

JESUS' AUTHORITY TO INTERPRET THE MOSAIC LAW

Matthew 5:1 – 8:1; Luke 6:17-49 / Yeshua §55

Since the beginning of His public ministry, (which began with His first cleansing of the Temple [John 2:13-25]), Jesus has been presenting Himself to Israel as her promised Messiah King. If Israel will receive Him, two things will happen. On an individual level, they will be born again as Jesus explained to Nicodemus (John 3:1-16). At the national level they will receive the promised Messianic Kingdom.

But persuading the Jews was difficult even though they were looking for the coming of the Messiah.

The process of persuasion was made difficult because Jesus didn't fit their messianic expectations.

He certainly didn't have the upbringing or training of a king.

The Pharisees, the religious leaders of Judaism, expected the Messiah to be one of them and to champion their cause. Instead, Jesus rejected their Oral Law and continually broke their Sabbath laws. Worst of all, Jesus claimed to be equal with God.

We would think Jesus' claim to be God would have presented the Pharisees the issue by which they could discredit Jesus rather easily. After all, no one was looking for a messiah who was a God-man! But such was not the case.

Why was it difficult for the Pharisees to shut Jesus down?

Because of the overwhelming evidence that authenticated Jesus' claims.

- The prophet, John the Baptizer, identified Jesus as the Messiah. His sworn statement can be found in John 1:29-34.
- God the Father declared Jesus to be His messianic Son at Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:9-11).
- Jesus taught the Scriptures with authority. Repeatedly, people were amazed because Jesus taught with authority and not like their rabbis.
- Jesus possessed authority over nature; He turned water to wine at the wedding feast of Cana (John 2:1-12).
- Jesus possessed authority over disease. Jesus healed "every (type) of disease and every (type) of affliction among the people" (Matt. 4:23-25).
- Jesus possessed authority over demons (Mark 1:21-28).
- Jesus possessed authority over defilement; He healed the man with leprosy (Luke 5:12-16). The pharisaic rabbis themselves taught that only the Messiah could heal a leper.
- Jesus possessed authority to forgive sin as demonstrated by healing the paralytic (Matt. 9:1-8). The authority to forgive sin is a divine prerogative.
- The Hebrew Scriptures bore witness to Jesus:
 - Jesus fulfilled the messianic prophecies pertaining to Messiah's first coming.
 - The pharisaic rabbis recognized from the Hebrew Scriptures that a second divine entity exists Who is called the *Angel of the Lord* and Whom they called the *Memra* which is an Aramaic

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term which means *Word*. Jesus' equality with God was a possibility according to rabbinic theology.

- Jesus is the Prophet about Whom Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 18.

Despite this overwhelming evidence the opposition of the scribes and Pharisees intensified. We are about a year and a half into Jesus' public ministry. At this point, though opposed to Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees have not yet delivered an official judgment regarding His claims.

Then Jesus preaches a sermon that breaks the camel's back.

This sermon irreversibly alienates the Pharisees and leads to their official rejection of Jesus' messianic claims.

Please turn to Matthew 5.

Many of us recognize this as the *Sermon on the Mount* (also found in Luke 6:17-49). Perhaps it's a surprise to hear that it is this sermon which led to Jesus' official rejection by the spiritual leaders of Israel. Some teach that the *Sermon on the Mount* is the constitution for the Messianic Kingdom. Others teach this sermon is the ethics for the church. Still others teach this sermon reveals the way of salvation.

None of these interpretations are correct.

The *Sermon on the Mount* is Jesus' interpretation of the true righteousness of the Law of Moses over against the Pharisees' interpretation.

Through this sermon, Jesus repudiated Pharisaism on two counts: He declared that the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees did not offer sufficient righteousness for entering the kingdom and that Pharisaism misinterpreted the righteousness of the Mosaic Law.

The key verse of the sermon is Matthew 5:20.

MATTHEW 5:20 (ESV)

20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Entering the kingdom of heaven is equivalent to *being saved*, to *having eternal life*. It's the way first century Judaism spoke of the afterlife for the righteous. The *kingdom of heaven* is the messianic kingdom Jesus is offering. The *kingdom of heaven* is not heaven; it is the literal, earth-based kingdom ruled by the Messiah that is promised in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Pharisaic Judaism, through its Oral Law, taught that all Jews (except the very worst) enter the kingdom of heaven. This teaching is called the *Merits of the Fathers*. Pharisaic theology taught that on the basis of God's election of the Fathers, i.e. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, all the descendants of Jacob (the Jews) are guaranteed a place in the Kingdom.

