

REJECTION OF TRADITION
Oaths, Retaliation & Love for Others
Matthew 5:33-48

Jesus is being followed by crowds who want to know if He's Messiah and **what God requires of them.**

HIS PROCLAMATION 5-7

Description of people with true religion 5:1-16

Their godly character 1-12

True religion isn't about following ritual or putting on a show

True religion is about internal godly character

Their permeating influence 13-16

True religion produces a permeating influence for God in pagan culture—living counter-culturally in the darkness

Relation with the religious 5:17-7:6

Jesus and the law 5:17-20

Fulfillment, not replacement 5:17-19

Jesus is NOT presenting a competing system to replace OT law

His message *fulfills* Law & Prophets

He has come to fulfill what God promised to His people.

He's their King; came to establish kingdom on earth.

He isn't out to destroy what God established.

Therefore it's important to teach the whole truth God has spoken. ***Don't tamper with it.***

That's the game Pharisees are playing.

They're *tampering* with what God said

That's central issue in his conflict with them!

People who *hear* law realize we'll never be able to fulfill what God requires.

Pharisees made their own code:

365 prohibitions; 248 commands.

Their legalism *relaxes* God's demands –focuses on *externals*.

To be acceptable to God requires more than that!

Greater righteousness required 5:20

To enter kingdom requires greater righteousness than their tradition

God requires a different *heart* attitude.

²⁰ *...unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees & the teachers of the law, you'll certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Rejection of their tradition 5:21-48

Jesus points to 6 areas where their traditions weaken what God desires from His people.

These 6 show **their rules don't fulfill God's expectations.**

The problem is a HEART problem!

He doesn't propose a *different* legalistic set of rituals.

True religion is about the **HEART! NOT legalistic ritual!**

Concerning murder 21-26

They're clinging literally to the letter: "*Thou shalt not kill!*"

They make a big deal of that, they can "check that box," while missing the spirit. Pharisaic, legalistic interpretation of law of murder won't establish righteousness.

True religion requires genuine love for others.

"Love your neighbor as yourself!"

[2nd issue that demonstrates true religion:]

Concerning Adultery 5:27-30

They focus on what law says—strictly, legalistically.

It's not about legalistic approach to law.

True religion deals with **our heart!**

So what's the heart issue God wants His people to deal with?

It's God's purpose to preserve a holy marriage.

Marriage is to satisfy our physical and emotional needs –we give ourselves!

God's plan: 1 man & 1 woman joined together—glued to one another—totally committed to each other—as 1 flesh.

That unity is God's plan for marriage.

The intent of law: protect that unity.

To refrain from *physical* act doesn't fulfill *spiritual* purpose of law.

Purpose: to protect unity of a man & woman in marriage.

Our hearts are committed to each other –Not just our bodies!

Christ warns us to remove the cause of the offense

That's not about the physical parts

Fixing problem involves **transformed heart**

Only God can produce that!

True religion produces new heart—total commitment to spouse!

Concerning Divorce 5:31-32 "*It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'*" ³² **But I tell you** *that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, & anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery."*

Background:

Responds to attitude of Pharisees

Matt. 19:3-12

Tone of their question:

"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

=> What kind of excuse is good enough?

Focus of Jesus' response:

God's plan for marriage

Jesus changes the focus.

It's not about divorce;

it's about God's plan for marriage!

By focusing on divorce, they trample on God's original plan.

In marriage a man & a woman are joined together—become one!

It's not about looking for an excuse to be free!

⁷"Why then," they asked, "did Moses **command** that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce & send her away?" [= > Deut 24] ⁸Jesus replied, "Moses **permitted** you to divorce your wives because **your hearts were hard**. But it wasn't this way from the beginning.

Deut. 24:1-4 "If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent [some defect] about her, & he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her & sends her from his house..."

God's people weren't to be like "macho" pagan men around them who had the final word to treat their wife however they wished.

Who could just get rid of their wife anytime they weren't happy, for any reason, and who could bring them back at will.

God's people weren't to live that way!

So God gave them rules—because of their heart problem!— they were to be different than the pagans around them.

[² & if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, ³ & her 2nd husband dislikes her & writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her & sends her from his house, or if he dies, ⁴ then her 1st husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.]

=> **Matt 5:31-32** "**It has been said**, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'³² **But I tell you** that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, & anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery."

They want to use the divorce certificate as a way out!

How good an excuse is good enough?!!

Legalistic approach: "Can I check the box, while getting a divorce?"

God's plan is total commitment—for life!

God still hates divorce.

Those who want to do God's will realize God *never* votes FOR divorce

They are trampling on God's plan,
using law as an excuse!

They have a heart problem!

Correction of perspective isn't intended to send people who've been divorced on a guilt trip!

It's intended to refocus legalistic religious people on God's purpose for marriage.

