are "not guidelines, they're laws." Paul's argument in Romans even hinges on that, appealing in chapter 1 to those who know they deserve death (Romans 1:32).

The tension, and some bad ways out

▶ 1:15:14

He gave the answer up front: the death and resurrection of Jesus. "I just resolved all the tension before it built. I'm just going to rebuild it." People resolve it in other ways, some more dysfunctional than others: the god of the Old Testament and the god of the New are different gods (his least favourite, and incoherent); the laws were always squishy guidelines; Jesus just "poofed" the law; we are under only the moral laws; or the new covenant is different because God now deals with the heart, where before he only issued harsh external rules.

▶ 1:17:30

> "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven… For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."
>
> MATTHEW 5:17–20 ↗

▶ 1:18:05

Two "untils." And Paul still says that all who rely on the law and do not do all of it are under its curse (Galatians 3:10). "There would be no curse of the law if there was no authority of the law." There is no

way around it, under it or over it: we must reckon with not measuring up to God's standard, and with its demand for death.

What Jesus said

▶ 1:19:10

Matt read the six sayings straight through. On anger: everyone angry with his brother is liable to judgment; whoever says "You fool!" is liable to the hell of fire; leave your gift at the altar and be reconciled first (Matthew 5:21–26). "Quite a shift from that video about the cook-off." On lust: looking with lustful intent is adultery in the heart; better to lose an eye or a hand – parts of who God made you – than your whole body go into hell (Matthew 5:27–30). On divorce, oaths, retaliation, and love of enemies (Matthew 5:31–48), ending: "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

▶ 1:23:53

So how can Jesus say the law is not abolished, while Paul says, "Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:14)? Not by calling the Old Testament unspiritual. It said, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5); "You gave your good Spirit to instruct them" (Nehemiah 9:20); "I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8). Jesus expected Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, to understand spiritual things (John 3:10).

Rescuing the true intent

▶ 1:25:58

Enemies. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" Love your neighbour is from the Torah (Leviticus 19:18). Hate your enemy? "Is there a chapter and verse for that? No." Jesus is rescuing what the law already meant. Asked "Who is my neighbour?" he told of a Samaritan – "not someone who would come to mind for a Jew as a good guy" (Luke 10:29–37). Your neighbours are everyone who cohabits your planet, the ones you like and the ones you don't. "He should know the true intent of the law. He gave it, because he is the Old Testament God."

▶ 1:28:25

Divorce. The certificate of divorce is scriptural, and Jesus does not abolish it; there is a ground for it. He is reacting to its flippant use – "if all you have to do is write a certificate, here you go." "What God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6). He upholds the right and teaches the purpose of marriage from Genesis on.

▶ 1:29:33

Adultery. "You have heard that it was said" is not scornful; it is one of the Ten Commandments. "Would we really believe that God in the Old Testament, giving this command, didn't care what you actually did up until the final moment?" Every parent knows the child who walks right up to the rule and just touches it – and so do we. The God who sees the heart is not thinking, "Well, he's not committing adultery, so I don't care." The command protects the purity of marriage as God designed it.

▶ 1:31:16

Oaths. The Torah said, "He shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth" (Numbers 30:2) – do what you said you would do, which is essentially "let your yes be yes." But people built gradations: swear by the temple and you are not bound, swear by the gold of the temple and you are (Matthew 23:16–22). "What a weird system." Without integrity inside, oaths are empty – the very word in "you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain" (Exodus 20:7).

▶ 1:33:30

An eye for an eye. Our culture hates the phrase, but Matt defended the Torah (Exodus 21:23–25). It is a limiting principle against escalating revenge – Hatfields and McCoys, Capulets and Montagues. If my drunk servant punches yours, you may not take his hand. And unlike codes where a nobleman's eye is worth more than a slave's (Kristin Tibbetts later confirmed Hammurabi's), an eye is an eye whoever you are. The twisting is to become the IRS: damages plus opportunity cost plus inflation, interest and emotional damages – "I'm taking your teeth." So Jesus states the intent unmistakably: rein in the chaos; turn the other cheek.

▶ 1:37:42

Murder. "Whoever murders will be liable to judgment" could be heard as a loophole: "I didn't all the way murder him – just seriously maimed." Jesus is not adjusting "You shall not murder"; he is zeroing in on who is liable. God always cared about everything leading up to it, because people bear his image (Genesis 9:6). Contempt and "You fool!" make you liable too. "He ought to know, because he is the God of the Old Testament."

So why are we under grace?

