

JESUS' TEACHING ON THE *TORAH* IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

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Abstract

Matthew's treatment of the *Torah* remains a much debated issue. The role of the *Torah* in its relation to Jesus and his teaching is a prominent theme in Matthew. It is the subject of a full scale discussion in Matt 5:17-48. Probably Matthew responds to some Jewish charges that Christians oppose the Law, a charge this Gospel emphatically denies (Matt 5:17-20). The relation between Matt 5:17-20 and the antitheses in Matt 5:21-48 remains a problem in Matthean exegesis. These antitheses raise the question whether Jesus opposed the *Torah* as such or the understanding of the *Torah* by specific Judaist groups. Related issues such as Jesus' unusual treatment of the Sabbath, fasting and purification commands complicate the issue. Does Matthew somehow subsume the detail of *Torah* by the double love command as sum total of the *Torah* and the Prophets (Matt 22:34-40) and his double (Matt 9:13 and 12:7) and unique reference to Hos 6:6: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice"? Matthew's frequent emphasis of the fact that Jesus came to fulfill the Law probably spread light on these questions.

1. Introduction

As early as the sixteenth century Sebastian Münster labeled Matthew a "new *Torah*" (Lapide 1984, 55). The role of the *Torah*, both that of the OT and the Jewish scribal teaching based on it, in its relation to Jesus and his teaching is a prominent theme in Matthew. It is the subject of a full scale discussion in Matt 5:17-48 and many other passages refer to this theme.

Matthew's treatment of the *Torah* gives rise to several questions: Was this emphasis meant to defend the gospel against Jewish misunderstanding about the Christian community? Did Matthew write to help Christians develop arguments against Pharisaic Judaism and so that they could understand the relationship between the OT and its fulfillment in the church? Was it meant as an apology against a particular group within in the church whose sense of emancipation of the *Torah* had led them to throwing off all restraint? Or was he writing to correct certain influences of Pauline

Christianity—or to reinforce them? Is Matthew not incongruent in his teaching about the *Torah*?

2. The *Torah* as Feature of Division and Exclusiveness

Because of the importance of the *Torah* for the people of God the interpretation of the *Torah* became a feature of the divisions in Judaism. This happened not because the different groups disputed its importance. It was their desire to meet the specific obligations of the *Torah* that resulted in competitive disputes as to what they meant in practice. Each group claimed to be living according to the principles of the *Torah*, but then implied that others were not doing so. “In such polemic the need for a group to find in the *Torah* its own self-affirmation had the inevitable corollary of making the *Torah* an instrument by means of which one group condemned another” (Dunn 2003, 292).

The tension was intensified by the fact that the Jews struggled to maintain their identity within the Hellenistic culture and under the Roman Empire. This resulted in a strong tendency towards Jewish exclusiveness. The Jews fended off foreign influences in their struggle to maintain their identity. The synagogue activities played an important role in this self affirmation (Knight 2004, 11). It was at this point that the distinction between Judaism and Israel became apparent. Specific interpretation of the *Torah* was used to assure Jewish exclusivism. Such emphases gave “Judaism” its national, anti-Gentile and exclusive character (Dunn 2003, 292).

In contrast to this exclusivity, the Matthean community was convinced of their responsibility to spread the teaching of Jesus to all nations. It is commonly assumed that Matthew’s Gospel was written in Antioch, the city in which the followers of Jesus for the first time were called “Christians” (Acts 11:26). It was this community that sent Paul and Barnabas out on their first missionary journey (Acts 13). The Matthean inclination to Gentile mission in contrast to the exclusivity of the Jewish community is evident from aspects that are highlighted in the Gospel (Versteeg 1980, 21-27):

- The Gospel begins with the genealogy of Jesus with the unusual inclusion of the names of gentile women (Matt 1); the veneration of the baby Jesus by the wise men from the East in contrast to the animosity of Herod and the Jewish religious leaders (Matt 2); the

child murder and flight from Bethlehem to a safe haven in Egypt (Matt 2).

- The story develops around the theme that Jesus came to his people, but was rejected by them (Matt 1:21).
- The privileged position of Israel is emphasized when Jesus sends out the twelve exclusively to the people of Israel (Matt 10).
- While the animosity from the Jews against Jesus increases the Canaanite woman recognizes Jesus as the Lord (Matt 15).
- The scribes and Pharisees reject Jesus and Jesus delivers the terrible accusation against the scribes, Pharisees and Jerusalem (Matt 21).
- The Roman officer and soldiers confess: “Surely he was the Son of God” (Matt 27:54).
- The Roman guards report that Jesus rose from death, while the chief priests and the heads of families offered them a large amount of money to pretend that Jesus’ disciples stole his corpse (Matt 28:11-15).
- The Gospel ends climactically with the commissioning: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations ...” (Matt 28:19-20).

