

An Assessment of the Theme of Grace and Law in the Antitheses in Matthew 5:21–48: Implications on the Disciple-making Process

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Abstract

A reading of the Antitheses in Matthew's Gospel record (Matthew 5:21–48) leaves one to wonder whether the demands put upon Jesus' disciples are practically possible. This study seeks to respond to the following research questions: What function does the theme of grace and law play in the disciple-making process? How does the theme of grace and law influence the life of a disciple? The study responds to the above questions by analyzing the theme of grace and law in Matthew 5:21–48. It argues that the Antitheses follow the scheme of grace and law which is an overall theme of the Sermon on the Mount. This is to say that the demands put on Jesus' disciples are not dependent upon their human effort but the divine empowerment to do the demands of the law. The study utilizes a hermeneutical method of socio-rhetorical interpretation of Matthew 5:17–48 and shows the implications of the theme of grace and law on the disciple-making process. The study consists of three sections. The first is a general introduction to the theme of grace and law in Matthew, and particularly in Matthew 5:21–48. The second section analyzes Jesus' interpretation of the OT law and its implications on disciple-making. Finally, the third section is a summary and conclusion of the theme of grace and law in the disciple-making process. It reveals that the disciple of Jesus, by entering into a cooperative journey with God in following Jesus, manifests the distinctive Christian lifestyle.

Keywords: authentic disciple, Antitheses, disciple-making, grace, inner transformation, law

Introduction

This study is an assessment of the theme of grace and law in Matthew 5:17–48 and its implication on disciple-making. Jesus' emphasis on the performance of the law and the call of His disciples to pursue higher righteousness questions the praxis of the same. Was this going to be achieved by the disciples' efforts or by being enabled? The study argues that Matthew 5:17–48 should be understood within the scheme of grace and law which is an overall theme of the Sermon on the Mount (hereafter SM). Green correctly observes, "God's love brings us into the kingdom in the first place; that same love must have practical outworking in our lives." (Green 2000, 42). This shows the possibility of the theme of grace and law in Matthew in general, and particularly in Matthew 5:17–48. The study, therefore, analyzes the text of Matthew 5:17–48 to ascertain the significance of the theme of grace and law in the disciple-making process.

Problem Statement

In New Testament (NT) studies, there remains a challenge on how the themes of grace and law are related to each other. This has led to two schools of thought. Some scholars emphasize works as the basis of salvation. For instance, Hans Windisch (1881–1935), a notable NT scholar who was born in Leipzig, Germany, views the SM as containing the terms of entering the kingdom of heaven. It forms a counterpart to the Mosaic stipulation in Deuteronomy where getting hold of

the land is made dependent on obedience towards the law (Luomanen 1998, 8). Windisch, therefore, emphasizes the role of law as the basis of salvation in Matthew. He, however, fails to demonstrate that God's grace preceded the demands presented in Deuteronomy whereby God first delivered the Israelites from Egypt before putting demands on them to obey. So, indeed, it is not true that the Mosaic stipulations in Deuteronomy determine the entry to the land of Canaan.

Some argue that salvation in Matthew is by grace. Among them is included Gerhard Barth, a leading German Lutheran theologian of the 20th century. Barth supported Windisch and his teacher Bornkamm that the last judgment and the demand to fulfill the law constitute Matthew's thinking. However, he differs from them by contending that on the whole, Matthew's imperative is based on the indicative (Luomanen 1998, 13). Barth's arguments are based primarily on God's character. God is merciful and He wants us to show mercy too. This is the position the current study builds on as well. This is because of Matthew's imperative, demand is based on the indicative, grace. Consequently, the beatitudes (grace) are preceded by the imperative antitheses in Matthew's literary arrangement of the SM. Both the Old Testament (OT) and NT studies reveal that grace takes preeminence in salvation. It is only afterward that the theme of the law becomes a possible reality. God's grace has been there from the beginning of creation, even before the entry of sin into the world of humans. This was long before the giving of the Law of Moses.

In Matthew's Gospel, the theme of grace is preeminent in the development of disciples. This is because, in Matthew's SM, the beatitudes (5:3–11) precede the antitheses (5:17–48). This is a clear indication that Matthew gives grace preeminence, but also putting the role of law in its rightful place in that it is expected of the disciples of Jesus to obey God's commandments as evidence of their salvation.

