

**Entrance into the Kingdom of God:
The Validity of Contemporary Judaism:
Jesus' View**

We continue our study today in of one of Jesus' best know messages. His notoriety had spread throughout the land through His itinerate ministry, an unheard-of array of stunning miracles, as well as synagogue readings and declarations ("...today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," he said having read Isaiah 61:1-2a in Nazareth). Jesus' forerunner, John, announced the advent of the Kingdom of God in the person of the "Lamb of God." Jesus declared, "The time is fulfilled the kingdom of God is at hand... (Mark 1:15)."

The dominant question by the people of His day was this: "How do I enter this kingdom you are declaring?" They knew it required righteousness, but where was it to be found. Are our religious leaders telling us truthfully the qualification for entrance into the kingdom you are presenting? Is your understanding of righteousness and theirs the same?

- I. The Setting, 5:1-2
- II. The Introduction, 5:3-16
 - A. The Description of those already in the Kingdom, 5:3-12
 - B. The manner of life of those already in the Kingdom, 5:14-16
- III. The Clarification and the Thesis, 5:17-20
 - A. The clarification: Law is not mankind's problem; it is erecting external meanings for fulfilling it when Jesus came, not to abolish, but to explain its meaning and function. Jesus is not opposed to the instruction of Moses. The Law was meant for us to understand that we are broken people and need someone to grant righteousness to us.
 - B. The thesis: Scribal and Pharisaic rituals are empty external substitutes resulting, not in righteousness, but failure to enter God's kingdom. It is not what we do; it is about the accomplishments of the King for us!
- IV. The Argument Sustaining the Thesis, 5:21-7:6
 - A. The Scribes and Pharisees wrongly interpret the Scriptures, 5:21-48
 - 1. The Law, Jesus, and murder, 5:21-26
Jesus makes the point that murder is deeper than the act of murdering; it is hatred of a person whether or not the ultimate dissolution happens.

This is basic biblical anthropology explaining dysfunctional behavior. Environmental stimulus may occasion ideas, yet the cause is not outward; it is inward, “the heart.” Murder is conceived in the heart and mind before action!!

2. The Law, Jesus, and adultery, 5:27-30

In the case of lust, it is adultery whether the perceived delight is precipitated.

3. The Law, Jesus, and divorce, 5:31-32

“And it is said... but I say” is connected to the issue of adultery. The point of the teaching is that divorce is wrong unless the cause is the breaking of the marriage covenant because of adultery. In the case of remarriage by the innocent party, the guilt emanating from the second marriage, the cause of the divorce, falls upon the guilty party. While divorce might happen in a world where promises are not kept, it is not God’s ideal at all. The right of remarriage was to protect the innocent and provide for the offended one.

4. The Law, Jesus, and deceptive speech, 5:33-37

The word “again” (v. 33) is hint interconnectedness of adultery and divorce, the latter being a digression. Jesus now resumes his direct attack on the Pharisee’s misuse of Scripture. These three are generally derived from the moral code of the Law, not a specific commandment.

a. The declaration, v. 33

Jesus begins with deceptive speech (perhaps an allusion to the ninth commandment concerning false testimony Exod. 20:16, more likely the allusion is to Deut. 23:21, 23; Lev. 19:12), oaths being uttered with no intent of keeping them. Deceptive oaths are a poor substitute for truth and integrity.

b. The manner of subterfuge, vv. 34-36

If the name of God was not involved in the oath, it was not considered binding. Jesus’ point is that whenever an oath is invoked, whether it be by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or one’s head, God is involved because he is the creator of all those things. Though the name of God may not be technically used, it is hair-splitting!

The prohibition against oaths cannot be universalized because God makes oaths in Scripture, not because he ever lies, but to strengthen surety for us (Heb. 6:17: ‘... he guaranteed it with an oath’) by invoking his divine character. I must repeat, it is important to note that swearing an oath is not a violation of

Scripture; the act is not wrong, but the motive may be. The proof of the point is that God invokes oaths to substantiate the veracity of his claims. 'By myself, I have sworn, declares the Lord....' (Gen. 22:16; quoted in Heb. 6:13).

c. The conclusion, v. 37

All our answers and pledges should be clear and completely reliable; there is to be no subterfuge in the use of double innuendos.