In the verses directly before discussing Jesus’ teaching on the *Torah*, Matthew reports the words of Jesus: “You are the salt of the earth ... you are the light of the world ...” (Matt 5:13-16). It seems as if Matthew draws a direct link between the interpretation of the *Torah* and the faithful people’s responsibility to witness to the world. The Matthean community’s decision to carry the proclamation of Jesus to the Gentiles must have created much tension with the synagogue which used the *Torah* as means to maintain Jewish exclusivity (Repschinski 2000, 27). Luz (1990, 84) proposes that Matthew elected himself as advocate to defend his community’s decision for the Gentile mission. An alternative interpretation of the *Torah* is proposed to combat Judaistic exclusivism. One should consider that the Matthean community consisted mainly of Christians from the Jews. Although at first they tried to maintain good relations with the synagogue, the community was heading towards a break with the contemporary Judaism of the synagogue.

3. A Crisis Requires a Reconsideration of the Interpretation of the *Torah*

It is generally assumed that the Matthean Gospel was finalized after the terrible event of 70 CE when Rome, in reaction to the Jewish revolt, destroyed Jerusalem, the temple and the temple service. The Jews struggled with the question whether this destruction was the punishment of God for their sins. If Jerusalem's destruction was God's punishment for sin, they had to consider how to know God's will with certainty to avert future similar disaster. This resulted in many significant reformulations of important theological ideas and religious practices. In the post-70 era various Jewish groups debated questions about the meaning and practice of Scripture and about authority to interpret it (Carter 2000, 140).

Within this situation Matthew presented Jesus as the one who brought the definite interpretation of God's will¹. Matthew claimed that Jesus provided the answer. Matthew reports the words of Jesus: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt 28:18-20). Jesus has the authority to interpret the Scriptures. His interpretation provides the answer to the correct way of understanding the Scriptures.

4. Several Views on Matthew's Emphasis on the *Torah*

Scholars' views are divergent on why Matthew pays so much attention to the *Torah* in his Gospel.

Bornkamm noted that the discussion in Matt 5 is specifically addressed to some people who might have thought that Jesus came to abolish the Law and the Prophets (Bornkamm 1963, 24). Closely related to this view and based on Matt 5:17ff, 7:15ff and 24:11ff, Barth developed the idea that the main aim of the gospel was to combat antinomianism in Matthew's church (Barth 1963, 159-164). While Paul emphasized the Christian freedom from the bondage of the Law, Barth is of the opinion that Matthew directed his

1 The sayings of Jesus had three successive life-settings: its setting in the historical ministry of Jesus (*Sitz im Leben Jesu*), its setting in the restricted selection of Jesus' sayings in the Matthean community (*Sitz im Leben der Kirche*), and its setting in the Gospel of Matthew (*Sitz im Leben der Evangelium*). The last setting is immediately accessible to us. From the Gospel itself, tendencies can be identified to provide some idea of the community.

attack against Hellenistic element in the church that went much further than Paul². According to Barth they were libertines who were of the opinion that Christ had abolished the Law. Such an identification of the opponents, however, is questionable. It is possible that there were people who tended to abolish the Law, but this *per se* does not mean that they were Hellenistic antinomians (France 1998, 110). Matt 5:17-19 might just as well have been directed to people whose behavior was incompatible with Christian discipleship.

Mohrlang (1984, 42-47) asserts that according to Matt 5:17-19 the entire Law remains valid, though he recognizes that this creates tension with other parts of Matthew. Mohrlang thus suggests that Matthew was engaged in fending off a more lax view of the Law supposedly deriving from Pauline Christians, while not totally condemning the Pauline perspective. He concludes that Matthew remains closer to traditional Judaism than Paul. In the same line of thinking, many scholars assume that Paul's conception of the Law differs radically from the teaching in this Gospel. Bruce (1983, 43) indicates that in earlier scholarship the statement that "anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:19) was directed against Paul. This implies that these words did not come from Jesus, but from a group that did not like Paul.

