

MATTHEW 5.21-48

WHAT THEY TOLD YOU IS WRONG

LIVING IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, 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. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly 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.”

MATTHEW 5.17-20

LOOKING FOR A LOOPHOLE

“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

ISAIAH 55.9

- ▶ Since the beginning of time, humans have searched for a loophole or a shortcut in God's rules. It began with the question to our first ancestors, “Did God really say ‘that’?” and the suggestion that there are acceptable alternative truths. Our humanness, and our pride, leads us to believe that there is an easier righteousness, a way that is more self-accommodating, self-affirming, and self-fulfilling.

- ▶ The righteousness of the teachers and Pharisees was arduous, complex, and demanding; it had hundreds of rules. It's big problem that prompted Jesus to say that it fell egregiously short was that it had loopholes—and in the kingdom of heaven there are no shortcuts to righteousness.

“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.”

MATTHEW 5.20

- ▶ The announcement, *“Repent! for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* was an indictment that the accepted way of living was unacceptable in the kingdom of heaven. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is declaring that the kingdom of heaven has a higher standard. If you want to get into the kingdom of heaven, these are the expectations and any alternative guarantees the eternal alternative.

“So whoever loosens up even one of the least of these commands, and so by this behavior, teaches others to do the same, will be called ‘Least’ in the kingdom of heaven.”

MATTHEW 5.19



Therefore Jesus says, be warned: if you live with Scripture in loose or noncommittal ways, you teach others to live that way too, and the consequence is that what you have done to Scripture here on earth is what will be done to you after this life: minimization.

This verse warns us, in short, against the temptation to dismiss Scripture, to relativize it arbitrarily, to get out from under its difficult texts cheaply, to evade obedience through [deceptive reason or argumentation]. This verse means take Scripture seriously and beware of every ‘loosening’ of a text’s simple meaning.”

F. D. BRUNER, *The Christbook*, p.170

- ▶ Scripture is the revelation of God's character and will. For Jesus, that revelation is the Law and the Prophets and he consistently honors that revelation. We do not have the prerogative to alter or amend Scripture to our accommodation. Jesus himself warns us against any teaching that sets Him (and those who claim to be his followers) in any way against the Old Testament.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, 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.

MATTHEW 5.17-18

YOU HAVE HEARD . . . BUT I'LL TELL YOU HOW IT REALLY IS

“You scratch out God’s Word and scrawl a whim in its place. You do a lot of things like this.”

MARK 7.13 MESSAGE BIBLE

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.”

- ▶ In the kingdom of heaven, any emotion, word, or action that does not reflect and achieve reconciliation, is no less than murder. Anger, resentment and grudges, and verbal belittling are worthy of hell.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

EPHESIANS 4.31-32

“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

- ▶ In the kingdom of heaven, cultural redefinitions of sexual expression and marriage relationships are unacceptable. Sexual purity and marriage inviolability are eternally defined.

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ . . . Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

“Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

MATTHEW 19.3-4, 6, 8-9

- Why is this so important and why did Jesus draw such distinct and emphatic boundaries—no dissolution, no alternatives? At stake is the knowledge of the image of God (Genesis 1.27; Matthew 19.4-6) and the testimony of Christ's sacrificial love (Ephesians 5.22-33).

*So God created mankind in His own image,
in the image of God He created them;
male and female He created them.*

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

GENESIS 1.27; 2.24

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

MATTHEW 19.4-6

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

- ▶ Human alternatives and exceptions are idolatry—and idolaters cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. *(Remember that Jesus emphasized that he came to uphold the revelation of the Law and that not one word would disappear before the final judgement.)*

Are we not all children of the same Father? Are we not all created by the same God? Then why do we betray each other, violating the covenant of our ancestors?

Didn't the Lord make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are His. And what does He want? Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth. "For I hate divorce!" says the Lord, the God of Israel. "To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife."

MALACHI 2.10, 15-16 NLT

For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

EPHESIANS 5.5

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

COLOSSIANS 3.5-6

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

MATTHEW 5.38-42

- ▶ In the kingdom of heaven, the expectation for disciples and the standard for responding to mistreatment and unfairness is much different—very un-humanlike! Peacemakers (5.7) are called to reject self-assertion, to respond with kindness and generosity, to not express a hint of vindictiveness, and most importantly, to follow the example of Jesus in really believing that God is a God of justice who will vindicate those who trust His character.

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

1 PETER 2.23; 3.9

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

MATTHEW 5.43-47

- ▶ In the kingdom of heaven, we are called to the unthinkable—called even beyond turning the other cheek; we are called to love our enemies. This, Jesus said, will be a test of paternal DNA, a mark of authenticity, a certification that we are true children of God.

Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us^a and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.

EPHESIANS 5.1-2

BE PERFECT, THEREFORE, AS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS PERFECT.

- ▶ Instead of our more preferable and accommodating human substitutions, Jesus demands perfection—that we live to the standard of the kingdom of heaven. But isn't Jesus demanding the impossible?
- ▶ Yes—which is the whole point. The kingdom of heaven is for those who surrender their lives wholly to God; to follow the example of Christ and live in such a counter-cultural and humanly antithetical manner that can only be accomplished by faith, surrender, and total dependency on the Holy Spirit.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.