

## THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

### Lesson 26, Chapter 7 Continued 3

In our previous lesson in Matthew chapter 7, Christ continues His Sermon on the Mount by making this unnerving statement in verses 22 and 23.

**CJB Matthew 7:22-23 <sup>22</sup> On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!'**

We're going to focus the bulk of our time together today on this passage that ought to be a shot across our collective and individual bow, because too easily Believers.... especially casual Christians.... dismiss it and think that this could not possibly be speaking about them or their congregation. What is a casual Christian? There is little better description of that than what we find in 1Corinthians. Paul put it this way as He spoke to the congregation of Christ Believers, Jews and gentiles, in the City of Corinth:

**CJB 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 <sup>1</sup> It is actually being reported that there is sexual sin among you, and it is sexual sin of a kind that is condemned even by pagans- a man is living with his stepmother! <sup>2</sup> And you stay proud? Shouldn't you rather have felt some sadness that would have led you to remove from your company the man who has done this thing? <sup>3</sup> For I myself, even though I am absent physically, am with you spiritually; and I have already judged the man who has done this as if I were present. <sup>4</sup> In the name of the Lord Yeshua, when you are assembled, with me present spiritually and the power of our Lord Yeshua among us, <sup>5</sup> hand over such a person to the Adversary for his old nature to be destroyed, so that his spirit**

***may be saved in the Day of the Lord.***

A casual Believer, or a casual Christian, is one who practices disobedience to God, and is even proud of it. Notice that while the immediate consequence on earth for a casual Christian may be little more than expulsion from the congregation, the eternal consequences begin upon the arrival of the Day of the Lord.

In our previous lesson we discussed that among Jews in the 1st century the term "on that Day" was a shortened form of "The Day of the Lord" and it meant Judgment Day. It pointed to the day that the history of mankind and the world as it currently operated (and operates) ends, and a new era dawns. On that day all humanity will be judged by God in a judicial sense. That is, all will stand before God as a defendant in a court of law and be judicially judged with the effects of the verdict lasting for eternity. The judgment will be rendered according to our works and deeds while we were still living. Admittedly, the common view of how the world would end, what would happen next, even what death itself brought next (if anything) was not a decided matter among Jewish religious authorities in the New Testament era and so it presented nothing like a firm or commonly held conviction within Jewish society. However what was generally understood was that God would judge each human at that point (or more likely in the Jewish mindset of that era, each Jewish human).

Therefore to help explain what people could expect on Judgment Day, Christ makes it clear within the theme and context of what He is saying that it is He who will act on behalf of The Father to make those judgments. The fundamental criteria He will judge by is 2 things: first whether He "knows" us, and second if we are or are not "workers of lawlessness". We should notice that the first criteria depends on the second. That is, if one is lawless, then Christ does not know us. But the question now becomes: what does it mean to know us, and what is lawlessness? His saying "I never knew you" cannot possibly mean that the individual standing before Him on the Day of Judgment was a stranger to Him in the literal sense that He had no prior knowledge of that person's existence. And it cannot mean that He never knew that person's character and inner being prior to the moment of Judgment. Rather to "not know" means: I renounce you. I do not accept you as a member of the Kingdom of Heaven. You are not one of My own.

This interpretation of what Jesus meant is illustrated by Paul who uses the term "to know" in a pertinent passage in 1Corinthians.

CJB **1 Corinthians 8:1-3** <sup>1</sup> *Now about food sacrificed to idols: we know that, as you say, "We all have knowledge." Yes, that is so, but "knowledge" puffs a person up with pride; whereas love builds up.* <sup>2</sup> *The person who thinks he "knows" something doesn't yet know in the way he ought to know.* <sup>3</sup> *However, if someone loves God, God knows him.*

