

**The Church of God, International
Bible Correspondence Course**

LESSON 7

**The Law
and the Christian:
Jesus and the Law**

In the last two lessons we asked how a person can know the difference between right and wrong, and how we can know which biblical laws apply to us in this age. In this lesson we will begin to look at what the New Testament writers had to say about the law and the Christian.

There is a widespread belief among many Protestants that Jesus came to do away with the law. The Jews, they believe, had labored away under the burdensome law, but Jesus came to offer grace. They think something that Jesus specifically told them not to think: They think he came to destroy the law (Matthew 5:17-18). We learned that far from coming to destroy the law, Jesus came to fulfill it. He said that neither dot nor comma could fail from the law as long as heaven and earth last.

Where then do these other ideas come from? If not from Jesus, do they come from Peter? From Paul? In this lesson, we will try to understand what Jesus taught about the law. Later, we will pass on to the others, and deal with those scriptures most often cited as doing away with the law.

A MATTER OF JUDGMENT

In the last lesson, we started with Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17: Not one jot or tittle has passed from the law. But we also saw that no code of laws can cover every possible nuance of human conduct, and that judgment is necessary as to how to keep the law. In the Old Testament, we have judgments rendered by God, by Moses, by priests, Levites, and judges. In the New Testament we have judgments rendered by Jesus, the apostles, the bishops, and the elders of the church.

All these judgments tell us how God's law should be applied to life situations. Some of the judgments made by Israel's leaders in ages past did not measure up to Christ's standards, hence He made some judgments of His own.

Matthew 5:17-48

1. What does Jesus' opening statement in this section tell you about His intent in the words that will follow?

2. Is it possible for any part of the written law to pass away while sun, moon, and earth are still here?
3. Did Jesus feel that the standards of judgment of the Pharisees were adequate?
4. Are there greater and lesser commandments?
5. Did Jesus approve of the breaking of even the least commandment?

Note: Jesus intends to render some judgments relative to the law. He will do so in the Sermon on the Mount, and at other times in His ministry. Preparatory to rendering these judgments, He wants it clear that He has no intention of destroying or otherwise doing away with the law. He will not even weaken it. The demands Jesus makes relative to the law are greater than those of His predecessors.

6. Jesus addresses the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." Which verses include His judgments and teachings relative to the commandment?
7. Was Jesus' judgment relative to the commandment more or less lenient than that which had gone before?
8. What instructions does Jesus offer to head off a possible violation of the commandment?

Note: There is a neat pattern or outline in these verses. First Jesus states the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," followed by the old judgment relative to the commandment. Then He gives His own judgment in three parts (verse 22) followed by illustrations of life situations that could lead to breaking the commandment.

9. Under which commandment do Jesus' teachings about adversarial relationships fall?
10. Was Jesus' teaching on "Thou shalt not commit adultery" more or less lenient than what had gone before?
11. Does a man's right hand or right eye operate independently of his mind?
12. If a man's hand is used to commit a sin, is it the hand's fault?
13. Is it likely, then, that Jesus was speaking literally when He said to cut off the hand or pluck out the eye?

Note: Once again the pattern is clear. Jesus cites the commandment, gives a judgment, and teaches about the law. In this case, he uses a figure of speech when He says that a man should pluck out his eye rather than look upon a woman with lust.

14. Did Jesus forbid divorce for any reason?
15. Was Jesus' judgment on divorce more or less lenient than what had gone before?
16. Who was it that rendered the older judgment about swearing? (verse 33. See also Matthew 23:16.)
17. How did Jesus' judgment differ from theirs?
18. What was Jesus' judgment relative to Leviticus 24:19-20? (Be sure to carefully compare Leviticus 19:18.)

Note: The law presumed a legitimate authority which would exact "vengeance"-i.e., would see to it that a man paid for any damage he caused to another man. Jesus' teaching

concerning this law emphasized the principle of Leviticus 19:18 in that He forbade the pursuit of personal vengeance.

19. If a villainous person knocks you down and threatens to do you grievous bodily harm, must you get up and let him break your jaw?
20. In such a case, is it permissible to run away?

Note: We have already seen that Jesus uses figures of speech to make His point. His point in this passage is that we should not pursue personal vengeance. He uses a proverbial statement, "Turn the other cheek," to emphasize that you are not to strike back in vengeance. He is not saying that you cannot defend yourself or your family against an immediate attack. He is saying that after the attack, you must not avenge yourself-leave it to the authorities. (Compare Romans 13:1-6.)

