

**JESUS AND THE TORAH**

**by**

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## **Introduction**

The issue of Jesus' attitude concerning the Torah remains very controversial among believers in Jesus. The spectrum of this controversy is very broad – from seeing Jesus as rejecting the law and its role completely all the way to seeing him as devotedly Torah observant and later misinterpreted by Christians. This paper deals with that very issue. Far from harboring the illusion that we will be able to resolve the controversy in this small study, we will just take a step in this direction, using a very famous and important passage in Matthew 5:17-48 as our starting point. We will study the meaning of the passage and see what it can clarify concerning Jesus' attitude toward the Torah in the context of the other biblical texts.

### **The Torah and the Messiah's standards**

After calling his listeners to the righteous life in the previous verses (13-16), Jesus starts a discussion concerning the law in Matt. 5:17 in a way that seems to be a strong response to a misunderstanding – “Do not think.”

“The law and the prophets” was common Jewish idiom to speak about the written scripture. It could mean the instruction to regulate lives of God's people, which was considered to be the true wisdom (cf. 2 Macc. 15:9; 4 Macc. 18:10; Sir. 1:1; 1QS 1:3; 8:15-16; CD 5:21-6:1).<sup>1</sup> Luke and Matthew also often use the phrase as an idiom with the similar meaning (cf. Luke 16:16, 29, 31; Acts 13:15; 24:14; Matt. 7:12; 22:40).<sup>2</sup> The references to “letter” and “stroke” in Matt. 5:18 and Luke 16:17 indicate that the written text is in view. The idiomatic meaning “the

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<sup>1</sup> For additional references from other sources, including Talmud and Philo see Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1999), 177. It is also supported by the ancient Jewish tradition to read the law and the prophets in the synagogues every Shabbat (cf. m. Meg. 4:1-6 – although it is recorded in the second century, the synagogue service was established long before). Cf. Luke 4:16-30.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase “the law and the prophets” is parallel to “Moses and the prophets” as we can see from the passages mentioned here (also cf. 2 Cor. 3:15).

Scripture” of this phrase is also seen in its usage by the New Testament writers to indicate that the scriptures prophesize about Jesus (cf. Luke 24:27, 44; John 1:45; Acts 26:22; 28:23; Rom. 3:21).<sup>3</sup> Therefore it is the most natural to understand the phrase “the law and the prophets” here as an idiom for the written Scriptures accepted by the Jewish people at that time, because it was the major meaning attached to this phrase by the Jewish people and, actually, by the first believers in Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

It seems that someone thinks that Jesus came to abolish the law.<sup>5</sup> Jesus emphatically corrects this misunderstanding, stating that his coming and ministry is not to abolish anything in the Scripture.<sup>6</sup> He came to fulfill the promises of the Scripture as the promised Messiah, with everything that implies, including bringing the Scripture’s instruction to its completeness.<sup>7</sup> This

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<sup>3</sup> It also corresponds to the traditional Jewish view (cf. b.Ber. 34b).

<sup>4</sup> Although many scholars try to divide “the law” and “the prophets” in two separate part, concluding different implications of this division (e.g. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity, 1992), 107.; Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1993), 105.), there is no reason to step out of the idiomatic meaning that is the easiest to follow according to the contemporary Jewish literature and other NT passages. We can understand “the law” as referring to the Pentateuch and “the prophets” as referring to the rest of the Scripture, but it does not change the fact that the whole phrase means “the Scripture” (cf. Gutbrod, TDNT, 4:1059; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 1:484.). There is also a view that “the law and the prophets” refers here to the Old Testament period of age (cf. Robert H. Stein, *Luke* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1992), 418.). But this view lacks any lexical, cultural or any other kind of contemporary support, because we cannot find any significant evidences that this phrase could be understood as a “dispensation” of God’s dealing with the people.

<sup>5</sup> This may likely make very good sense in Matthew’s reduction due to the accusations made by the Jews against Jesus and his Jewish disciples. Matthew, whose primary addressees are Jewish, dedicates what is probably the longest passage in the gospels to the issue of Jesus not being against the Torah, as many Jewish people wrongly assumed about Jewish believers and Christians (cf. Acts 21:21; Rom. 3:8; b.Shab. 31a; Ex.Rab. 47:1). Matthew’s gospel is considered by many as very positive toward the Torah, provided the law is interpreted rightly (cf. the list of supporters in Keener, 176.).