Paul makes a kind of riddle by employing a play on words using the terms "to know" and "to have knowledge" several times and in several ways, all with slightly different meanings. That is, within this short passage "to know" can mean to have knowledge. To "have knowledge" can mean to possess information. Later Paul uses "to know" in the sense of having a belief or a firm conviction about something. And then finally Paul says that if someone loves God, then God knows him. But God knowing someone cannot mean merely possessing information about them, or having a conviction about them, or simply being aware of their existence. Notice how Paul first talks about knowing and knowledge from the human perspective. Only at the last does he talk about it from the divine perspective. And from the divine perspective "to know" someone means that God accepts that person as one of His own provided that person loves Him. Therefore it has the same meaning in Matthew 7:23. For Christ to "**not** know" someone means to not accept them; it means to reject them.

But on what grounds does Christ reject that person or persons? He says it is because they are workers of lawlessness. Most Bible versions say "lawlessness" (which is a good, literal translation of the Greek ***anomia***), but some others like the KJV say "iniquity" or in a few translations like the NAB it is translated as "evil doers". Why the difference? While I cannot get into the minds of the translators with any kind of certainty, from the outside I can see only one reason: it is to blur what is actually said and meant in order to lead us to a different conclusion than what Christ intended. What is the motive for doing that? Because if we accept the obvious meaning, then it throws a monkey wrench into the works of some rather widely held church doctrines.

To best understand what Christ meant by "lawlessness" I'd like to substitute the term Torah-lessness, or perhaps The Law of Moses-lessness. I have no doubt of this interpretation because if we take the phrase the way it is most often taught, then it means that if we are criminals or violators of any system of civil laws on earth, then He rejects us. Can our adherence to manmade legal systems.... some of them horribly corrupt and ungodly, be what Christ will use to determine our eternal worthiness to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven? As Paul might say:

"Heaven forbid!" Thus lawlessness can only mean the lack of obedience to the Law of Moses.

This subject, and the general subject of the Law of Moses as it pertains to Believers, is a mammoth undertaking. So at this time I am going to take us on a significant detour to examine it. To start our detour we must backtrack to the beginning of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount.

In Matthew chapter 5 after He has made a series of statements about 'how blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, those who show mercy, and those who seek peace' Yeshua suddenly pauses when He seems to realize that the huge Jewish crowd listening to Him (and perhaps those who would read His words in the coming centuries) might misunderstand what He was saying or have some objections to His words. He perceived that they might have thought He was pronouncing a new set of laws and commands; that is, a new Law of Jesus. I can imagine Him standing up, scanning the huge crowd and making eye contact with those nearest to Him, and then earnestly cautioning His rapt listeners using these words of Matthew 5:17-19:

<sup>CJB</sup> **Matthew 5:17-19** <sup>17</sup> ***"Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete.*** <sup>18</sup> ***Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened.*** <sup>19</sup> ***So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.***

Christ said that He did NOT do the very thing that a majority portion of His Believers today, and for the last 16 to 17 centuries, say that He did: abolish the Law of Moses and replace it with His own commands. I challenge the nearly universal Church doctrine that the Law of Moses is dead and gone. I believe that this subject, which is only recently starting to be re-examined by a small segment of the Body of Christ, is most appropriate at this time because we appear to have entered the final stage of mankind's salvation history that leads to universal judgment.

Little has divided the gentile Church from our earliest faith roots (as but an offshoot of 1st century Judaism) more than the determination of what the effect of

the Old Testament Biblical Law ought to be upon Christians. My intent is therefore to establish a context for us (as Believers) to comprehend the Law within the boundaries of the teaching of the overall Bible and our faith in Yeshua as Savior, perhaps in a different way than you have ever considered it. I will do this by FIRST establishing the point of view of the Apostle Paul who is at once the most difficult, most controversial New Testament contributor but who is also the most prolific and influential writer upon whom so many of the doctrines and beliefs of the Christian Church have been established.