Some scholars regard Matthew's Gospel as reflecting the preference of a group of early Christians who felt strongly about the maintenance of the full authority of the Law for Christians without specific reference to Paul's teaching. Bultmann (1963, 138) suggests that Matthew "records the attitude of the conservative Palestinian community in contrast of that of the Hellenists". Surely there must have been several selections of the sayings of Jesus in circulation before the written gospels were being produced. It is often assumed that the collection preferred by stricter Jewish Christians has been used by Matthew—often labeled M as it was only used in Matthew's Gospel³. This would depict the outlook of the Matthew and his community (Bruce 1983, 43). However, it seems that Matthew did not limit himself to a partisan collection of Jesus' sayings. Matthew rather gave an all round

2 The relation of Matthew's church to Pauline Christianity has much been debated (see Davies 1963, 316-366).

3 Another, more comprehensive, selection on which both Matthew and Luke are considered to have drawn is commonly labelled Q.

picture of his teaching. This might have resulted in what seemed as if some of these sayings on the *Torah* are in conflict with one another.

5. Allegations against Jesus' Followers about Interpretation of the *Torah*

A more convincing possibility is that Matthew reacted to counter Jewish suspicion against Jesus' teaching as accepted in their community (Loader 1997, 167). Following Jesus' interpretation of the *Torah* probably resulted in the alienation between the Matthean community and the synagogue. To be in tension with the synagogue was not only a religious matter. It meant estrangement from one's people and community⁴. Matthew responds to Jewish charges that Christians abolished⁵ the Law, and therefore emphatically denies such charge in Matt 5:17-20 (Carter 2000, 140; Keener 1999, 50), verses which are unique to Matthew (Matthew *Sondergut*):

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Moule (1982, 69) commented that Matt 5:17-20 "which sounds like extreme legalism is better interpreted as a defense against anti-Christian Pharisaic allegations that Christianity lowered moral standards". Scholars have connected this accusation with the devastating circumstances resulting from Rome's destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, and the priesthood in 70 C.E. (cf. Matt 22:7; 23:38; 24:2; 26:61) (Neusner 1972, 313-327). Jews probably accused Christians of lowering moral standards and thus brought

4 Matthew uses the phrase "their synagogue" five times (4:23, 9:35; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54) and "your synagogue" once (23:34) to underline the distance between Jesus and the synagogue community (Carter 2000, 31).

5 Abolish means "destroy" as in the destruction of the temple in 24:2, 26:61; 27:49, Matthew's only other uses of this verb (Carter 2000, 140), probably indicating some link between the interpretation of the Law and the destruction of the temple.

God's wrath over his people. The interpretation of the Law was an important issue in this conflict. The author was writing in the painful situation of a Jew who followed Jesus' teachings and therefore experienced increasing tension with official Judaism. This tension might be the reason for some of the emphases Matthew puts on the beatitudes at the opening of the Sermon on the Mount, e.g.: "... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness ... who are persecuted because of righteousness, ... blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me ..."⁶ (Matt 5:3-12).

It is commonly assumed that this tension could be linked with the introduction of the *Birkath ha-Minim* around 85 C.E. (e.g. BurrIDGE 1994, 91). The so called *Birkath ha-Minim* was introduced into the Jewish synagogue liturgy, referring to a phrase in the Eighteen Benedictions which were supposed to be recited three times per day by all Jews:

Let Nazarenes (Christians) and *minim* (heretics) perish in a moment, let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and let them not be written with the righteous (as quoted by France 1998, 85).

It is relatively sure that Matthew was composed in the period in which this Jewish benediction was first formulated. This must have had a significant impact upon Jewish-Christian relations (Horbury 1982, 19-61). Matthew's community struggled to make sense of this pain and hostility. The Gospel was meant to provide a context for making sense of the past and a direction to shape the presence and the future of the community that found itself on the margins of the rest of the Jewish community (Carson 2000, 33).

For Matthew's argument it was important to defend his conviction that Jesus gave the correct interpretation of the *Torah*. Jesus' relation to the *Torah* forms a central motive in his Gospel. Thus Jesus is seen as the last and greatest expositor of the Law. Davies (1963, 102) writes: "Matthew has draped his Lord in the mantle of a teacher of righteousness". Jesus' relation to the *Torah* is taken up in the Sermon on the Mount—specifically in Matt 5:17-48. "The single most important passage in determining the relationship between Jesus and the Law is undoubtedly Matt 5:17-48" (Moo 1984, 17).

6 Some scholars might argue that Matthew put these words in the mouth of Jesus to suit his argument. It can also be argued that the tension that Matthew and his community were experiencing, reminded him of these words of Jesus.