<sup>6</sup> The construction μή νομίσητε introduces a prohibition, forbidding the occurrence of the action (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*. [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996], 469). The ἢ (“or”) instead of the expected “and” to connect “the law” and “the prophets” is probably due to the negative form of the sentence (cf. Davies and Allison, 484.). Jesus emphatically repeats twice that he is not going to abolish the Scripture.

<sup>7</sup> There are many different ways of understanding πληρόω in this passage (for the list and discussion see Ibid., 485-7.). The best solution from our point of view is that Jesus is “fulfilling” the law in the sense of its messianic expectations, namely, he is the Messiah. The arguments supporting this are as follows: (1) Matthew uses

confirms the truth of Scripture, and Jesus makes it clear that his teaching does not contradict Scripture but instead takes Scripture as its foundation and completes it. In the following statement, Jesus, in a rhetorical, hyperbolic way, emphasizes that the law is as stable as creation and that the law does not fail in even the smallest point, continuing to keep the status of God's word (cf. Matt. 15:3-4).<sup>8</sup> The imperatival force of the law also remains intact, and people will be judged and rewarded by their obedience to it (v. 19).<sup>9</sup> In this respect, Jesus exhorts his disciples to a higher standard than the example of the Pharisees in order to enter into the kingdom. It is clear here that the Pharisees fell short of the demands for the entering the kingdom. Although Jesus was dissatisfied primarily with their observance (e.g. Matt. 23:28),<sup>10</sup> in light of the

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this word primarily to express Jesus' fulfillment of OT prophecies (it seems to be formulaic; e.g., Matt. 1:22; 2:15, etc.); (2) the phrase "the law and the prophets" in v. 17 probably indicates that Matthew thinks in terms of all Scripture, not just the law as the number of the commandments; (3) this view does not contradict some other strongly supported views but instead includes them (as the Messiah, Jesus can perfectly modify, explain and observe the law). Additionally, for Matthew, Jesus was probably the prophet promised in Deut. 18:15-20 (cf. Matt. 17:5); that implies not just fulfillment of the prophecy about him but also anticipation of God speaking anew.

<sup>8</sup> The language of "heaven and earth" passing away is usually used to indicate stability of existence (cf. Jer. 31:35-37). Also, in contemporary Jewish thought, the eternity of the Torah was certain (e.g. Bar. 4:1; 4 Ezra 9:37). The conceptually parallel text in Luke 16:17 uses similar language to demonstrate the eternal nature of the Torah. Thus, the eternal endurance of the Torah is probably what is in mind here. For the list of the Talmudic references, see Hermann Leberecht Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar Zum Neuen Testament Aus Talmud Und Midrasch*, [6., unveränderte Aufl.] ed. (München.; Beck, 1974), 1:244-7. The texts within Jewish tradition that are sometimes referred to in indicating the temporal existence of the Torah (cf. b.Abod.Zar. 9a; b.Sanh. 97a-b) actually speak of the change from the "period" of the Torah to the "period" of the Messiah, indicating the "ruler" of the period but not the disappearance of the Torah.

The phrase "until all is accomplished" (5:18), may mean the consummation of the kingdom, when heaven and earth will pass away (cf. 24:34-35; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32; Syb.Or. 3:570). But I would rather take the meaning to be hyperbolic and rhetorical, due to the considerations just mentioned.

<sup>9</sup> Jesus employs hyperbolic Jewish rhetoric here. Jewish teachers regularly distinguished "light" and "heavy," or "least" and "greatest," commandments (cf. Abot 2:1; 4:2). To "break" or "relax" a commandment meant to diminish it, and the opposite was to "uphold" it. The idea of being rewarded for obedience and different ranks according to it is also found in other passages (e.g. Matt. 5:12; 10:41-42) and within Jewish tradition. For references to the Jewish sources see Ibid., 1:249-50., 4:1138-43. The order "do and teach" corresponds to the view of the school of Shammai, which placed doing before studying (m. Abot 1:15, 17). If the law remains valid even down to the smallest details (v.18), then it must be practiced and taught in its entirety (cf. also Jas 2:10). One cannot pick and choose among the commandments but must obey them all (e.g. Abot 2:1; 4:2; b.Ned. 39b, b.Shab. 70b).