▶ 1:40:42

Not because God has matured, treating the Old Testament as a beta test with Israel as his focus group. Humanity is largely the same – "we have iPhones now, but if you look on the heart" – and Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). "We know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully" (1 Timothy 1:8). And Paul's argument for why we need Christ's death hangs on the law still

standing. So how could anyone escape something that remains standing? Hint: "The law is binding on a person only as long as he lives" (Romans 7:1).

▶ 1:42:42

Why not just embrace the Torah and live under it? Many do. "Maybe we'll be that special generation that finally got it right" – one thought Matt feels free to make fun of. The reason we need a new covenant:

> "For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says: 'Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.'"
>
> HEBREWS 8:7–8 ↗

▶ 1:43:51

He finds fault with *them*. The fault was never God's covenant but us – which resonates with how Jesus finished: be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. That is why Matt wants those who most strongly believe we are under grace to preserve the law's authority: "I don't want you to have any shortcuts or secret doors or tunnels" to grace that skip reckoning with why we need it.

The law did not die. We did.

▶ 1:44:35

> "Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God."
>
> ROMANS 7:4 ↗

▶ 1:45:26

Paul does not say the law died; he says you died. "The law doesn't apply to dead people" – no one sues the dead, which is why some people fake their deaths. When you take the Sermon on the Mount exactly as it is, it ought to prick you. You might feel confident – I didn't actually commit adultery, I didn't actually murder anyone – "but Jesus is saying that's not what it was all along."

▶ 1:47:53

You died through his body, though your own is very much alive, so that you belong to Jesus, raised from the dead. The law keeps its divine authority, and its curse still stands for anyone tempted to think, "I trusted Jesus to be forgiven, but I'm doing pretty good... I could really impress him given the time." The wages of sin is still death (Romans 6:23). "And that just happens to be the very thing Jesus offers for free."

▶ 1:49:01

He cancelled "the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands... nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14). If you had stood at the cross, you would not have seen a book nailed there. You would have seen the body of Jesus – the God of the Old Testament. "There is no escape except by death, the very thing he's offering for free. No wonder he says pick up your cross and follow him." That is how monumental Christ's death is for our identity: dead to the law, its curse and its demands, and free to bear fruit by belonging to him.

A celebratory trust

▶ 1:51:00

What should you do? Believe it. He already died; that is not going to unhappen. He already rose; that is not going to unhappen either. "You can't mess this up. It's beyond bumpers on a... bowling lane." It is Jesus bowling for you and asking, "Are you going to be on my team? I already scored the perfect 300." "I don't know, I think I'll mess it up." "It already happened."

▶ 1:53:02

So it is not a hesitant "I think I can trust," but a celebratory one: thankful that the God of the Old Testament gave his own life, made room for us to be dead to the law in his own body, and proved the cheque cleared by rising, leading captives in his train and giving gifts (Ephesians 4:8).

▶ 1:53:30

> *"If you've started becoming enamoured with your own ability to do the good things... here's my advice: repent. The answer to that is not to just degrade yourself. The answer is to look up – to look to the one who was worthy, who did die, who did rise, and remains alive."*

He prayed that God would help us trust him "exuberantly and joyfully and celebratorily," and know him.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Romans 1:32
- Matthew 5:17–20
- Galatians 3:10
- Matthew 5:21–26
- Matthew 5:27–30
- Matthew 5:31–48
- Romans 6:14
- Deuteronomy 6:5
- Nehemiah 9:20
- Psalm 40:8
- John 3:10
- Leviticus 19:18
- Luke 10:29–37
- Matthew 19:6
- Numbers 30:2
- Matthew 23:16–22
- Exodus 20:7
- Exodus 21:23–25
- Genesis 9:6
- Hebrews 13:8
- 1 Timothy 1:8
- Romans 7:1
- Hebrews 8:7–8
- Romans 7:4
- Romans 6:23
- Colossians 2:14
- Ephesians 4:8

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Which of the “bad ways out” of the law-and-grace tension have you heard or held, and what does each one lose?
2. Jesus says love your neighbour was in the law but hate your enemy was not. Who is the “neighbour” you are most tempted to exclude?
3. In the sayings on adultery, oaths and murder, Matt saw people looking for loopholes. Where do you walk right up to the line and “just touch it”?
4. Romans 7:4 says the law did not die – we died to it in Christ’s body. How does that change the way you think about obedience?
5. Matt called for a “celebratory trust” in something that has already happened. What would it look like to trust Christ that way this week instead of being impressed with your own progress?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel’s senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church’s governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope’s own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1-A-8UXFRo&t=4460s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.