6. Does Jesus Take the “Conservative” Approach?

Jesus declares: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 5:17). Jesus used a perhaps popular Jewish saying about the eternal validity and applicability of the Law and applied it to the fulfilled Law to demonstrate his essential continuity with it. Scholars’ views are divergent on Jesus’ interpretation of the *Torah*. Traditionally the tendency has been to regard Matthew as conservative. This assessment of his attitude is based on the interpretation of Matt 5:18 (not the smallest letter (*jot*)⁷, not least stroke of a pen (*tittle*)). He entirely upholds the Law, showing complete obedience to its demands in his own life (Ridderbos 1960, 314). He is actually intensifying the demands of the Law as “Toraversharfung” based on his immediate awareness of the will of God (Kümmel 1934, 121-127).

However, when taking an overview of the rest of the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus’ personal observance of the Law, it seems as if Jesus did not follow the conservative approach. With a mere conservative assessment of Matt 5:17-19 it seems as if Jesus contradicts Himself with his teaching and life that follows later in the Matthean text. With the arrival of form-critical methodology this problem was easily solved by relegating Matt 5:17-19⁸ as a piece of the text coming from a conservative Jewish-Christian milieu. These words were not regarded as authentic utterance of the historical Jesus. It is assumed that these words do not concur with the rest of Matthews report on the life and teaching of Jesus confirming the form-critical idea of cracks in the text. Since the advent of the redaction-critical analysis, however, more emphasis has been placed on the role of the evangelist in reworking the tradition to form a logical flow of argument

7 The Semitic origin of Jesus’ words is illustrated by the inclusion of Hebrew words in the text. Beyond providing some *couleur locale* to the narrative, it also demonstrates Jesus’ respect for the *Torah*. Out of respect for the *Torah* only Hebrew was used in that period in discussions on the Jewish Law (cf. Fitzmyer 1970, 501; Joosten 2004, 89). Kooyma (1992, 79ff.) however argues that the distinction between Aramaic and Hebrew layers in the tradition can not be distinguished that clearly. Beyond arguments around “die Muttersprache Jesu” one should not also distinguish Jesus’ language in his ministry, but also the mother tongue of Matthew (the author).

8 Study of Matt 5:17-19 is complicated by the complex and debated tradition history of the verses. According to some scholars each of the three verses has to be assigned to a different stratum of the early community as they present differing views of the Law (Moo 1984, 24).

(Banks 1974b, 226). The easy option of form-criticism to solve the seeming contradictions is therefore no longer convincing.

7. Does Jesus Overthrow the Law?

Jesus' statements on the Law in Matt 5:17-19 can only properly be understood in relation to his statements in 5:21-48, which are presented as Jesus' definite interpretation of the *Torah* in contrast of the current interpretations. Matt 5:21-48 presents a series of six (commonly labeled) antitheses⁹ against the current literal interpretation of the Law. Structurally Matt 5:21-48 consists of six paragraphs (unique to Matthew), each illustrating Jesus' (alternative) interpretation of the *Torah*:

- Matt 5:21: Moses forbade murder (Ex 20:13; Deut 5:17).
Matt 5:22: Jesus forbids anger.
- Matt 5:27: Moses condemned adultery (Ex 20:14; Deut 5:18).
Matt 5:28: Jesus condemns the adulterous thought.
- Matt 5:31: Moses permitted divorce (Deut 24:1-4).
Matt 5:32: Jesus restricts the permission.
- Matt 5:33: Moses gave rules for taking oaths (Lev 19:12).
Matt 5:34: Jesus rules that oaths should not be taken at all.
- Matt 5:38: Moses recommended the precept: "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Ex 21:24; Lev 24:20; Deut 19:21).
Matt 5:39: Jesus denies the precept's application to personal disputes.
- Matt 5:43: Moses required love of neighbor (Lev 19:18).
Matt 5:44: Jesus requires love of the enemy, in effect, love of all.

The six antitheses (or examples) are all introduced by variations of the repetitive formula "You have heard that it was said to (the people) of old" (5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43) and "but I say to you" (5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44). The formula used by Jesus suggests He is quoting the *Torah* as it was

9 Though it is quite common to label the six citations of Jesus as "antitheses", this term in itself represents an assumption. The grammar allows at least three nuances in translation: "you have heard, but I (in contrast to that / in addition to that / in agreement with that) say to you".

usually heard by his audience. In Matt 5:21-48 Jesus quotes the Jewish Law six times and then presents his definitive interpretation. These interpretations are meant to confirm the claim made in Matt 5:17 that Jesus did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them. However, scholars disagree whether or not Jesus indeed did overthrow the *Torah*.