Introduction of the Theme of Grace and Law in the Antitheses (5:17–20)

The theme of grace and law can be traced in the Antitheses, albeit implicitly. This section of Matthew has been deemed as legalistic. This, however, is not the case because Matthew, in the preceding section of the beatitudes, puts grace and demands together. Similarly, in the Antitheses, the demand is anchored on grace. The reception of a 'new law' is a gift from God. Harrington views the Torah as a gift and a privilege given to Israel, not a burden. Acting upon the Torah is the privileged way of responding to the Creator God who has entered into a covenant relationship with Israel (Harrington 1991, 91). The disciples receive, so to speak, a 'new law' in juxtaposition to Israel receiving of the old covenant law (Ex. 19–20).

The receiving of the law by the nation of Israel is a clear demonstration of God's grace to the nation (Deut. 4:8). Similarly, the disciples of Jesus were privileged to hear Jesus interpret the law for them as well. The presentation of Jesus giving His disciples a 'new law' has been considered by some scholars as Matthew's portrayal of Jesus as a 'new Moses' (see Allison 1993). The idea of viewing Jesus as a new lawgiver has been rejected by some scholars (Green, McKnight & Marshall 1992, 218). It is true that Jesus was not out to give a 'new law' but to interpret the law anew. It is, therefore, necessary to see Jesus as the interpreter of the law.

The Demand for a Higher Righteousness (5:20)

In this section, we argue that disciples are developed through God's grace which enables them to perform the demands of the law. The imperative (demand), as it were, follows the indicative

(grace), as has already been argued. In Matthew, Jesus demands nothing less than a ‘higher righteousness’ that supersedes that of the scribes (5:20). Jesus, by demanding such high standards from His disciples, is informed by the fact that God’s grace was already at work in empowering the disciples. The higher righteousness demanded by Jesus of His disciples is expounded in six antitheses.

The antitheses have a two-part format. The first part states an injunction which is introduced characteristically “You have heard that ...” and, the second part either explains, expands, or clarifies the stated injunction. Albright correctly argues that the verb translated to mean ‘fulfill’ has an idea of clarifying the true meaning of something (Albright 1971, 58). This is, indeed, what Jesus is doing in the antitheses. He seeks to give the correct meaning of the Mosaic Law which had been perverted by the scribes and the Pharisees. To give the correct meaning of the law, each of the second parts of the antitheses is introduced with “But I say to you ...” In this case, Jesus adopts a figure of speech coined in Jewish tradition (Strecker 1988, 62). It is, therefore, clear that there is no contradiction between Jesus and his dealing with the Torah. Instead, Jesus brings to light the intended meaning of the Torah which remained obscured through wrong interpretations by the Pharisees and the scribes (Mark 7:6–8, 13; Luke 11:38).

The Role of Grace and Law in Developing Disciples: A Detailed Analysis of 5:21–48

Introduction

This section analyses Matthew’s citations of the Pentateuch LXX in Matthew 5:21–48. The analysis reveals the role of the theme of grace and law in the disciple-making process.

Matthew’s Rhetoric of Recitations of the OT Law (5:21-48)

Scholars refer to this section in Matthew as the ‘Antitheses’. An antithesis, which means ‘opposite’ is a rhetorical device in which two opposite ideas are put together in a sentence to achieve a contrasting effect. Harrington cautions that “When applied to Matt 5:21–48 the word ‘antithesis’ fits the rhetorical pattern but not the content” (Harrington 1991, 90). The method used by Jesus was a conventional approach to teaching in the 1st century AD (Martin & Martin 2001, 4). We now turn to the analysis of the antitheses of Matthew 5:21–48 to show their function in developing disciples. In this study, we consider the analysis of four of the antitheses found in the first, second, third, and sixth quotations.

The First Quotation: Matthew 5:21 (Ex. 20:13, LXX; Deut. 5:17, LXX)

The first quote in 5:21 is an interesting one to note, the verb used here ηκούσατε (you heard) is in the aorist tense. This probably implies that the people received the teachings of the law orally in their synagogues (Green et al. 1999, 340–66). This is supported by the next verb ἐρρέθη (it was said) as opposed to γέγραπται (it is written) of Matthew 4:4.

In the first citation, we notice that there are some additional demands to this commandment from the Decalogue, the sixth commandment. As we observe, Exodus LXX simply reads οὐ φονεύσεις (Do not murder). This is a perfect translation of the MT which also reads :הַאֲדָמָה לֹא תִרְצַח “Do not murder.” In Matthew, Jesus adds ὃς δ’ ἂν φονεύσῃ, ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει (Whoever shall murder shall be liable to judgment).