- Mark 7:1-23**
21. Is the conflict here over the law of God or the "traditions of the elders"?
 22. Does Jesus place the traditions of the elders on a par with the commandments of God?
 23. Does Jesus see the traditions as a correct interpretation of the law of God?
 24. Which of the traditions did Jesus' disciples break to raise this question?
 25. What other phrase does Jesus use as a parallel to "traditions of the elders"?
 26. Which of the Ten Commandments did Jesus use to illustrate that the Pharisees were rejecting the law of God in favor of the commandments of men?

Note: The illustration comes from the Fifth Commandment, but Jesus uses a judgment from the law of Moses-specifically Exodus 21:17. The word corban which Jesus uses here has to do with money offered to the treasury of the Temple.

27. What was the net effect of the Pharisees' judgment relative to this commandment?
28. Is it possible, through traditions or commandments of men, to render vain the worship God?
29. Did Jesus accept the Pharisees' judgment in this area?
30. Again, what was the provocation that started this entire line of teaching from Jesus?
31. Is there any mention of either law or tradition having to do with dietary laws?
32. Jesus' teaching (or judgment) had to do with which of the traditions of the elders?
33. Did His disciples feel they understood what He was saying? (See verse 17.)
34. Is Jesus saying that there is nothing that a man can eat that will harm him?
35. Can you conclude from this passage that arsenic, entering in from without a man, will not kill him?
36. When Jesus says that nothing a man takes in through is mouth can defile him, is the defilement in question physical harm or moral harm?
37. Where does the dirt on food end up?

Note: "Going out into the draught" and "purging all meats" are parallel statements. The "meats" or foods (dirt and all) are purged from the body. It says nothing about making foods clean.

38. Is Jesus talking about physical or moral defilement?

Note: This passage once again illustrates the practice of rendering judgments about the law, teaching from the law, and the development of traditions about the law.

Matthew 12:1-9

39. Was it lawful for the disciples to pick grain passing through a stranger's field? (See Deuteronomy 23:24,25.)

40. What was the Pharisees' judgment relative to doing this on the Sabbath day?

41. Did Jesus agree with that judgment?

Note: Plainly there was no objection to eating on the Sabbath, nor with picking up a morsel of food and taking it to the mouth. The objection seems to be that the disciples were "harvesting" the grain on the Sabbath. If you can pluck one, why not two? If two, why not three? Where, the Pharisee would have asked, do you draw the line? The difference between harvesting and feeding yourself seems simple enough-it is a matter of the intent of the heart. But when one cannot discern the intent, one has only actions to discern and judge by. Therefore, the Pharisees judged by the numbers and came to the conclusion that it was wrong to do it at all. What Jesus does at this point is interesting. He does not argue the right or wrong of the action, but argues the right of individual and personal judgment. Not only that, but He argues that there are exceptions to the law-something that the Pharisees no doubt found unnerving.

42. What is Jesus' primary example offered to refute the Pharisees' charge? (See I Samuel 21:1-6.)

43. Was it lawful for David and his men to eat the shewbread?

44. What scriptural authority did David cite to justify eating the holy bread?

45. Did Jesus say that it was lawful for them to eat the bread?

46. How did they come to the conclusion that it was permissible to eat?

47. Did Jesus concur with their decision?

Note: David and the priest reasoned that the case was an exception. They rationalized it by observing that the young men were not defiled and that the bread was not entirely holy.

48. Did the decision of David and the priest in any way change the law, or was it a simple one time exception?

49. What if they were wrong? Who was responsible for the consequences of a wrong judgment?

50. Were the Pharisees in any way responsible for the consequences of a wrong decision by Jesus' disciples?

51. In what way might the temple priests have profaned the Sabbath? What duties did they have that might have conflicted?

(See Numbers 28:1-10. The priests were required to offer more animals in sacrifice on the Sabbath than on a regular weekday.)

52. Was the slaughter, cutting, and burning of animal sacrifices work-hard work? Did it "profane" the Sabbath?

Note: Jesus' first example was of a reasoned exception to the law based on human need. The second example involves a conflict between two laws, the one requiring that no work be done, the other requiring that sacrifices be offered. In offering this example, Jesus acknowledges that the law of God can sometimes come in conflict and that a judgment may be required as to which law takes precedence. It is an old question based on one or the other of two choices-to do the lesser of two evils, or to do the greater of two goods.

53. In this example, which law took precedence?

54. Write a paragraph giving your judgment of why it would take precedence.

55. Did Jesus consider that His disciples had done anything wrong? (See verse 7.)

56. Had the Pharisees been merciful in their judgment of the disciples?

Note: The phrase, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice," is parallel with the example of David and the shewbread. Out of mercy, the priest let them have the bread rather than hew to the letter of the law relative to sacrifice. Christ argues, not for the abolition of the law, but for a merciful application of the law.