These antitheses (examples) can hardly be described as conservative. In more than one case Jesus' interpretation points to a more demanding challenge than the mere literal application of the Law, not suggesting that the literal application ceases to be important (cf. Matt 5:21-22 and 27-28). The OT principle of love for the neighbor is extended to include enemies (Matt 5:43-47). The permission for divorce which Deut 24:1-4 appears to give, apparently is withdrawn (Matt 5:31-32 and cf. Matt 19:3-9). The elaborate system of oaths and vows is simplified by the principle "Do not swear at all" with the implication that this system comes from the evil (Matt 5:33-37)! The *lex talionis*, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is replaced by a radical principle "do not resist one that is evil¹⁰" (Matt 5:38-42). On the surface level it is clear that Jesus is opposed to the current literal interpretation of the Laws.

Scholars are divided on how Jesus reinterpreted the *Torah*. Some scholars such as Ridderbos (1960, 299) merely regard these antitheses as more detailed expositions of the Law.

On the other side many scholars such as Meier (1976, 135) hold that Jesus clearly abrogated the commandments of the OT in some instances. Meier claims that Jesus' teaching with regard to the *lex talionis* is "perhaps the clearest and least disputable case of annulment in the antitheses" (Meier 1976, 157). Bornkamm argues that the third, fifth and sixth antitheses not only show a sharpening of the Law as is the case in the first, second and fourth, but the abolition of the Law. Consequently, according to Bornkamm (1971, 16), the "better righteousness" of 5:20 is at least partly concerned with a new Law. Strecker (1971, 146) supports the view that the antitheses largely replace the demands of the OT by way of new regulations. In such a case Matthew's treatment of the *Torah* seems to be inconsistent. On the one

10 Broer (1994, 20) argues the fact that Matthew portrays the *lex talionis* as the Old and Jewish norm says much about the relation between his community and the Jewish community from which his has separated.

side he portrays Jesus as being adherent of the Law but then, under pretence of being true to the traditions, actually initiates a new Law!

Davies (1963, 102), however, argues that “we cannot speak of the Law being annulled in the antitheses, but only of its being intensified in its demand, or reinterpreted in a higher key”. Allison argues that Jesus transcends the traditional commandments by making additional, difficult commands. “In 5:21-48 Jesus is directly dealing with the words of Moses—but not so much interpreting them as qualifying and adding to them ... Jesus uses the Scriptures as a point of departure to demand more from his disciples. In most cases he extends the Scripture by interpreting its ethical and societal implications for human living ... but in the fourth (vv. 33-37) and fifth (vv. 38-42) examples he allows part of the Scripture to pass away (vv. 18-19)” (Allison 1993, 184). Similarly, Carter (2000, 144) remarks that “oaths and revenge are not part of the life in God’s kingdom”.

Jesus quoted the words of Moses and then at times significantly added and modified the original. Jesus’ words supplemented those of Moses. Thus the tension between Jesus’ teaching and the Mosaic Law “is not that those who accept the former will transgress the latter; rather is it that they will achieve far more than they would if the *Torah* were their sole guide” (Allison 1993, 183). Keeping the continuity with the past, there is a newness in the present when 5:21-48 demands even more. At times these modifications seem to entail a change of more than a “jot or tittle”. “The status of his antithetical statement is ... not a second opinion, but and authoritative declaration made on his own God given authority” (Loader 1997, 173).

8. More Righteousness than that of the Scribes and Pharisees

In an attempt to understand the seeming contradiction between Matt 5:17-19 and 5:21-48, some scholars interpret 5:20 (“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law”) as if Jesus in 5:21-48 is not referring to the written Mosaic Law as such, but merely to the oral traditions of the scribes and Pharisees. Barth (1963, 93) remarks: “It is plain that the antitheses are not directed primarily against the OT itself, but against the interpretation of it in the Rabbinate”. Patte (1987, 78) regards the difference as an antithesis between a literal, narrow interpretation of the Law as done by the rabbinate and a broad interpretation as done by Jesus. Though

criticism of Pharisaic tradition and behavior is present in these verses, 5:17-19 points to more than that taking in account the contents of the antitheses.

The discussion as introduced by Matt 5:17-19 continues to distinguish the “righteousness” Jesus requires from that of the scribes and the Pharisees (5:20). While Matt 5:17-19 refutes a wrong interpretation of 5:21-48 (as to an overturning of the *Torah*), 5:20 supplies another clue of the right interpretation. The announcement that Jesus’ followers must exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees (5:20), anticipates that Jesus’ words in the subsequent paragraph will exceed those of the scribes’ and Pharisees’ interpretation of the *Torah*.