According to Pharisaic Judaism, the means of maintaining one's place and gaining honor in the messianic kingdom is by obeying the Mosaic Law as it was interpreted in the Oral Law with its thousands of additional commands. A righteous person, according to Pharisaism, was a person who outwardly conformed to the Mosaic Law through keeping the Oral Law. Under Pharisaism, a person was righteous in the eyes of God if they did not murder even though they harbored hatred in their heart.

Pharisaical righteousness was external conformity to God's Law.

The pharisees' view was that God cared most about the letter of the Law, less about the spirit of the Law. God cared more about outward behavior, less about inward character. God cared more about one's hands than one's heart.

Jesus rejected the *Merits of the Fathers* and the notion that all Jews will enter the messianic kingdom. As we see in Matthew 5:20, Jesus warns His Jewish listeners that unless their righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, they will not enter the messianic kingdom. Jesus taught Nicodemus that a person must undergo a spiritual rebirth in order to enter the messianic kingdom (John 3:1-16). How is a person spiritually reborn? By receiving/believing/trusting Jesus as the Messiah King.

Jesus also rejected the Pharisees' interpretation of righteousness as external conformity to the Mosaic Law. First, Jesus rejected the Oral Law. Second, Jesus accurately interpreted the Mosaic Law and the righteousness God seeks in His people. It is a righteousness of heart that expresses itself in a righteousness of hand.

Jesus used the sixth commandment prohibiting murder to illustrate the true righteousness of God.

MATTHEW 5:21-24 (ESV)

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

True righteousness is resolving anger in the heart so murder never comes to the hand.

Again, Jesus used the seventh commandment prohibiting adultery to illustrate the true righteousness of God.

MATTHEW 5:27-30 (ESV)

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

True righteousness is purity in the heart so adultery is never even considered.

In chapter six Jesus teaches true righteousness is serving God in humility. The Pharisees did their acts of service such as giving, praying and fasting to be seen and praised by people. Jesus admonished His listeners that the righteous life is lived in humble service toward God Who rewards.

MATTHEW 6:1 (ESV)

¹ "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus invites His audience to reject Pharisaism, follow Him, and return to the true righteousness of the Mosaic Law; a righteousness first of the heart and then the hands. But in His invitation, Jesus makes a very interesting observation about Pharisaism.

MATTHEW 7:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

The narrow gate is Jesus. The hard way is the true righteousness of the Mosaic Law. The wide gate and easy way are Pharisaism. That may sound strange, but in context, this is what Jesus is addressing.

The narrow gate is Jesus, because it is only through faith in Him that a person will enter the kingdom of heaven. The hard way is the true righteousness of the Mosaic Law that calls a person to both internal and external righteousness. Which is easier – to not murder or to keep one's heart free from anger?

We need to remember that at the time Jesus preached this sermon, the Mosaic Law was still in effect. Jesus is calling the Jews out of the Oral Law back to the Mosaic Law. Jesus is calling them out of Pharisaical righteousness to true righteousness of heart and hand.

In so doing, Jesus restored the correct interpretation of the righteousness of the Mosaic Law, but irreversibly alienated the scribes and pharisees resulting in His official rejection.

Jesus' death rendered the Mosaic Law inoperative. We do not live under the Mosaic Law. We live under the Law of Messiah contained in the New Testament. Some commands contained in the Mosaic Law are contained in the Messiah's Law but most are not.

Though we are not under the Law of Moses, we are under the definition of true righteousness. God is most concerned about the condition of our hearts; our behavior is a reflection of our character. Salvation is a lifetime work of God that begins with the forgiveness of our sins and continues with the transformation of our character. God delivers us from the penalty of sin so that He can transform us into the character of Jesus. The primary way we partner with God in this process is by reading and meditating upon God's Word. Jesus said we will know the truth and the truth will set us free. The Holy Spirit helps us understand the Word and how it applies to our lives.

God wants first and foremost to change our character because He knows that when our beliefs, values and attitudes are aligned with Him, our behavior follows.

This week the staff was reading from Dr. Dallas Willard's book *Renovation of the Heart* where he addresses this process of internal transformation:

A major service of spiritual disciplines – such as solitude (being alone with God for long periods of time), fasting (learning freedom from food and how God directly nourishes us), worship (adoration of God), and service (doing good for others with no thought of ourselves) – is to cause the duplicity and malice that is buried in our will and character to surface and be dealt with. Those disciplines make room for the Word and the Spirit to work in us, and they permit destructive feelings – feelings that are usually veiled by standard practices and circumstance and by long accepted rationalizations – to be perceived and dealt with for what they are: our will and not God's will.

May we all be pursuing the true righteousness of the heart God desires.