<sup>10</sup> The emphasis in v. 19 is on "doing," and this is also the case in v. 20. Righteousness here is not a "teaching" but instead a "doing." The lack of "doing" (hypocrisy) was the very area in which Jesus constantly rebuked the Pharisees (e.g. Matt. 15:7; 22:18; 23:13-15, 28). Despite knowing what was right to do, they were not doing it.

following passages, it seems that their standards also have to be adjusted. And now Jesus, with the authority of the Messiah, gives six examples illustrating the direction in which the standards are to be adjusted.<sup>11</sup>

In these examples, Jesus follows the same pattern used in addressing an issue – “you have heard what is said ... but I say to you.” According to the contemporary Jewish way of speaking, in using the phrase “You have heard,” Jesus was probably referring to the Scripture directly while considering its contemporary Jewish interpretation.<sup>12</sup> In this case, due to the fact that the focal point of Jesus’ formulation in Matt. 5:21-48 is probably the relationship between “It was said” and “I say,” Jesus claims to have at least the same amount of authority as Moses.

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<sup>11</sup> Despite the doctrine of the immutability of the Torah, there are Jewish texts that teach that the Torah will be better understood in the future than in the present, and the texts that indicate - without at all diminishing the Torah’s authority - that the modification of various kinds would be necessary, at least in certain details (e.g. Midr.Ps 146:7), explain why the flesh of animals, prohibited in this age, will be allowed in the age to come (cf. Mark 7:19); cf. also Lev..Rab. 9). We can also see examples of some modification to the law (without diminishing it) contemporary to Jesus (e.g. 11QTemple; m.Sheb. 10:3-4). For the list of the texts see Davies and Allison, 1:492.

<sup>12</sup> In Rabbinic tradition, the phrase “you have heard” seems to be equivalent to “you have received as tradition” and the phrase “it was said” – equal to “it was taught as tradition.” For textual support, see Strack and Billerbeck, 1:253-4. If this is the case, then Jesus deals intentionally with the Jewish tradition, or the oral law. But this is hardly possible, because (1) Jesus deals with the Torah in the context of this passage, and it seems awkward to intentionally change the subject from the Scripture to the tradition; and (2) some quotations here are taken directly from the Torah (e.g. vv 27, 31).

In rabbinic discussion, we also find a similar phrase, “I hear” (lit.), which is probably better translated “I understand” or “I might understand.” This phrase introduces a literal interpretation of Scripture which, through conceivable, still must be rejected. The whole phrase here expresses a contrast between the “literal understanding” of a rule and what we must “say” it actually signifies (cf. David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* ([London]: Athlone Press, 1956), 55-7.). The problem with this solution is that (1) we do not see any interpretation directly stated in some examples, but for the quotations from the Torah; (2) as we will see, the “you have heard”-statements and its meaning are not rejected by Jesus.

Another possibility is to see in the phrase “you have heard” an expression of the common Jewish experience of “hearing” the law read and expounded in the synagogue and the Temple worship context. The Old Testament was not only looked upon as the written tradition of Israel, it was also the collection of what had once been “said.” It could have been “said” either by God directly or by persons appointed by Him for this reason (cf. the discussion in Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Semitic Background of the New Testament*, Combined ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich. : W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; , 1997), 10-1.). The problem with this view is that (1) twice in Matt. 5:21-48, the phrase, “You have heard” is used for a quotation not literally found in the Old Testament (vv. 21, 43); (2) “hearing” of the Scripture assumes its understanding according to the contemporary culture and worldview, and “hearing” a statement from the law automatically assigned a certain subjective meaning to the statement. These considerations bring us to conclude that the best option here would be that Jesus indeed was referring to the Scripture directly while considering its contemporary Jewish interpretation. In this case, we avoid the problems stated above.

And he, the Messiah, has the right to make such a claim and to give additional revelation and authoritative interpretation.<sup>13</sup>

Touching on the issue of murder (vv. 21-26), Jesus addresses anger as the main issue, elevating the standard from the external, that is, observance of what is specifically punishable by the law, to the internal - the kind of heart that generates such behavior.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, coming to the issue of adultery (vv. 27-30), he addresses lust as the main issue, drawing attention to intention, an internal heart matter, as the standard here.<sup>15</sup> Following that with the issue of divorce (vv. 31-32), Jesus elevates the standard from an earthly matter to a spiritual/heavenly one, describing it as the violation of God's creation and unfaithfulness to God and spouse.<sup>16</sup> Addressing the issue of

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<sup>13</sup> "But I say to you" does not necessarily mean an antithesis, but instead an addition. The conjunction  $\delta\epsilon$  here is better taken without a contrastive meaning. Paul, in fact, uses exactly the same formula when giving instruction for a particular situation in addition (not in contradiction) to what the Lord said (1 Cor. 7:10-12).