The righteousness Jesus required far transcends what the scribes and Pharisees considered as righteous. Jesus time and again declares “But I tell you ...” implying that there are deeper principles to the Law and the goal is nothing but perfection (Matt 5:48). The dominant note, hinted by the emphatic “But I tell you”, is the independent, authoritative teaching of Jesus. However from the foregoing divergent views the question remains as to how (Matthew’s) Jesus interpreted the Jewish Law.

Przybylski (1980, 81) suggests that the new interpretation of the Law should be understood in the sense that Matthew is applying the Rabbinic principle of making a fence around the *Torah*¹¹. Jesus would have applied a hermeneutical principle of the rabbinics to state his argument. Applying this principle for example to 5:21-26 the fence consists of the recommendation that one should not even be angry with his brother, for in this way one would definitely obey the commandment not to kill. In a similar manner Przybylski applies this principle to the other antitheses. This brings him to the conclusion that “the logical antidote to the practice of the relaxing of the commandments would be to make a fence around the *Torah*” (Przybylski 1980, 82). This suggestion sounds convincing when applied to the most of the antitheses. However, when applied to the *lex talionis* (fifth antithesis), the suggestion does not adequately answer all the issues.

11 This was a hermeneutical principle used to protect the Law “by surrounding it with cautionary rules to halt a man like a danger signal before he gets within breaking distance of the divine statute itself” (Moore 1970, 259).

9. Controversy with the Pharisees and Scribes beyond Matt 5:17-48

Beyond Matt 5:17-48 Jesus is frequently presented as being in debate with the Pharisees and scribes on the interpretation of the Law. Jesus' views and practice with regard to the Sabbath (12:1-21), fasting (9:14-17), purity (15:10-20) and divorce (19:1-12) and his association with tax-collectors and sinners (9:10-13) clearly stand in sharp contrast to the legal norms of the day (Moo 1984:15). This resulted in an increasing rejection of Jesus by the Jewish religious leaders and people. At that stage the right maintenance of purity and food Laws, and the Sabbath were flash points and make-or-break issues on which differences and divisions in Judaism turned (Dunn 2003, 292).

10. Fulfillment of the Law

The seemingly conservative approach to the Law as stated by Jesus in Matt 5:17-19 in contrast to the apparent overturning of it by the antitheses (5:21-48) and other teachings and practices with regard to the Law, lead us to reevaluate what Matthew meant by "fulfillment" (5:17) of the Law in this context.

It is important to notice that the word used as contrary to "abolish" is not to "confirm" or to "enforce" the Law or even to "obey" it, but to "fulfill" it. The fulfillment of the OT in Jesus is the basic orientation of Matthew's gospel (France 1998, 196; Moule 1967/8, 293-320). This also forms the crux of Jesus' argument on the Law (Moo 1984, 24). The fulfillment in Matt 5:17 would make the saying to refer to the function of the Law as pointer to a future "fulfillment", one which has come in the ministry of Jesus. "Fulfill" in this context probably has the meaning of bringing to full intent and expression. Jesus' own coming then becomes the fulfillment of the Law (Ladd 1993, 123). Patte (1987, 73) describes this fulfillment as the "vocation" of Jesus. With such an interpretation of Matt 5:17 in mind Banks (1974a, 226) remarks "it is not so much Jesus' stance towards the Law that he (Matthew) is concerned to depict: it is how the Law stands with regard to him, as the one who brings it to fulfillment and to whom all attention must now be directed". Jesus' teaching fulfills the Law in the sense that the Law pointed towards his teaching. Jesus' demands move in a sphere above the

Law, whose continuing validity exists only in and through Him (Meier 1976, 88).

Taking these considerations into account, the following interpretations of fulfilling can be considered. The relationship between Jesus' teaching and the Law could be that:

- He fills it up by expressing its full intended meaning;
- He completes the Law by extending its demands; and
- He brings the Law to which it pointed forward to.

The most obvious use of fulfillment in Matthew comes in the introduction of the so-called "fulfillment citations" which declare the fulfillment of OT prophecies in the life of Jesus (Menken 2003, 181). Thus the Law and the prophets can be regarded as having a prophetic function. Then the Law can perhaps be best viewed as an anticipation of Jesus' teaching. The statement "until everything is accomplished" does not as such point to the end of the world¹², but to the fulfillment of "all" that God has planned. With such an interpretation it makes sense that the fulfillment in Jesus is the point up to which a specific function of the Law remains in force (Davies 1962, 31-66). "All" is accomplished not so much by the faithful observance of the Law, but rather in that its preparatory function has been successfully achieved.