57. What was the judgment of the Pharisees relative to healing on the Sabbath day?

58. What was their judgment regarding work done to rescue a trapped animal?

59. Did Jesus agree with their judgment?

60. Did Jesus see healing on the Sabbath as an exception to the law, or as a lawful act? (See verses 10 and 12.)

61. What was the Pharisees' response to the miracle?

62. If there is a day which is the "Lord's Day," which day is it? (See verse 8.)

Note: For a thorough study of the Sabbath day, see our booklet, Sunday, Saturday-Which?

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

63. Under the judgments given to Moses, was it permissible to divorce with the right of remarriage?

64. Was it permissible under all circumstances?

Note: The Hebrew word for uncleanness or shame in this passage is literally translated "nakedness." It implies sexual uncleanness or sin.

65. If divorced for this reason, could a woman remarry?

66. If divorced a second time, could she return to the first husband?

67. In what way might this sort of error "cause the land to sin?" (verse 4)

68. Were people always stoned to death for committing sexual uncleanness? (See Matthew 1:19 and John 8:7.)

Note: The wording of this passage suggests that it is a judgment-that is an application of law to a life situation. It says that when this situation prevails, this is what you should do. It is a response to sin-a man has found a matter of sexual uncleanness in his wife.

In a perfect world, a judgment like this would not be necessary, but men and women sin. Their sins pose a problem for a society or community. How do we live with the consequences of sin? We could kill all the sinners, but that might not leave many survivors. Besides, the death penalty required an accuser and a willing executioner-someone had to cast the first stone. It was permissible to extend mercy to a sinner.

But sin has consequences, and a community must deal with those consequences. In order to formalize the separation and subsequent remarriage, a writ of divorcement was required. The judgment is an attempt to stabilize society. The reference to "causing the land to sin" probably uses the word land in the sense of "nation." Unless some control of divorce and remarriage is exerted, you may have an entire nation of people running from bed to bed and back again. How did Jesus view this judgment?

Matthew 19:3-12

- 69. What exactly was the scope of the Pharisees' enquiry?
- 70. What was Jesus' judgment about divorce for every cause?
- 71. Did Jesus cite scripture for his authority? (See Genesis 2:21-25.)

Note: Jesus cites, not the judgment of Moses, but the law as expressed in original intent. He went all the way back to the Creation account for His authority. That original intent was one man with one woman for life. But the Pharisees pressed on-they had asked the "every cause" question and now they wanted to know about Moses' judgment.

- 72. Did Jesus draw a distinction between Moses' judgment and the original intent of God when He made man and woman?
- 73. What did He offer as the reason why Moses allowed the exception to the original law?
- 74. Did Jesus allow the same exception as Moses in the case of sin?

Note: The Greek word porneia, translated "fornication," refers to sexual uncleanness of all types. Adultery is a narrow definition of sin. Porneia is a broad definition including adultery. Jesus reference to "the hardness of your hearts" is a way of saying that it shouldn't have to be this way, but it is because you are sinners.

- 75. Did Jesus allow divorce with the right of remarriage for sexual sins?
- 76. Did Jesus allow divorce with the right of remarriage for anything other than sexual sins?
- 77. Did Jesus say anything to negate the Law of Moses relative to divorce and remarriage?
- 78. The disciples drew a conclusion from Jesus' teaching in this area (verse 10). Does their conclusion seem to logically follow?

79. Does Jesus acknowledge that men (and women) have needs that may require marriage?

Note: For more on the subject of divorce and remarriage, request our article, "Is There Life after Divorce?"

Matthew 23:1-4

80. Who, according to Jesus, was currently occupying the seats of judgment derived from Moses' authority?

81. In what category of law might they have been binding heavy and grievous burdens?

82. Did they have the authority to bind or loose the written law?

Note: Jesus reference to "not one jot or tittle" passing from the law is a deliberate reference to the written law. Any law outside the "Law and the Prophets" -i.e. the Holy Scriptures-was "oral law," otherwise called the "traditions of the elders." Jesus made no reference to the permanence of the oral law. See also Luke 11:46.

Matthew 11:25-30

83. What scope of authority had the Father placed in the hands of Jesus? (See also Matthew 28:18.)

84. Considered as a yoke or burden, how did Jesus' judgments relative to the law compare to that of the Pharisees?

Note: Remember that one of the great roles of the Torah is to teach. Jesus' judgments on the law were given, like the law itself, to teach the difference between right and wrong. The law, including the statutes and judgments, was intended to make men's burdens lighter, not heavier. Self-righteous men saw the law as a means of control, and imposed frustrating rules and regulations to build a fence around the law. They saw it as their duty to see that no one broke it. It is this that imposed a yoke of bondage, not the law itself.

But it is sin that imposes the heaviest burden of all. Compared to that yoke, Jesus' burden is light indeed.

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