<sup>14</sup> Matt. 5:21-26 (On Murder and Wrath). The prohibition of murder in the "you have heard" part of the example is found in Exod. 20:13 and Deut. 5:17. The addition about judgment as the consequence is not found in the Scripture or the extant Jewish literature but can be fairly assumed to be the summary of other selected passages (cf. Gen. 9:6; Exod. 21:12; Lev. 24:17; Num. 35:12; Deut. 17:8-13). This is an example of people automatically interpreting the Scripture read to them. In his "I say" exposition, Jesus raises the issue of anger, specifically detailing it as different forms of subsequent actions. Any anger and violation of human dignity is (rhetorically) the subject of judgment equal to murder. Jesus goes beyond behavior specifically punishable by the law to the kind of heart that generates such behavior. Scripturally and logically, it was easy to assume that anger would generate murder (cf. Gen. 4:6-7; 37:4, 8). We see warnings against anger in Scripture (e.g. Lev. 19:17; Prov. 14:17, 29; 19:19; 27:4), and they correspond to some Jewish writings (for a list of references cf. Strack and Billerbeck, 1:276-8.; Keener, 183.), but it had never been expressed in such emphatic imperatival form (cf. also 1 John 3:15; Eph. 4:26-26; 29-32; James 1:19-20). Thus, Jesus' standard on this issue goes from external to internal. Jesus also proposes the solution: Seeking reconciliation, vividly emphasizing its importance (Luke 12:57-59).

<sup>15</sup> Matt. 5:27-30 (On Adultery). The prohibition of adultery in the second example comes from Exod. 20:14 and Deut. 5:18. It is another serious sin that could legally end in the death penalty (cf. Deut. 22:22-24). In his exposition, Jesus raises the standard from adultery to lust, probably in allusion to Exod. 20:17 and Deut. 5:21. It is, again, not morally new (cf. Job 31:1, 9-10; Sir. 9:8; for examples from the Jewish writings, see Strack and Billerbeck, 298-301.; Keener, 186.), but it had never been expressed in such emphatic imperatival form. Just as murder starts with anger, adultery starts with lust. Intention, an internal heart matter, is being emphasized here as the standard. Jesus also vividly proposes a solution: Separation from the cause of the desire (Mark 9:43, 45, 47).

<sup>16</sup> Matt. 5:31-32 (On Divorce). The quotation in the third example comes from Deut. 24:1. In contrast to the previous prohibitions, it is an allowance - the possibility of divorce. The divorce's issue is discussed by Jesus several times in different contexts (Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-9; Luke 16:18). Connecting divorce and remarriage to adultery, Jesus goes beyond the commandments of the law in imposing an unprecedented strict prohibition. The Torah forbade adultery absolutely (cf. Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18) and considered it a capital offence (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22), but never connected divorce to adultery. Although during the Roman period capital

oaths (vv. 33-37), Jesus states that integrity is the real issue in his teaching.<sup>17</sup> In the next example (vv. 38-42), Jesus states that people have to exercise forgiveness, mercy and generosity rather than retaliation.<sup>18</sup> Finally (vv. 43-48), love, even for enemies, is the major issue.<sup>19</sup> These examples are part of the way to have the perfection of God (v. 48).

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punishment could not be executed by the Jews, continuing validity of the extremely strict view of adultery is attested in the contemporary Jewish literature (cf. Jub. 30:8-9; for more references cf. Hauck, TDNT, 731-2). In case of adultery a woman was considered defiled and unclean for her husband, moving him to divorce her (cf. m.Sota 5:1; 3:6; 4:2; etc.). Although the major Jewish school of Jesus' time (Hillel) would allow divorce on a number of different reasons, Jesus' strict position on divorce was also shared by another Jewish school (Shammai) and the Qumran sect (cf. m.Git. 9:10; 11QTemple 57:17-19; CD 4:20-5:1). Nevertheless, the statement describing marriage after divorce as adultery was unprecedented in the Jewish tradition (cf. Strack and Billerbeck, 1:320-1.). Note also Mat 5:28, where Jesus equates the lustful desire with adultery.