Let's start by defining the term "The Law" because there is more to it than meets the eye. Before we can rightly discern what Jesus meant by the lack of law, **anomia**, (lawlessness as taken from Matthew 7:23), we first have to know what the biblical term "law" is referring to because it can mean different things in different usages. The Bible, Genesis to Revelation, is a thoroughly Jewish (or more technically, Hebrew) construction. Therefore we must consult Jewish scholars to understand the context and backdrop of its meaning. When a Christian sits down to discuss The Law with a Jew, the two parties have entirely different concepts of what the discussion is about. Christians think of The Law as being a series of strict rules and commands, do's and don'ts, and blessings and "curses" in the OT Law of Moses. Jews on the other hand see The Law as consisting of far more than what is written in the Old Testament. Judaism says that Moses did NOT write down **all** that God gave him on Mt. Sinai. Most of what God told Moses, it is said, was handed down and passed on by word of mouth, from generation to generation over the centuries. And, by sheer volume, this additional Law called the Oral Law far outstrips the written Law (that which was given on Mt. Sinai). But there is also **Halachah**, the foundation of the **Talmud**. The Talmud is a compilation of Jewish Rabbinical instructions and rulings that is designed to give the Hebrew people laws and ordinances that can be observed outside of the direct and written Laws of Moses, but (according to the Rabbis) those rulings are within the intent of the Law of Moses. It is due to the present absence of a Temple and Priesthood, which are necessary to enforce much of the Law of Moses, that is why these law of the Rabbis are considered not just valid but necessary out of practicality. This version or kind of law eventually became more popularly known among Jews by another broad name: **Tradition**. However it is also often included under the general heading of "Torah" or even just "Law".

With this rather broad Jewish understanding of the term "The Law" in mind, I'd like to tell you the Jewish position **about** the Law; and even more important to

our lesson today, their perspective on how Christians deal with the Law because it is this perspective that in turn gives rise to the nearly universal Jewish **opposition** to Christianity. First Judaism sees Christians as having declared all the rulings and commands of the Law as null and void.

Second, Judaism says that Christians believe that the Law was an essentially a negative, wretched, rigid and faulty institution.

Third, Jews believe that Christians see grace as strictly a New Testament innovation that played no role among Israel's religion (that is represented by the Old Testament) prior to Jesus. And that Believers in Jesus say that there is now a strong distinction between God's Law and God's Grace, that the two are mutually exclusive, and one must choose one over the other; law or grace. Therefore there is a great divide between the faith of Jews and the faith of Christians. Their conclusion is that Christians **MUST** believe that the God of the OT is a fundamentally different god than the God of the New Testament otherwise Christ followers could not believe such things.

Interestingly, the Jews are not too far off the mark in their perception of what the institutional Church believes and teaches, are they? There is a thread of thought woven tightly throughout mainstream Christianity that the god of the Jews is the subject of the OT, and the god of the Christians is the subject of the NT. Therefore the OT Law is for the Jews, and the NT grace by faith... the Law of Jesus... is for Christians.

Jews will (correctly) argue that grace is part and parcel of God's Law. That is, grace is the entire point of the Sacrificial System whereby an innocent animal pays the price of atonement for a human person's sins. The animal, then, is a substitute for what is rightly due to humans for sinning: death. They see the Law a divine gift to mankind of the greatest benefit and providing marvelous joy. Further, they believe that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The very first Christians, who were overwhelmingly Jews, did **NOT** hold to the viewpoint that the gentile dominated church has developed over the centuries as a core theological principle.....the anti-Law view. Rather, from a historical perspective, it was only around 70 years after Christ's death when gentiles began to take over the leadership of this Messianic movement (as the first followers of Christ were called) that this anti-Law view first raised its ugly head.

So Jews see that most Christians believe that now, because of Jesus, the Law is

dead and gone, having been replaced by **grace by faith** (and they point to Paul as having said that). But did the Jewish Paul actually hold that view? Did Paul believe and/or teach that the Law was to be abandoned and replaced because it was bad and inferior? Let's examine Paul a little bit, because Paul's words are the primary source for modern Christian doctrine.