The inexact quotation is as a result of interpretation. Jesus’ additional words would have been influenced by the various interpretations that were available within Judaism or even as

expanded by other texts (Davies & Allison 1988, 47). The principle of “it is also written” could also have been employed by Jesus Christ (Matt 4:7). It, therefore, suffices to state that Jesus did not use a different version of the LXX. Instead, He took the OT interpretative approach to a deeper level.

Jesus does not just state the law as it was given to those of ancient times. More than that, He gives meaning to the law with some new understanding. After quoting the LXX Pentateuch, Jesus adds a new understanding to the stated law, whereby He reveals that murder is not simply a matter of the act, but attitude, and therefore pointing out that attitudes such as anger (ὀργή), name-calling, such as *Raca*, and “you fool” (μωρέ) as equivalent to murder. Some manuscripts have the variant εἰκῆ (without cause, e.g., Byzantine MSS) which is a secondary addition in an attempt to qualify the sweeping character of the statement (Guelich 1982, 185). The context of Matthew does not seem to support the variant which reads “without cause.” Jesus simply outlawed murder as an act and the attitudes of anger that bring it. Indeed, acts of moral violation are liable to judgment at the law courts. This was perfectly understood by the Jews. Davies and Allison assert, “The said murder should be punished by proper authority. Jesus says that the feeling of anger which prompts the crime will meet the divine condemnation. In this way, He fulfilled the law by drawing out the moral principles which underlay the enactment” (1988, 48).

The law, thus, functions in the development of disciples in cultivating the right actions and attitudes. Whilst the beatitudes spell out the right position of Jesus’ disciples, the antitheses deliberate on the expected right performance of Jesus’ disciples. The performance of the law begins with one’s inner disposition. It evident that in Matthew, Jesus clarifies the law to achieve its intended role of developing authentic disciples. This is because the law as interpreted by Jesus addresses the human problem to its very core. For instance, the first antithesis reveals the nature of the sin of murder. In this case, the sin of murder is traced to its original premeditated attitudes which Jesus condemns, not just the act alone. Stott argues, “Now these things—angry thoughts and insulting words—may never lead to the ultimate act of murder. Yet they are tantamount to murder in God’s sight” (Stott 1978, 85).

The disciples of Jesus are hereby forewarned of harboring wrong attitudes within their hearts as these would lead to undesirable acts. It is evident that the wrong attitudes the disciple is warned to refrain from do not only affect his social and legal standing, that is, ending in the law courts, but they also affect his moral standing and relationship with God. This is the idea of verses 23 and 24. The two verses reveal that the disciple of Jesus Christ, by harboring negative thoughts towards his brother, impairs his worship before God. This is expressed in the third-class condition introduced in verse 23 with its implications in verses 23 and 24. Jesus here puts the relationship above the offering of gifts. He uses three imperatives on the same verse to show the priority of relationship over the offering of gifts. Here is the sequence of these imperatives: ἄφες (leave), ὑπάγε (depart) and διαλλάγηθι (be reconciled). The three imperatives reveal something to do with grace and law. The first two imperatives emphasize the action to be undertaken by the disciple while the third one is what is done to the disciple having taken the actions. The adverb πρῶτος (first) qualifies the verb διαλλάσσω (to be reconciled) and thus emphasizes the relationship between the disciple and his brother as a prerequisite for the acceptance of a disciple’s worship.

Second Quotation 5:27 (Ex.20:14; Deut. 5:18)

The second antithesis, like the first, cites a commandment from the Decalogue, the seventh commandment of Exodus 20:14, and Deut. 5:18 which reads “You shall not commit adultery” (οὐ μοιχεύσεις). Matthew in his characteristic version follows the quotation with its rejoinder, “But I say to you.” Jesus states another antithesis to the divine injunction οὐ μοιχεύσεις, by saying, πᾶς ὁ βλέπων γυναῖκα πρὸς τὸ ἐπιθυμῆσαι αὐτήν ἤδη ἐμοίχευσεν αὐτήν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ (Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart). This again demonstrates Jesus’ interpretation of the law.