Although Jesus' statement is revolutionary for the Jewish "halakhah," it does not contradict to the teaching of the Torah. In the parallel discussions (cf. Matt. 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-9), we can see that Jesus usually bases his statement on allusions to Gen 1:27; 2:24, emphasizing that instructions in the law concerning divorce were given by Moses because of human heart-hardness, while originally God is absolutely against divorce. In saying this Jesus not only automatically confirms the imperatives of the law and the prophets (Exod 20:14; Lev 18:20; Deut 5:18; Mal 2:14-16), but also gives more demanding standards, elevating the law of marriage and divorce from an earthly matter to a spiritual/heavenly one – to the place this matter originally holds. Divorce is violation of God's creation and unfaithfulness to God and the spouse.

<sup>17</sup> Matt. 5:33-37 (On Oaths). The next example, although not literally and directly stated in Scripture, can be regarded as a summary of several passages (cf. Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:3; Deut. 23:21; Zech. 8:17; Eccl. 5:4-6; Exod. 20:7; for additional Jewish writings, see Keener, 192-3.). At first, Jesus' reply looks like a prohibition of any oaths at all (cf. Jas. 5:12). If this were the case, however, it would contradict Scripture, which approves of and encourages oaths/vows (cf. Deut. 6:13; Isa. 45:23; Jer. 4:2; 12:16; Rev. 10:5-6), and instead support the human weakness of not keeping one's word (cf. Deut. 23:22; Eccl. 5:5), which clearly could not be Jesus' intention. The point of Jesus' exhortation here is that people must have integrity ("yes" should mean "yes" and "no" should mean "no"; cf. v. 37). With such integrity, people do not need vows; vows are needed due to human hardness (like divorce) and the evil nature. Although the idea itself was not new to Scripture and Judaism, this exhortation is unprecedented.

<sup>18</sup> Matt. 5:38-42 (On Retaliation). The next example, the regulation of legal, equal retaliation for loss, probably comes from Exod. 21:24, Lev. 24:20 and Deut. 19:21. When Jesus was teaching, monetary reparation had replaced physical maiming as the penalty for physically injuring another. Jesus, in his address, urges nonresistance to evil, giving three specific examples explaining that instead of expecting an equal payment, people must exercise forgiveness, mercy and generosity (cf. Job 31:29-31; Prov. 20:22; 24:29; 25:21; Luke 6:29-30; 23:24; Acts 7:60; Rom. 12:17; 1 Cor. 6:7; 1 Thes. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9). This idea was not new within the Old Testament and Judaism, but the exhortation is unprecedented. For a list of supporting Jewish writings, see Ibid., 196-202.

<sup>19</sup> Matt. 5:43-48 (On Loving One's Enemies). The first phrase of the "you have heard" part in the final example comes from Lev. 19:18, while the second is not found in Scripture in its literal form, although we can find some similar sentiments (Deut. 7:2; 23:4, 7; Ps. 26:5; 137:7-9; 139:21-22) that are probably rooted in a kind of righteous indignation for real wrongs done. The whole phrase was probably a common attitude toward friends and enemies in Jesus' time (cf. Strack and Billerbeck, 1:553-68.). In his climatic statement, raising the standard, Jesus asks his listeners to transcend this understandable reaction and to love their enemies. The parallel passage in Luke 6:27-28; 32-36 supplies practical examples of this love. This exhortation is unprecedented, though it does have its

These six examples show Jesus not rejecting the law but intensifying it. In the opposing interpretation of each scenario, human responsibility appears to be restricted to the mere performance or omission of a particular act, but Jesus not only calls on people to look at the law from the standpoint of God and the intentions of the heart, he also asks for integrity and generosity that reflect mercy and love toward all.<sup>20</sup> As we can see, this intensification in no way stands in contradiction to the Torah but instead finds its foundation within it and is also actually supported by Jewish tradition.<sup>21</sup> Jesus' "inward" intensification actually functions as a "fence" around the Torah, because as an automatic result of observing Jesus' instruction, people do not break the Torah's commandments.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, it is evident that Jesus relocates authority from

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roots in Scripture (Exod. 23:4-5; Ps. 35:13-14; Prov. 25:21) and some parallels in contemporary Jewish writings. For more Jewish background, see Keener, 203-5.