12. Jesus as the New Moses

It is clear that Jesus quoted Moses' laws and then added to them. The question is how this remarkable situation would have been understood.

An important clue can be found in the broader context of Matt 5. Matthew frequently presents Jesus as another Moses (cf. Allison 1993, 137-270; Floor 1969, 34). Even the beginning to the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1-2) the Sinai typology is significant (Loader 1997, 165). This leads to an anticipation of a new revelation to be delivered by a new Moses. This

12 Some scholars viewed this statement as a *terminus ad quem* restricting the validity of the Law to the duration of the present age. In line with such an interpretation Patte (1987, 71) argues that the Law will stay in place until the end of the world and that Matthew stated that the coming of Jesus is not to be confused with the time of this eschatological judgment. The Law and the prophets are still in place. Others regard these words as a vivid and idiomatic way of saying "never" (Banks 1974b, 234).

expectation is met where Jesus elaborates on the Decalogue as such. Jesus is presented as another Lawgiver. In Judaism it was a well known concept that the Mosaic character could transmigrate to later legislators and teachers (e.g. Ezekiel). According to 4 Ezra the scribe receives the old revelation of Sinai plus additional, new revelation (Allison 1993, 185). Therefore it was only conventional for Jesus as teacher and revealer being portrayed as a new Moses.

Jesus is also presented as the Messiah. He is the fulfillment of eschatological messianic expectations. Thus Matthew interpreted the Messiah's teaching as an eschatological Law against which the first Law is to be measured. For Matthew to associate Jesus as Messiah follows from expectations attested in many texts, according to which another eschatological figure would bring eschatological instruction. According to Isa 42:1-4 the servant (Jesus the Messiah for Matthew; cf. Matt 12:18-21) would bring *mispat* and *Torah* (cf. Num 24:17; Deut 18:18-19; Isa 52:7; 61:2-3; Dan 9:25). John describes a similar expectation with the Samaritan woman who expressed her faith that when the Christ comes, "he will explain everything to us" (John 4:25).

Rabbinic sources witness to a variety of beliefs about the fate of the *Torah* in the messianic age to come (Davies 1963, 156-190): that it would stay the same, inviolate forever; that obscure parts would become clear; that certain sacrifices and festival would cease; that purity Laws would be revised; or that a new *Torah* would come into place. These expectations clarify Matthew's presentation of Jesus as the one who brought the "messianic *Torah*" (cf. Gerhardson 1964, 327). Even Paul's words: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the Law of Christ" (Gal 6:2) may prove that "Messiah's *Torah*" at that time must have been a well known concept. Paul probably has meant by it that Jesus Christ had his own Law. Similarly Matthew presents the Law of the Messiah.

13. Interiority of the Commands

Matthew presented Jesus to a great degree as focussing on the interiority of the commands. Such an emphasis is already apparent in the *Tenak*:

- Deut 30:11-14: "... the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it".
- Ps 37:31: "The Law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not slip".

- Ps 40:8: “I desire to do your will, O my God; your Law is within my heart”.
- According to Jer 31:31-34 (“‘The time is coming’, declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant ... I will put my Law within their minds and write it on their hearts ... I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more’”) a new covenant will be established, the *Torah* will be interiorized, and the sins of God’s people will be forgiven. All three forecasts in Jeremiah find their match in Matthew: Jesus the Messiah instituted a new covenant (Matt 26:28: “this is my blood of the covenant ...”), the internal dimension of the commandments are stressed (5:21ff.) and Jesus gave his life as ransom for many (Matt 20:28; 26:28: “... for the forgiveness of sins”).

Jesus combats legalistic behaviour patterns (Gnilka 1997, 213). The rigour of Matt 5:18-19 is not meant as literal fulfillment, quantitatively, but qualitatively. In this restatement of the *Torah*’s demands Jesus expands the focus on the actual prohibitions to include all attitudes and actions which potentially lead to related acts (Loader, 1997, 179). Jesus makes the link between attitude and behaviour. The focus throughout is to have a more generous and positive attitude towards the Lord and fellow people. When doing so, Jesus is not shown making free floating or arbitrary claims. Jesus pressed behind the immediate issue to the deeper questions of motives and righteousness. He refused to take the easy way out in applying the immediately obvious ruling. He dug deep into the Law to discern the divine rational in its particular *mitswot* (Dunn 2003, 582; Van der Walt 1997, 76). The clear implication throughout is that Jesus’ words interpret and apply the true intention of the commandments. Thus the antitheses are best understood as pressing behind some specific Law to the more fundamental reorientation of relationships that can be achieved or maintained by cold hearted legislation.