Just as attitudes of anger are condemned in the first antithesis, here Jesus condemns lust which leads to adultery. Jesus’ major concern is not the act per se, but the thoughts that bring forth the action. In other words, transformation for a disciple of Jesus must be from inside out and not the other way round. This comes as a result of internalizing the law as interpreted by Jesus. While in the OT, it was the act of adultery that was condemned, Jesus condemns a person’s thoughts and desires. Clearly, not only is the deed of the sinful look, but also the perverted will of an individual is the object of Jesus’ statement of judgment (Strecker 1988, 71). Besides, Jesus’ interpretation of the seventh commandment reveals a problem of its full interpretation by the rabbis. The problem of the rabbis was that they provided a convenient definition of adultery at the expense of sexual purity (Stott 1978, 87). The disciple is hereby warned that the law must get its fullest interpretation and application. Strecker rightly argues, “Jesus demands wholeness and undividedness, that is, human perfection” (Strecker 1988, 71).

While the verb μοιχεύω (to commit adultery) generally is used in connection with a married spouse whereby both the woman and the desiring man sin against the rights of each other. However, in the context of Matthew, Jesus is against all forms of sexual impropriety. Accordingly, sexual impurity, whether within marriage or outside of marriage is sinful. This is evidenced by the Greek accusative noun γυναῖκα that is used in 5:28 where it refers either to a ‘woman’ in general or a ‘wife.’ Jesus’ interpretation of the OT injunction shows His concern for proper relationships between man and woman, married or unmarried. Accordingly in Matthew, Jesus disapproves of any forms of sexual impropriety terming them sinful and that they must be avoided by His disciples. Philo also indicates that violation of this injunction has far-reaching implications in that it can affect even an entire city (The Decalogue. XXIII. 127) (Philo & Yonge 1993, 529).

Jesus, after explaining the seriousness of the sin of adultery, goes further to demonstrate the need to undertake drastic measures to avert it. This is demonstrated using two hyperboles, “gouging out” one’s right eye and “chopping off” one’s right hand. Jesus uses the same sayings in 18:8–9 as well. Jesus’ usage of these sayings is a strong warning of the danger of adultery. The same saying also occurs in Mark 9:43–47, however, not in the context of prohibition of adultery. It is not certainly clear as to why Jesus talks about the right hand here which does not seem to have any link to the verb as is the case in ‘look’ with ‘eye’ (Matt 5:28–29). It is possible that the hand is used here in connection with other sins that are committed by use of the hand, and not about adultery. Nevertheless, there is also a connection between the use of hands in evil adulterous imaginations. Probably here as Hendricks observes, “this insistence seems to reflect the general assumption that the right hand is a more important side of the body, and so damage to it is more serious. The eye also stands here for what is most precious” (1984, 70).

The radical interpretation of the law demands radical actions to be undertaken. It is preferable to lose some valuable members of one’s body such as the right eye and the right hand

rather than to lose the entire body in hellfire. Misuse of a single organ of one's body may endanger the whole. While seeing, in general, is a proper use of the eye, lusting after a woman is not. This is because proper ethical behavior is demanded of the whole person (Strecker 1988, 72).

Third Quotation: Matthew 5:31–32 (Deut. 24:1, LXX)

The third antithesis is simply introduced by the verb ερρέθη (“It was said . . .”) unlike the first two antitheses which had a full statement (“You heard that it was said to those of old . . .”). The third quotation is not taken from the Decalogue as the first two we have discussed. This time Jesus quotes from the Mosaic Law. The wording of this quotation is not the same as in LXX Deuteronomy where the quotation is taken from. Jesus here summarizes the OT injunction taken from Deuteronomy 24:1. There is also some textual variation between LXX and MT. The LXX's basis of divorce is πορνεία (fornication/prostitution) while in the MT is עֲרוּת דָּבָר (literally; nakedness of a thing, some indecency) (Strecker 1988, 75–79).

One, then, wonders how Jesus' rendering of “indecency” is equivalent to “fornication/prostitution.” It should be noted that the two terms πορνεία (fornication) and μοιχεύω (adultery) are not identical in Matthew. Jesus in his response to the Mosaic Law regarding divorce negates what the Law of Moses permitted by pointing out that divorce can only be justified, παρεκτός λόγου πορνείας (except on the ground of infidelity), otherwise if the divorced woman marries both she and the new husband commit adultery. However, this can be resolved through repentance of the spouse and forgiveness by the husband/wife instead of divorce. To Jesus, divorce was not (and still is not) the ideal will of God but only His permissive will. In principle, remarriage is adulterous because God is opposed to divorce (Keener 1997, 119). In Matthew 19, Jesus revisits the issues of divorce and cites Genesis, arguing that it has never been God's intention (Matt. 19:3–9). However, when the Pharisees objected to Jesus' interpretation, citing Moses' consent for issuing a certificate of divorce among dissatisfied couples, Jesus reiterated that divorce is not permitted for his disciples just as God rejected it (Mal. 2:16).