Legalistic religion will never be good enough!

True religion produces marriages that reflect God's purpose!

—NOT to seek an excuse to get out!

Divorce destroys God's plan for our lives.

That's the heart issue involved!!

One discussion question:

What are the implications of this instruction for US?

What difference should our Lord's words make in OUR lives?

How can we live counter-culturally—against the flow of our culture?

Concerning Oaths 5:33-37 *"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' ³⁴But I tell you, do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; ³⁵or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶& do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' & your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."*

What's cultural issue surrounding us that Jesus points to?

Cynicism concerning honesty in high places runs rampant in our times.

Stock scams, property scams, phone scams.

Politicians perjure themselves, swear to tell truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth.

Everybody's skeptical about anybody's claim to tell the truth!

Perjury under oath is epidemic, marriage vows are broken almost as often as made;

God's name is invoked by blatant liars witnessing to their truthfulness.

James gets it! In hard times,

it's hard to tell the truth,

esp. if telling truth will result in greater suffering.

Nobody likes to suffer.

So we tell lies to avoid pain.

It's easier to join Peter's denial of our Lord,

Matt 26:72 Peter denies that he knew Him *with an oath!*

["I swear by heaven {?} (or by GOD!), I DON'T know the man!

Cross my heart! Hope to die!"]

James' exhortation:

Exhortation against oaths 5:12

"Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your 'yes' be yes and your 'no,' no, or you will be condemned." He heard Jesus' words!

"Above all"—literally expression means—before everything else!

Hard to imagine this is most important thing to tell us!

In any case, whether marked in red, or a conclusion (= "finally"),

James thinks this is important!

Wiersbe: "Exhortation seems out of place; what does speaking oaths have to do with suffering? If you've ever suffered, you know the answer: it is easy to say things you don't mean—even bargain with God—when going through difficulties."

That's what people do in foxholes when under fire by the enemy.

That's what Peter did when he denied the Lord.

Christians do it, when it can get us out of hard times.

James says:

STOP SWEARING BY ANYTHING!

Don't swear by heaven.

Don't swear by earth

Don't make any other oath.

Instead, **GIVE STRAIGHT "YES" OR "NO" ANSWERS.**

Let your "yes" mean YES.

Let your "no" mean NO.

So you won't be judged (for bearing false witness--for *perjury*)

=> Matt. 5:33-37

My confession re. "swearing".

That's not point of these verses!

I'm still pressed by repeated statement to **stop it**. "Don't take an oath!"

Exhortation not to swear by anything is primarily a call to ...

ESTABLISH A REPUTATION FOR HONESTY.

Dishonest pagan society uses oath to guarantee their word.

In *Christian society*, in *church*, we shouldn't need a guarantee!

Jewish philosophers rejected oaths:

"Don't guarantee your word with anything material because you can't guarantee what will happen tomorrow." Nothing is sure.

Philo said: "You ought to avoid oaths;

if you have to make one, be sure you carry it out carefully."

1st choice: not to swear at all.

2nd: if you have to do it, be sure you do what you say.

Worst: lie.

His ideal is person who never needs oath;

everybody knows his word is good.

His word *IS* *mighty* oath.

"I GAVE THEM MY WORD!"

Philo's attitude: same mouth shouldn't speak God's Name & lie

Meaning of oath comes from its name.

"Swear" means literally "to grab hold of something firmly"

When we make oath, we grab hold of something as a guarantee.

God can do that; He's most sure in universe Heb. 6:13-18

He holds everything in His hands.

We can't do that.

Nothing we can grab hold of that firmly.

Not even our own life

(as in "cross my heart, hope to die.")

We don't control tomorrow!

Best counsel: give simple yes or no answer, then DO it! People will learn we mean what we say.

Oaths to tell truth give testimony to people's dishonesty.

Essenes: "If a man requires an oath to make him tell the truth, he's already branded as untrustworthy."

Fact that courts find it necessary to place a witness under oath is a confession that people are congenital liars!

Oath-taking is necessary because people are liars!

Establish reputation for always telling the truth so people trust you.

Christians shouldn't need an oath to guarantee our word!

We should be known for telling the truth.

An oath "on a stack of Bibles" means nothing to a liar.

He can just as easily say, "Cross my heart, hope to die!"

He doesn't believe it will happen anyway!

If we establish reputation for always telling truth, the oath is meaning-less.

We don't need it!

If we establish reputation for always giving clear, honest answer, that inspires confidence.

People count on us.

"Forget the oath. Just tell the truth!" **"JUST DO IT!"**

Before everything else, we should be known as people who keep our word, whether anyone else does or not!

My concern: in days when we *aren't* suffering for our faith, . . .

when there's nothing at stake,

... we don't always tell the truth!

We make threats, but don't carry them out.