<sup>20</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Leicester, England: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2002), 138. We see other examples of a prior emphasis on the moral intentions of the heart in the gospels (e.g. Matt. 6:1-18; Mark 12:41-44; 14:3-9; Luke 18:9-14). This is actually consistent with the Old Testament teachings (e.g. Isa. 29:13; Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21; 1 Sam. 16:7; Jer. 17:10). The movement of the heart, mind and will did count with God. Evil desires are clearly condemned.

<sup>21</sup> In light of Matt. 5:17-20 and 21-48, the term "antitheses," traditionally assigned to the six examples, is clearly incorrect, because Jesus neither overturned the Torah nor operated with ideas that were foreign to Scripture and even Jewish tradition. The "righteousness" of the disciples is not even opposed to that of the scribes and Pharisees but rather surpasses it (cf. Eugene Boring, "Matthew," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 188.). Some scholars understand this as reaffirmation, radicalization and situational application of the law. Another term proposed for this kind of teaching of Jesus is "hypertheses" (cf. Benedict Viviano, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond Edward Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland Edmund Murphy (London: Chapman, 1989), 641.). Jesus did not proclaim an absolutely "new law" or a particularly Christian ethic in respective juxtaposition to the "old law" or to rabbinical ethics. Rather, he expounded what God originally intended as his will as revealed in the Torah. Cf. Hans Dieter Betz and Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 214.; W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1989), 102. The same view was held by Luther and Calvin. For an informative history on exegesis and reference, see Ulrich Luz and Helmut Koester, *Matthew : A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 1.276-8.

<sup>22</sup> Jewish teachers generally advocated building a "fence around the law," making it stricter, to make sure one did not accidentally violate its intention. The Mishnah comments that a good interpreter should build this fence (cf. m. Abot 1:1). Jesus' legal disputes with Pharisees seem to represent a clash between different conceptions of how to build that protective hermeneutical fence. This leads some scholars to conclude that Jesus was engaged in the erection of an interpretive fence, even if his overall concern was of a different focus. Cf. Markus N. A. Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 4. While accepting the Torah, Jesus distinguishes it from the Pharisaic halakhah, which he rejects in many cases (e.g., Mark 7:8-9). For Jesus, therefore, the "fence" around the Torah is itself rigorously scriptural.

the Scripture to himself.<sup>23</sup> It also seems to indicate a crucial need for the Holy Spirit in order to enter into the kingdom.<sup>24</sup>

This idea of the Torah's inward intensification in Matt. 5:21-48 corresponds with Jesus' teaching in general. The commandment to love God, along with that to love one's neighbor, is, for Jesus, the heart of the Torah (cf. Matt. 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-31). Similarly to some contemporary rabbis, Jesus summarized the substance of the Torah in the "Golden Rule" (cf. Matt. 7:12). Many passages in Matthew show Jesus repeatedly exalting justice, mercy and faith above the detailed regulations on tithes and purity, calling it the "weightier matter of the law" (cf. Matt. 23:23; 9:13; 12:7).<sup>25</sup> For Jesus, human life and good was of higher priority than external rituals, customs and even Shabbat (e.g. Matt. 12:11-12; Mark 3:4-5; Luke 13:15-16).<sup>26</sup> At the same time, we cannot see any imposition of the Torah for the Gentiles (cf. Matt. 28:16-20) in his teaching.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Boring, 188. It seems that Matt. 5:21-48 correlates with Matthew's Christological interests in Matthew 5, bearing witness to who Jesus was (cf. Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1982), 260.). Some see the fact that the sermon is "on the mountain" as indicative that Jesus is the "second Moses," even though no explicit comparison between the two figures is drawn. (cf. Luz and Koester, 1:279.; Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, 102-3.).

<sup>24</sup> The raising of standards for entering into the kingdom so high (cf. Matt. 5:20) seems to point to the need for the Holy Spirit, whose coming is associated with the coming of the kingdom and granted to believers in Jesus. The Spirit is said to produce this elevated righteousness in people (cf. Jer. 31:33-34; Eze. 36:27; Gal. 5:22-23). This will be fully seen in the consummation of the kingdom, when the believers in Jesus will receive their new bodies and enjoy fullness of righteousness as the fruit of the Spirit (cf. Rom. 7:18-25; Gal. 5:17, 19-21).