This antithesis demonstrates to us that disciple-making is cultivated under stringent rules of adherence. A weak law produces weak disciples or, rightly put, a weak interpretation of the law produces weak disciples. On the contrary, a comprehensive law or interpretation of the law produces authentic disciples. Jesus' goal was to make authentic disciples whose task is to disciple the whole globe (Matt. 28:19-20). Such disciples are prepared under a transformed world view. This is the main aim of the six antitheses.

The Sixth Quotation: Mat 5:43 (Lev 19:18, LXX)

It is Jesus' norm to modify His quotations. Once again in the last antithesis (5:43–44), Jesus cites some parts of Leviticus 19:18 on the commandment to love one's neighbor. The LXX reads ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν ἐγὼ εἰμι κύριος (You shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am the Lord). Here the LXX is faithful to the MT which also reads: וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ (and you shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am the Lord). This shows that the rest of the words “and hate your enemy” are Jesus' additions to clarify the meaning of the commandment. Some OT passages intimate to this aspect of ‘hating one's enemy’ (See 2 Chr. 19:2; Ps 5:5; 139:21) and the story of Elisha calling down bears upon some young men who were mocking him (2 Kgs. 2:23–25). Allison in support states, “The closest parallels occur in the Dead

Sea Scroll. In 1QS 1:10 the members of the sect are to ‘hate all the sons of darkness,’ and Josephus, Bell. 2:139 tells us that the Essenes swore ‘to hate always the unjust.’”(Allison 2004, 84). This raises the question as to where Jesus draws his additional words from and for what purpose of adding them to the Mosaic Code. Albright argues, “...but the remainder of the verse is oral commentary inferred from the distinction drawn in the post-Exilic period between dealings with Jews on the one hand and dealings with Gentiles on the other.” (Albright 1971, 71). This is clearly what the ancients were taught concerning this commandment and the same was being passed on to Jesus’ audience. Jesus, being aware of this, saw it necessary to correct the erroneous interpretation of this commandment of love.

Jesus makes it clear that his disciples are not to make such a distinction among individual persons or groups. Instead, they are to treat all people as their neighbors. Indeed, Jesus perceives the neighborhood as one which involves doing acts of kindness towards the vulnerable and needy (Matt 25:35–37). In this case, the disciple of Jesus is expected to do good to his neighbor just like the heavenly Father (Matt 5:45). The theme of *imitatio Dei* (imitation of God) is underscored as the guiding principle for the disciple to do what is right. God does not show partiality concerning His dealings with humankind. Two examples from nature reveal the character of God. He causes the sun to rise upon the evil and the good (Matt 5:45). He also sends rain upon the righteous and the unrighteous (5:45). Both of the verbs ἀνατέλλει (to cause to rise) and βρέχει (to send rain) in present tense taken essentially communicate the idea that God treats all people impartially. Therefore, the disciples of Jesus are called upon to imitate their Father who is in heaven by treating people equally. Epictetus who lived in the period of A.D. 55-135 and thus a contemporary to many New Testament writers also discourages hatred among human beings when he says, “Why, man, if you must need be affected in a way that is contrary to nature at the misfortune of another, pity him rather, but do not hate him; drop this readiness to take offense and this spirit of hatred”(Epictetus & Oldfather 1946, 121).

The first-class conditional sentences in verses 46 and 47 are conditions of the first category, that is, simple conditions. For example, in verse 46, Jesus is stating that if we love only those who love us, then we are no different from the tax collectors; that is, the heathen, or people who are not followers of Christ. The same applies to the simple condition in verse 47 where Jesus is stating that if we greet our brothers only it does not distinguish us from the world which does likewise. The rhetorical questions that follow each of the conditional sentences are intended to disapprove of how the disciples thought appropriate in handling their enemies (the Gentiles). The point is that such acts do not make any distinction between a disciple and the worldly people. The point is clear, for example, the actions of a disciple are compared to those of a tax collector. In the 1st century AD, tax collectors were a class detested not only by the Jews but by other nations also, both on account of their employment and of the harshness, greed, and deception with which they did their job (Danker, Arndt & Bauer 2000, 999). In the synoptic Gospels, tax collectors are usually named alongside ‘sinners.’ This is a clear indication that the tax collectors were viewed in a bad light (Matt 9:10–11; 11:19). The use of rhetorical questions and contrasts that Jesus employs here are intended to gain audience contact (Kennedy 1984, 57). Jesus wanted to gain direct contact with his audience here in addressing this pertinent matter.