14. Authority and Function of the Law

One question remains open that is how the commandments are to be executed. It seems responsible to answer this question from the surrounding context, where something very different from a rule based legalism is suggested. In this regard France (1998, 196) makes a very useful suggestion. He believes that one should distinguish between the authority and the

function of the OT Laws. To affirm that the Law remains authoritative with no *jot* or *tittle* lost does not necessarily imply that it will continue to function in the same way. When read along with the focus on the fulfillment as the key to understanding Jesus' relation to the Law, it is obvious that the practical functioning of the Law would not remain the same as it was before his coming. Even though the Law remains permanently important, it should function differently in a pre- and post-fulfillment situation.

Jesus gave two principles by which He interpreted and applied the Law:

- First He maintained that the proper way to keep any commandment was to fulfill the purpose for which it was given (e.g. with regard to the Law of marriage and the Sabbath¹³). He did not abrogate the commandment, but He interpreted it in a different way from the current interpretation. In such a way his interpretation exceeded the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees.
- Secondly Jesus maintained that the obedience of the Law began inwardly. It is not enough to maintain the Law only in one's outward actions and words. Where the mind and will are set to do the will of God, the speaking and acting will not deviate from it. There should be an emphasis on the spiritual aspects of the Law, rather than the outward and material. Jesus' remark on ritual purification should be understood in this context (Matt 15:17-20).

15. The Lord Desires Mercy and Love

According to Matthew Jesus implicitly affirms the validity of the Law provided that it is interpreted correctly (Patte 1987, 167). The difference between the "right" and "wrong" interpretation of the Law is summed up when Jesus in reaction to Pharisaic objections referred to the text from Hosea (which only occurs in Matthew's gospel): "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Matt 9:13 and 12:7), a text the Pharisees failed to understand (Meier 1979, 84). The proper application of the Law is to be understood not as setting limits to the application of the Law, but as demonstrating its right application. "The Law is to be used in order to establish one's vocation, to discover what one should do in specific circumstances so as to fulfill God's will, that is mercy" (Patte 1987, 168).

13 Therefore any action which promoted rest, relief and general well-being was permissible on the Sabbath. The Sabbath actually was the most appropriate day for such performance.

Mercy is carried by love, the greatest commandment. It is not valid to assume that Matthew subsumes the detail of *Torah* by the double love command as sum total of the *Torah* and the Prophets in (Matt 22:34-40). To the contrary—this lies at the core of his argument about the meaning of the Law.

Matthew demonstrates that love and mercy finds its full meaning in the One to Whom the *Torah* refers to, Jesus Christ (Davies 1962, 31-66). In and through Him the *Torah* reached its full meaning. Therefore Jesus invites all that are tired of the legalistic way of applying the *Torah* by the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 11:28-30): “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest ...”.

16. Conclusion

Matthew’s emphasis on Jesus’ relation to the *Torah* should be understood within the situation where the *Torah* became a feature of division and exclusiveness. While Judaism used the *Torah* to fend off foreign influences, the Matthean community propagated gentile mission. This decision intensified their conflict with the synagogue who accused them of not adhering to the *Torah*. The crisis of 70 C.E. led to reconsidering the correct interpretation of the *Torah*. Matthew claims that Jesus brought the correct teaching of the *Torah*. Jesus’ teaching of the *Torah* is the subject of a full scale discussion in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus probably used a popular Jewish saying about the eternal validity and applicability of the Law and applied it to the fulfilled Law to demonstrate his essential continuity with it. Jesus is presented as the new Lawgiver (Moses), the eschatological revealer and interpreter of the *Torah*, the Messiah who brought the definitive end-time revelation for the heart. The *Torah* remains permanent in Christian conduct, but its application changes from the legalistic observance of all its literal regulations to demonstrate the deeper attitude of one’s heart. God expects mercy and love. The fulfillment of the OT in Jesus forms the key to understanding the will of God at a far deeper level than mere rule-keeping. Jesus is the ultimate demonstration of the meaning of the *Torah*. Matthew’s view of the Law is above all Christological in meaning and function.

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