Lesson at Junior camp:

"Speak softly & carry a big stick!"

We tell people we'll do something but don't do it.

"I'll do such and such!"

"I'll be there at such and such a time!"

"Yeah, sure!"

"No really! I swear! Cross my heart!"

J. Vernon McGee: "I remember one time my dad went to bank to borrow money for a cotton gin. Banker was busy and told my dad to just take the money. My dad said, "But I haven't signed the note." I'll never forget what the banker responded: "If you say you'll repay it, that's as good as a note. Come in later & sign."

That's what our word should be like!

When's the last time you heard someone say: "Mrs. _____ told me!"

So everyone knew it was true?

If we tell our kids “tomorrow we’ll do something” Do they believe us?

If we tell them: head for car; we’re leaving now

Do they know that means it’s time?

Or, have our own children become skeptical of our promises?

Parents at store: Just be good for 5 more minutes, then we’ll...!”

"Do you promise, mommy?"

"Cross your heart, hope to die?"

Have we established a reputation for truth-telling?

Forget about the oaths--we don’t need them!

Do I tell people the truth?

Do people know that if I tell them something, I’ll keep my word?

Acc. to dictionary, promise is an agreement to do something, or not to do something.

Acc. to the Bible, a promise is to be kept.

God keeps His promises & expects us to.

Jesus says we don’t have to swear to keep our word, **“JUST DO IT!”**

“Yes” should be good as a promise, or a sworn statement.

Let your yes be yes. Let your no be no.

Forget the fancy oaths.

Nobody expects people to keep their word anymore.

We don’t expect it from our politicians.

We don’t expect it at the office.

We don’t expect it from kids at school—even from the teachers!

We don’t expect it from our husband or wife.

Frankly, our kids don’t expect it from their parents!

It’s time for God’s people to be counter-cultural/different!

Don’t take a fancy oath!

Just **say what you mean, and mean what you say!**

JUST DO IT!!!

How should our Lord’s words affect OUR lives?

How can we live counter-culturally—against flow of culture?

CONCERNING RETALIATION 38-42 *“You’ve heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, & tooth for tooth.’ ³⁹But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the rt. cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰& if someone wants to sue you & take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹If someone forces you to go 1 mi., go with him 2 mi. ⁴²Give to the one who asks you, & do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”*

What’s their principle?

How can we “✓ the □”?

Lev. 24:17-20

“Whoever takes a human life shall surely be put to death. ¹⁸Whoever takes an animal’s life shall make it good, life for life. ¹⁹If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to

him, ²⁰fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him.

Criminals, people who hurt or cheat others, must repay in conformity with harm done to another.

"If you hurt me, I have legal right to strike back in kind!"

Tradition protects *MY RIGHTS!*

"I'll sue you for damages!"

But punishment/repayment must be limited to harm done.

Law's intent: control excess; set limits on retaliation.

God's people shouldn't avenge wrongs done, excessively.

What's heart attitude God wants *His* people to live by?

Offended people never *required* to strike back in own defense!

To demand our rights is not manifestation of God's nature.

Jesus urges: give up rights;

seek good of people who harm us!

Rather than seek retaliation/vengeance, respond in love to people who seek to harm us

"Turn the other cheek"

–what's that mean?

Give generously—*more* than we're asked for.

Roman soldier could only require people to carry his things 1 mi. God's people shouldn't respond with bare minimum.

We go above & beyond required minimum.

So what will that look like today?

CONCERNING LOVE FOR OTHERS 43-48 *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor & hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴But I tell you, love your enemies & pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil & the good, & sends rain on the righteous & the unrighteous. ⁴⁶If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷& if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

What's their principle?

How should we "✓ the □"?

Show love for neighbor.

"Love your neighbor as yourself."

But, don't have to love people who try to hurt us!

It's OK to avoid or repay people who hate us.

What's the heart attitude God wants us to live by?

God loves people who don't deserve it.

WE should love people who don't deserve it.

God sends blessing on sinful people.

WE should bless people who seek to hurt us.

We should pray for their welfare.

Even tax collectors & pagans are nice to people who are nice to them!

What's special merit in that?

Both traditions:

True religion => doesn't seek revenge;

=> respond generously, in love, to people who *don't* deserve it!

Hard question: What if our spouse is our enemy? How do we apply principle to an ornery spouse?

=> How then should we respond to spouse who isn't our ENEMY, but who IS hard to live with?

OTHERS?

God's standard isn't met by external conformity;

like character of God,

He's concerned with our heart attitude.

We should model God's character.

We should be like Him!

DISCUSSION: How should Lord's words affect OUR lives?

Consider each of these 4 traditions. How should Jesus' re-interpretation of God's priorities affect our lives this week?

How should WE apply words this week? What will change?

How can we live counter-culturally—against flow of culture?