<sup>25</sup> Jesus is probably hereby confirming a distinction between central and peripheral commandments. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Jesus himself probably remained deliberate in his observance of the Torah in "smaller" and even traditional things (e.g., Matt. 23:23 – tithing; Mark 12:41-44 – sacrifice and gifts; Mark 6:41 – blessing before meal; Matt. 9:20 – tassels on his garments; Mark 1:44; Luke 11:44; Matt. 7:6; 23:27 – biblical purity laws). He also tended to avoid contact with Gentiles (cf. Matt. 10:6). His seeming freedom in touching the dead (Luke 7:14), lepers (Mark 1:41) and a hemorrhaging woman (Mark 5:27) probably has to do with a transformation of purity (from Jesus) rather than impurity (to Jesus) (cf. Exod. 29:37; Mark 5:30).

<sup>26</sup> Here, he was probably extending the halakhic principle of life-saving on the Shabbat to any act of restoring people from afflictions to wholeness. This principle was recognized by the rabbis but rejected by Qumran community (cf. Bockmuehl, 7.).

<sup>27</sup> According to some scholars, Matthew (together with James, Peter, John and Paul) belonged to the category of the believers who recognized the relative freedom of the Gentiles and, at the same time, believed that

Mark 7:19, declaring all food clean, seems to be the biggest challenge to the view that Jesus, while elevating the standards of the Torah's commandments, still considered the Torah itself to be intact. There are many different views on this verse,<sup>28</sup> and unfortunately, we are not able to study this passage and validate different views on it properly within the scope of this study. Nevertheless, even if Mark's comment is authentic for Mark and his pattern (cf. Mark 7:2, 3-4)<sup>29</sup> and indeed indicates that not only food eaten with "defiled hands" is declared clean but also "all foods" are declared clean, implying some kind of "cessation" of the Levitical food laws, even then, such revocation of the kosher laws goes beyond Jesus' intention in the given situation, consisting rather of the implications Mark draws from Jesus' statement in v. 15.<sup>30</sup> It is likely that Jesus' intention was to argue against the oral tradition in terms of its contradictions to the Torah. This is supported by the parallel passage in Matt. 15:1-20<sup>31</sup> and corresponds well with the body of Jesus' teaching in the gospels concerning the Torah.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, although this passage evidently needs more study, it seems that Mark's comment does not challenge our views as discussed above, while the context supports these views.

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those born as Jews should remain within the law and Jewish tradition. It seems that for Matthew, the law is still to be observed by Jewish believers but that this is not necessary for the Gentiles (as probably seen from the fact that circumcision is not mentioned in Matt. 28:16-20). Cf. Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 493.

<sup>28</sup> For a good summary of different views and interaction with them see Robert Horton Gundry, *Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994), 367-71.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26* (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1989), 378-9.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 458.

<sup>31</sup> Matt. 15:1-20, in comparison to Mark 7:1-23, does not make any indications that Jesus annuls the laws of kashrut. Matthew omits any words to the effect that Jesus intended to declare all foods clean (cf. Mark 7:19), and the discussion clearly centers on the question of the oral tradition, which includes the washing of hands.

<sup>32</sup> Jesus also seems to elevate standards of righteousness to the area of "the heart" here (cf. v. 19a; Mat 15:18-19).

### Conclusion

It seems that with this teaching of the Torah's inward intensification in accordance with God's original will, Jesus, setting higher standards and priorities as recorded in the gospels, laid the Scriptural foundation for further development of the teachings concerning the law, as we can see in Acts and the epistles.<sup>33</sup> The teaching found in the examples of Matt. 5:21-48 was probably later called "the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2) and "the royal law" (James 2:8), as we can see from the context of these passages, and also described as "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22-23). Thus, the revolutionary foundation for the kingdom ethic, based on the original will of God and on the Scripture, was laid and later further revealed by God, especially when the Gentiles began joining the church. This further fascinating revelation is a subject for future study.

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<sup>33</sup> "Jesus left it to Paul to bring into clear light the implications of his teaching concerning such things like Levitical sacrifices, temple worship, etc." (John William Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (London.: Tyndale Press, 1972), 33.)

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