

CHRIST'S RELATION TO THE O.T. LAW

Intro: In the beginning of this series I emphasized the fact that the Sermon on the mount is really a sermon with an introduction, a body, and invitation. In the introduction to Jesus' sermon He invites his audience to consider why they need to be righteous. 1. Because living a righteous life brings divine blessings! 2. Because living a righteous life impacts the world for good! I.e. the victory and vitality of kingdom living!

The main body of the sermon explores the features of that righteous life by way of contrast. That's what makes the paragraph we are about to study so important. It is the pivotal paragraph of the sermon and introduces the main subject of this sermon. If we miss the point of these verses we are likely to misunderstand the whole sermon. Each point that Jesus makes in this paragraph prepares the way for the authoritative message that He gives in the remainder of this sermon. Read paragraph.

What is the message of that paragraph?

IMPORTANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

When the story of the N.T. begins, it is clear that many changes have taken place in Palestine since the prophet Malachi spoke the last written words from God to his people. One of the obvious changes is the presence of religious sects. The political environment of Israel was dominated by the Sadducees, an aristocratic group who controlled the temple and who represented Israel to the Roman authorities. The religious environment was dominated by a group of super-pious men called Pharisees. These, along with the scribes (who copied the Law) were Israel's holy men. These were the epitome of righteous. They were the "teachers" of Israel; their conduct supposedly modeled the requirements of God. To be a Pharisee was to be righteous, so it was thought; and to be like a Pharisee was to be righteous. As interpreters of the Law they had so distorted the truths of God as to nullify the principles upon which righteousness is founded. Later we will see how they did that.

But now keep in mind that as Jesus begins to show the error of the Pharisees he may in the minds of some people appear to be showing disregard for the Law itself. They needed to carefully distinguish between the true righteous that the Law pointed to and the rabbinical misinterpretations of the Law that undermine that righteousness. So then, Jesus begins with a word of clarification about His relationship to the Law.

CHRIST'S RELATION TO THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS

I have not come to destroy but to fulfill.

By the Law and the Prophets Jesus means the entire written O.T.

Jesus did not come to undermine the work of God of 14 centuries. But rather He came to fulfill the words of the Law and the Prophets and prove them to be true to the last detail.

"I have come to fulfill". The Law had a prophetic character!

Direct predictions of the Messiah--Mic. 5:2; Deut. 18:18; Is. 9:6

Types and shadows of the Messiah--sacrifices, passover, etc. all point to the Lamb that God would provide.

Jesus professes to fulfill these predictions thus proving himself to be the Messiah. Jn. 5:39; Lk. 24:44

Jesus does not mean to say then that the Law with all its ceremonies would continue to be binding. Some groups teach that Jesus came to "fill full" the Law, that is, add His own teaching to it. That misses the point entirely! But, what is the point?

Ill. with acorn. There are two ways to destroy an acorn. Smash it with a hammer. Plant it in the ground! So it is with the Law.

Jesus did not come to smash it in the ground but to allow it to fulfill its purpose! Gal. 3:23-24 Rom. 10:4

What this means in practical terms is this:

Jesus had the highest respect for the revealed will of God. Amen--truly, truly. Not one jot or tittle shall pass away. Explain the Hebrew "yod" and "keraia". Therefore, Jesus urged everyone to obey its precepts who lived under it! Gal. 4:4

The Law of Moses, being prophetic in character, was also provisional. It served its purpose until Christ came. It was design to lead men to Christ. Its types and shadows give way to the realities of the gospel age. Its moral principles find continuity in in N.T. law. Sao in that sense none of the law was destroyed! But all was fulfilled.

By fulfilling the Law Jesus established himself to be the Messiah, or God coming in flesh and therefore, his will must be respected on every issue. This is the reason why Jesus can say in this sermon, "I say unto you!" By fulfilling the law he established himself as the Christ! He, and He alone, has the right to say "I say unto you!"

MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST'S WORDS

Because He is the Christ, we cannot set aside any command that Christ might give. His role as Christ demands that we give him total obedience!

To teach or practice anything other than the Lord's words is to nullify his role as King over his Kingdom!

Jesus would come back to that point later. Mt. 7:21-22

It is true that not all commands have the same weight. That is true of the Law and it is true of the gospel! Cf. Mt. 23:23

But to set aside the less important truths of the gospel has a corresponding loss. The point that Jesus is making is that all of the words of Jesus are important. Ironically, people cry on that point "Pharisee!" when one insists

on obedience to minute details of law. That's not Phariseism! That's discipleship! For that very reason, because people tended to set aside the principles of God's law, the next statement becomes necessary!

OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS MUST EXCEED THAT OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES TO ENTER THE KINGDOM!

How that must have shocked the Pharisees in the audience! And the other listeners as well. You mean, we've not only got to be as good as Pharisees? We have to be better?!? Exactly!

In the verses that follow Jesus will in the body of this sermon show the different between true righteousness required by God and the pseudo-righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. He will show that the standard of true morality is not any man, but God himself! v. 48

Some important practical observations:

True righteousness never obeys the letter of law while ignoring its spirit.

True righteousness never seeks personal glory to divine glory.

True righteousness never focuses on this world but the one to come.

True righteousness never focuses on others first, but rather focuses on one's own performance first.

Conclusion: If I am correct in explaining passages, Jesus is giving then laying the foundation for the rest of his sermon. In a word he is saying. I will prove by my life that I am the Christ. In doing so, I will establish the truth of the Law and my right to command men to obey me. Those who get to heaven will have to do more than be righteous skin deep! We will have to give our hearts to God. We will have to do more than compare ourselves with pious men we know. God is the standard.

Even as I say these words, we may feel shamed by them. For the demands of God's law should make us aware of how "poor in spirit" we really are; and much we need the atoning power of Jesus blood and the sanctifying power of Jesus' spirit. If you tonight recognize that, come to Jesus!