5. The Law, Jesus, and vengeance, 5:38-42

The law provided for the extension of justice to curb violation, but vengeance was prohibited (Lev. 19: 18, "eye for an eye" is about justice, not excessive retribution). The law was designed to limit retaliation. Law limits punishment to the size of the injustice, not beyond it.

The four principles make the point that vendettas for wrong are not permissible for a Jesus follower.

a. Do not respond to gross insults in kind, v. 39

There is hyperbole here as above in the recommendation that mutilation is the answer to lust (v. 30). The point is that we are not to seek vengeance. We should not always demand proper adjudication. We have the right to give up our rights!

b. Rights do not limit duty, v. 40

A coat was an inalienable possession by the Law (Exod. 22:25-26, Deut. 24:13), but that rule does not limit privilege. Again, there is hyperbole here; no Jew at this time would go home wearing only a loincloth!

c. Duty does not limit obligation, v. 41

While citizens were required to carry a Roman soldier's baggage for a mile, a rule should not limit the expression of obedience. Here is a case that we should submit to forced labor at times and go beyond the requirements stipulated by law.

d. Rendering of financial aid, v. 42

This does not mean we should impoverish ourselves because we give to everyone who requests. See Proverbs 11:17; 22:26. Jesus' point is that among his disciples' self-interest or legal limits should not be the rule!

6. The Law, Jesus, and discrimination, 5:43-47

a. The error, v. 43

Jesus quotes from Leviticus 19:18, perhaps in the way that the Jews of the day read it. They deleted 'your neighbor as yourself' and added 'hate your enemy', a phrase not in the text.

b. The antithesis, v. 44

He then correctly interprets the command: love is to be manifested universally, not merely for convenience, personal advantage, or limited to friends.

c. The purpose, v. 45a

Simply put, God's children have a greater goal than self-expression and triumph; it is to reveal the character of God.

d. The reasons, vv. 45b-47

1. God's benevolence is not discriminatory, v. 45b

2. Acting like the Pharisees and Gentiles brings no reward from heaven, vv. 46-47

The manifestation of kindness is a natural human response, a universal principle, even for the most despised in Jewish culture, among them being tax collectors for an oppressive government.

e. Conclusion: the demand for perfection, 5:48

This is the first time in the Bible that God is referred to as perfect, complete. Jesus appears to be saying that the intent of the law was to point to Himself, the end, the fullness. Believers should strive toward the law's intent.

'As' is comparative not an absolute; we are to strive to embrace the same meaning of the Law as God's intent for it, we who are children of the kingdom.

Thoughts:

1. We live in a culture where deception is rampant from the advertising industry to political offices. 'Truth is found in the fine print,' a saying goes, meaning that purposeful, misleading use of words abounds. For the Christian, the use of deceptive speech is forbidden. We are to speak the truth plainly to be clearly understood, no deceptive speech. Is that true of how you talk to your mate, to your children, in the workplace, at church? Do you keep your promises?
2. Those living in Christ's kingdom should not go around demanding their just rights all the time. In fact, being a Christian, receiving undeserved kindness from God, should lead us to be willing to give up our rights for the sake of others even when it is not justifiable. Our society is factitiously tribal with people demanding minority rights; we fill the courts seeking

adjudication for wrongs done to us. For the Christian, we do not have to act that way. With a kingdom perspective on life, we can give up our rights rather than demand them with retaliation.

3. We are to love our enemies, returning kindness for harshness, gentleness for hurt. Jesus will later say that the essence of the commandments can be summarized in the word love, love for God and love for others. Are there people that you simply do not love? Are there people that you do not love for justifiable reasons? Does that make an unloving spirit valid? Loving one another leads to freedom and joy, its absence leads to narrowness and bitterness.