One must bear in mind that Paul was not just any ordinary Jew; he was highly educated in Jerusalem at the esteemed school of Gamaliel, and was well on his way up the religious social ladder as a Pharisee of Pharisees. Few knew the Law (Tradition and biblical) as Paul knew the Law. Now, the question for us is, as a result of Paul's encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, did Paul give up the religion of his Hebrew forefathers for something new? Did he stop observing the Law of Moses and instead go on a crusade to convince other Jews to give it up, and for gentiles who wanted to follow Christ to ignore it? Was it his intent that followers of Yeshua were to never again celebrate any of the Biblical Festivals? That they should quit going to the Temple and should shun the 10 commandments of Mt. Sinai that were set down by God and given to Moses?

Let's begin to get our bearing on Paul, the man, by reading a small excerpt from Acts.

### **READ ACTS CHAPTER 21:15 - 26**

Clearly James the Just, the biological brother of Yeshua and the supreme leader of the Believing Jews in Jerusalem didn't think Paul had quit observing the Law. Yet there were rabble-rousers among the religious Jews who accused Paul of TEACHING against the Law in all its forms. James had a solution to this slanderous accusation: put Paul to a very public test. Paul was told to go with certain men, described as **brethren**..... meaning Messianic Jews.....Christian Jews.....who had taken the vow of a Nazarite, and to go the Temple and observe the standard Jewish purification rituals that accompany these vows. James fully expected Paul to comply and here in Acts 21 we see that Paul did as was suggested without balking in any way! So was Paul being a phony just to please James? Many, if not most, denominational leaders will answer in the affirmative.

If we're going to understand Paul and to define him in his proper Jewish context, we must begin by asking ourselves a very basic question: did He agree with Yeshua on every point, or not? And as we peel the layers back a bit deeper we must also ask: did Paul teach what Jesus taught about the Law of Moses, or did

he teach someone different?

Let's revisit the Sermon on the Mount.

### READ MATT 5:17-19

<sup>CJB</sup> **Matthew 5:17** *"Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete." <sup>18</sup> Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened.*

Yeshua has just said in His sermon that He has NOT abolished the Law, nor should anyone ever SAY it has been abolished, nor should it ever be taught that even SOME of the laws have been modified let alone replaced by anything that He would say. So did Christ tell several thousand people at the Sea of Galilee that His coming and His teachings did NOT abolish or replace the Law, but then a few years later speaking from Heaven He said the opposite to Paul, and then sent Paul off to tell people NOT to obey the commands of the Torah? To pay no attention to what Yeshua taught when He was alive and on earth?

Without question the Law is something that never should have been removed from its divine place as central to trust in God and to His Messiah. Therefore it never should have been removed from Christian doctrine and it must be restored. The lawlessness, the anti-Law view, must end. It is more important to our faith than ever, today, IF we have the eyes to see and the ears to hear. According to Matthew 7:23 our eternity will be greatly affected by our decision on this matter.

I want to give you some points to ponder about the true biblical nature and character of The Law of Moses as explained in the Scriptures.

- **The Law was never created to be a source of justification or salvation.** The Law of Moses was not given by God for redemption, and never used as such at any point in history. The Law was created and given to a people (the Hebrews) who were **already** God didn't redeem Israel from Egypt by means of the Law; God FIRST redeemed them as a free gift of deliverance from bondage, and then a few months after their redemption He brought them to His holy mountain.... Mt. Sinai... to give them His Law. I propose that this is same pattern that is unchanged and intended for all



Believers. FIRST we receive Christ, THEN we receive God's commandments. Because without first receiving the Lord, and more importantly the Lord **accepting** us, we have no ability to properly carry out His commands in the spirit they were intended. Let me say this another way: Yeshua says in His Sermon on the Mount that The Law, the Torah, is our manual for living the redeemed life, as a member of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is not (and never was) a means to redemption.