The disciples of Jesus are expected to move beyond the norm. Jesus had been developing this idea since the beginning of the antitheses. This argument is hinged on the call to pursue higher righteousness (5:20). The disciple of Jesus in his/her pursuit of higher righteousness must develop a distinctive character different from that of the world. The goal of pursuing higher

righteousness is to become as perfect as our heavenly father (5:48). Since the adjective τέλειός means “complete”, “perfect” and “mature,” this then implies that the disciple of Jesus is to pursue the path of righteousness to attain this goal. The adjectives τέλειός could also mean “perfect, fully grown in a moral sense” when it is used concerning persons (Arndt et al. 1979). Jesus here was pointing His disciples to the goal of being His disciples as it is envisioned in Matthew’s Gospel, that is, to attain to this level of being complete, not lacking morally, as both beatitudes, and the Antitheses have it.

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, our exegetical analysis of Matthew 5:21–48 reveals that the disciple of Jesus is expected to display a high level of righteousness (fulfill the demands of the law). This is because the disciple of Jesus has been divinely empowered to live the Christian life. This is made possible by the disciple entering into a cooperative journey with God as he/she follows the way of Christ. The distinctive Christian lifestyle of the disciple of Jesus begins with the inner transformation of the heart. Living under the grace and law of God brings about the outworking of certain distinctiveness in the life of a disciple. Jesus makes it vivid that a transformed heart harbors no evil intents and thoughts such as of murder and hatred towards a brother as the first antithesis reveals (Mat 5:21–26). It also combats evils attitudes such as the desire to commit adultery as the second antithesis shows (Mat 5:27–30). In this case, inner transformation influences the behavior of a disciple. The right attitudes in the heart lead to the right actions of a disciple.

Therefore, the disciple of Jesus is supposed to guard his heart for, “from it flow the springs of life” (Prov. 4:23). Indeed, the distinctive life upon which the disciple is called to manifest is meant for purposes of witnessing for God through speech and action. This is why in the third antithesis (Mat 5:33–37), the wrong use of speech of oath-taking is discouraged. Therefore, the disciple of Jesus is expected to demonstrate integrity in the area of speech. The fifth antithesis (5:38–42) further demonstrates the need to lead a life of non-retaliation. The disciple of Jesus is called to do much more than what the law simply demands. He/she is to live beyond the norm having been divinely empowered to witness for God in a world whose morals are quickly eroding. Finally, the sixth antithesis (5:43–48) highlights the guiding principle of fulfilling the demands of law which is obedience to the law of love.

The study has also demonstrated that the theme of grace, though implicit in the antitheses which we have analyzed, can nevertheless be traced in aspects such as the interpretation of the law by Jesus. This recalls the giving of the law by God to the nation of Israel which was to be viewed as a gift. Israel enjoyed this privilege which other nations did not have. The same can be said of the Matthean community in the time of Jesus who had the privilege of hearing the law interpreted by Jesus Christ. This underscores the role of grace in preparing disciples as perceived in Mathew’s Gospel record in the Antitheses section. Besides, Matthew’s community having a privilege to receive the interpretation of the law, they are challenged to adhere to its dictates by not breaking even the least aspect of it or by deviating from its teaching (5:19). The call for internalization and observance of the law in such a strict sense as presented in the antitheses clearly shows the role of law in developing disciples. It is noteworthy to realize that this internalization and sincere observance of the law is possible only after one’s heart has been changed through faith in God’s grace. For example, in Ephesians 2:8–10, it is clearly stated that nobody has ever been or can ever be justified by good works of obedience to the law. It is only

after we are justified by grace when we believe and receive Jesus Christ into our lives that we are enabled to do the works that God prepared beforehand (in antiquity) for us to do (including obedience to his law and more than that). Therefore, Jesus' depiction of the role of grace and law is evident in Matthew 5:21–48 in this study. The stringent demands expected of Jesus' disciples are to be understood against the background of the theme of grace and law.

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