- **The Law tells us what sin is, and it reveals to us our sinful natures.**

The Law, the Torah, gives us the **knowledge and consciousness** of sin. I suspect that most of you accept that rather easily because that generally is the standard doctrine in most denominations. Yet in the same breath it is equally as often said that the Law was and remains ONLY for the Jews. Here is the question: if God intended that the Law was ONLY to be studied and obeyed by the Jews, how is it that a gentile Christian can say that a Jewish-only Law is OUR source for the knowledge and consciousness of sin if it does not apply to us?

- **Trusting Christ confirms the Torah and The Law.** Let's read Romans 3:28 through 4:3.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Romans 3:28-31** <sup>28</sup> *Therefore, we hold the view that a person comes to be considered righteous by God on the ground of trusting, which has nothing to do with legalistic observance of Torah commands.* <sup>29</sup> *Or is God the God of the Jews only? Isn't he also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, he is indeed the God of the Gentiles;* <sup>30</sup> *because, as you will admit, God is one. Therefore, he will consider righteous the circumcised on the ground of trusting and the uncircumcised through that same trusting.* <sup>31</sup> *Does it follow that we abolish Torah by this trusting? Heaven forbid! On the contrary, we confirm Torah.*

<sup>CJB</sup> **Romans 4:1-3** <sup>1</sup> *Then what should we say Avraham, our forefather, obtained by his own efforts?* <sup>2</sup> *For if Avraham came to be considered righteous by God because of legalistic observances, then he has something to boast about. But this is not how it is before God!* <sup>3</sup> *For what does the Tanakh say? "Avraham put his trust in God, and it was credited to his account as righteousness."*

The context for this vital section of the Book of Romans is summed up in Romans 3:31 when we see that Paul makes the point that trusting in Messiah does not

abolish the Law and in fact actually validates it! But the punch line of this entire statement is framed in verse 2 of Romans 4 where it speaks of justification. Paul says that if someone tries to use their obedience to the Law as their righteousness before God; that is, **as a means to justification**, they will incur God's wrath. Why? Because obeying the Law is wrong? Is it obedience to something that is faulty or no longer exists? No; it's because justification is NOT what God created the Law created to do. Trust in God and to the Messiah He sent to us, and the righteousness that trust imputed upon us, is the one and ONLY means to justification. And, with the advent of God on Earth, Jesus Christ, faith in Christ is the one and only means to justification and to try to use something else for this purpose.....such as obedience to the Law of Moses.... is not only wrong and ineffective, it is also offensive to God. Yet that hardly means that obedience to God's laws and commands is now irrelevant. Being a Believer equips us to be more devoted to The Law, because we can now do what is commands in the proper spirit. Do you see this? Yeshua said that His purpose was to fulfill the Law, not to abolish it. For without the Law, how will we know what pleases and displeases God? How will we know what sin and holiness is? How will we calibrate our moral compasses? Only accepting the truth of the Gospel is needed for Salvation; but the Law remains fully valid and it is there to guide us through our lives on earth and into the Kingdom of Heaven. It is to teach us right from wrong, and sin from righteousness. You see, after we become saved THAT is the moment when we should begin to seek this knowledge of the Law, and to learn it so that we know how to DO it! To properly incorporate God's laws and commands into our lifestyles and behaviors that make us reflective of God's ideal. Do it in reverse, and you indeed can get an unholy legalism.

4) **The Law acts as our protector.** By our being obedient to the **principles** of the Law, we are living within a Kingdom of Light and Truth designed by the Creator. The Lord constantly tells His people not to wander outside of the boundaries of this Kingdom, because outside of it is nothing but deceit and darkness and death.

A good question right about now ought to be: how do we 21st century Believers who do not live in an ancient Hebrew culture, obey the Law in the way and spirit that Paul prescribes? Step one is by acknowledging that the Law and the Grace of Christ are not mutually exclusive; rather they are complementary. Christ redeems, the Holy Spirit reveals and guides, and The Law instructs and protects us.

The intent of The Law is to instruct Believers in God's principles and that is what we should focus on. The New Testament rests entirely upon the foundation of the Torah and The Law, and so the NT generally expects its readers to already know the principles of The Torah and The Law.

Let's return for a moment to how Judaism views the "righteousness before God" aspect of the Law. One of the prime assumptions within the Church is that Jews endeavor to work their way to Heaven by being obedient to the Law and so Judaism is a religion totally reliant on human deeds and behavior as a self-justification, while Christianity is a religion 100% based on grace and thus for us works and deeds and especially obedience to God's commandments are either secondary or might even present a danger to our Salvation. It might surprise you to know that Jews do NOT believe that being obedient to the Torah (the Law) is what takes them to Heaven. For one reason Jews don't believe that after death one GOES to Heaven to live with God.

I think this quote from a well-known Jewish website called Judaism 101 says it best:

***QUOTE: Some people look at these teachings and deduce that Jews try to "earn our way into Heaven" by performing the mitzvot. This is a gross mischaracterization of our religion. It is important to remember that unlike some religions, Judaism is not focused on the question of how to get into heaven. Judaism is focused on life and how to live it. Non-Jews frequently ask me, "do you really think you're going to go to Hell if you don't do such-and-such?" It always catches me a bit off balance, because the question of where I am going after death simply doesn't enter into the equation when I think about the mitzvot. We perform the mitzvot because it is our privilege and our sacred obligation to do so. We perform them out of a sense of love and duty, not out of a desire to get something in return.***

Jews believe that their greatest duty to God, and the greatest joy they can attain during their life on earth, is to know that their obedience to the Law is pleasing the God of Israel, and there is practically no thought of what happens when life is over.

Christianity has moved toward a different extreme. While Jews generally have little thought about life after death, for Believers our lives on earth is often viewed as having but modest meaning and instead most of our thoughts and efforts point

towards life after death and all its Heavenly rewards. We see our works and behavior as having a very limited role in our lives; instead it's our belief in Christ and our good thoughts that are everything.

Because the point of this detour is to bring us to a concrete understanding of Matthew 7:22 and 23, and what Yeshua means by "workers of Lawlessness" I want to once again quote Paul.

<sup>RSV</sup> **2 Thessalonians 2:1-4** <sup>1</sup> *Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him, we beg you, brethren,* <sup>2</sup> *not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.* <sup>3</sup> *Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition,* <sup>4</sup> *who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.*

Who is this man of lawlessness? We all understand that he is the Anti-Christ, don't we? So what does this man's lawlessness refer to? Is he disobedient to Roman law? To Syrian law? To American law? To International law? Is the anti-Christ simply a modern super-scofflaw like Jessie James or Bonnie and Clyde who has no regards for the different laws created by the many different societies and nations? When the Bible refers to law it only ever means one thing: **The Law**. The Torah. The Laws of Moses. God's laws. Our possible entry into the Kingdom of Heaven is certainly not measured by manmade laws. So this man of lawlessness is the epitome of a worker of Torah-lessness. He is a man who will thumb his nose at God's laws and commandments, and God's moral definitions of good and evil.

Therefore The Law is important and valid and relevant for us not only for the several reasons we've discussed, but because if we don't know The Law we will hardly be able to recognize the Anti-Christ who will be primarily known by him being anti-Law.....being against God's Torah. Being against the Law of Moses. Being a worker of lawlessness.

Bottom line: This warning about lawlessness is not to pagans. This warning is to those who claim to rely on Yeshua's name, and who claim to be part of the Believers' congregation the world over. Some of these people will be intentionally

counterfeit in order to inflict harm; others will deceive themselves and think they can claim Christ, but at the same time deny God's commandments and do what is right in their own eyes. Yeshua calls these the "workers of lawlessness" and they will be denied entry into the Kingdom of Heaven.

This ends our detour and we'll take up verse 24 and move towards completion of the Sermon on the Mount the next time we meet.