

Follow Jesus – Authentic Righteousness/Worship!

2/4/18 - Pastor Randy

Matt. 5:38-48

"You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'³⁹ But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also.⁴⁰ If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too.⁴¹ If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles.⁴² Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow.

⁴³ "You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy.⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.⁴⁶ If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much.⁴⁷ If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that.⁴⁸ But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

As we have seen Jesus do in five previous statements, he introduces a new principle of His kingdom ethics, a principle of authentic righteousness, with the phrase "You have heard it was said...But I say to you". In this instance Jesus referenced the common law of retribution. The Mosaic law and other ANE (Ancient Near Eastern) law codes used the phrase an "eye for and eye" to communicate that justice required that an offender suffer a penalty commensurate with his offense. The issue at hand is one of a person's right to justice. This principle of justice placed a limitation on the punishment, and in doing so was intended to prevent the never ending cycle of retaliation that is part of sinful human nature. A few years ago I did a funeral for an 18-year old murder victim who just graduated from high school. He had beaten another kid up at a party and the other kid returned with a gun and shot him. The act of retaliation was motivated more by the injury to his sense of honor than as the result of his physical injury.

Jesus begins His, "But I say to you" response by first calling on His followers to forgo their right to seek retribution. He then followed that up with four examples that highlight how Jesus expects His followers to respond to those who pose a threat to them by taking from us; whether what they have taken

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is our honor, time, or possessions.

First Jesus addressed how to respond to being slapped. This backhanded slap was an assault on a persons' honor, not their body. In no way was Jesus prescribing a posture that invites others to physically abuse you, or instruction to forgo protecting ourselves from abuse. To use Jesus words here to suggest that a person must stay in an abusive relationship is to tragically misrepresent these words.

To turn the other cheek is to communicate that you are free from the need for human honor and free from the sting of human shame. Jesus followers, Kingdom people, are not easily insulted; they don't have fragile egos because they are secure in God's love for them and the place of honor they occupy as His sons and daughters.

The next example Jesus uses is the case where someone has been sued for their shirt (inner garment). Jesus said, Give them your coat (outer garment) too. These instructions if followed literally would have left a person naked, an absurd notion and an extreme indignity that makes it obvious that Jesus is employing hyperbole for rhetorical effect. He is saying, "If someone sues you for your shirt tell them, "You really want my shirt? Ok, go ahead and here is my coat well you are at it." He describes an extreme response which reflects the attitude of a person who, being free from an attachment to things, refuses to get pulled into a cycle of retaliation reflected in the attitude of, "If you are going to sue me, I'll sue you right back."

In Jesus day, the Jews lived under the often oppressive rule of the Romans. Roman soldiers could compel some act of labor from a Jewish man and they were prone to take advantage of this authority. Jesus charge to go the second mile is a call to respond to an unfair demand by someone in authority by doing even more for them than they ask of you. An application of this principle would be for an employee who is assigned an unfair workload decides to do the assigned work with excellence and then to offer to help with a task that they weren't even obligated to perform.

Finally Jesus says, "Give to the beggar and lend to the borrower, no questions asked, no strings attached." Jesus point here is that His followers are not

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overly cautious in their giving, worried that they might be giving more than the person deserves; worried that what they lend might not get paid back.

I have three siblings but two of them are six years and 10 years younger than me respectively. So most of my sibling interaction growing up was with my older brother who is about 15 months my senior. Whenever there were chores to do we frequently bickered over who did more work, accusing each other of not doing his fair share! We devised a Solomon-like plan when it came to divvying up the leftover dessert. The person who cut the pie into two pieces had to let the other one pick which piece he wanted.

Jesus purpose was not to provide answers to the controversial questions that arose in debates about how to apply principles of justice to the judicial and ethical dilemmas of the day. Jesus words do not disallow or discourage people from working towards a more just society. Jesus himself spoke out against injustice and those who oppressed others. His point was to communicate that His followers, His Kingdom people, will not be obsessed with making sure that they get their fair share and everyone else gets their just due. They are not obsessed with making sure that the scales of justice are never out of balance in a manner that is not in their favor.

Jesus words are intended to create an alternative culture to the culture of retribution, retaliation, and vengeance. He is calling his followers to go beyond the obligations of justice and to be extravagant and prodigious with their mercy, grace, and generosity. Be willing to trade in your right to demand justice in the face of evil committed against you for the opportunity to extend mercy, grace, and generosity. Their obsession is with loving God and loving others.

Jesus summed up all that he said in verses 38-42 with his call to go beyond the typical limitations placed on the command to love one's neighbor. Most Jews understood "love your neighbor" as only requiring them to love their fellow countrymen – other Jews. The Mosaic law never commanded anyone to hate their neighbor, but this was taught by a certain sect within Judaism called the Essenes. Jesus words call His followers to follow Jesus example. Jesus loved mankind. Jesus came to earth as an expression of God's love for

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those who had positioned themselves as His enemies:

There is no greater expression of someone extending mercy in the face of injustice at the hand of his enemies than Jesus cry on the cross: *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

How can we call ourselves Jesus' followers if we only love those who love us? The kind of righteousness that only loves those who love us belongs to the world of fallen, corrupt mankind. The kind that loves those who have not loved us is the kind that belongs to the character of God.

Authentic Worship

Chapter six opens with a new but related theme. Jesus is still distinguishing the "righteousness" of the Pharisees from an authentic expression of righteousness, but here he addresses issues related to worship; giving and prayer and fasting. In this section of Jesus sermon, He began to use some harsher words in his critique of the religious leaders; referring to them three times as hypocrites. The word hypocrite derives from the context of the theatre. The hypocrite is an actor or an actress; a person who plays a role; who pretends to be someone they are not.

"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.

"Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their

faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

1. When Giving isn't Giving

We have a rather comical picture here of people seeking to draw attention to themselves as they bring their offering to the synagogue with the sound of trumpets. We have contemporary English idioms such as tooting your own horn, singing your own praises, or trumpeting your own achievements that make make the same point. We can't be sure if Jesus was describing people who literally sounded trumpets or whether he was employing it as a figure of speech, but the idea of someone literally staging their presentation of their offering with trumpets sounding is just incredible. Who does that!?!?!?

Few people are so pompous as to do something like that but how many of us would have to admit that we have at some time or another made it a point to make our generosity known to others. Almost everyone struggles at least a little with the temptation to want to be applauded and recognized for our good deeds. The danger is that the pleasure of being recognized and rewarded for our giving can easily influence our motivation. Jesus message is that if we give for the reward of personal praise from men, then that is the reward we will get. Don't expect God to bless you, you took care of that.

The key phrase is, *"that they may be praised"*. When giving is practiced for self-serving reasons, to gain fame or fortune, praise or payback, your giving was not really giving. If your giving is a means of getting, then your motivation was not to love for God and neighbor, but for self.

Do you give to bless or give to get? Authentic righteousness and authentic worship gives motivated by love for God and the people, not self.

2. When Praying and Fasting Isn't

Jesus' concern in vs. 5 & 6 is with prayers that were prayed to gain human attention, not divine attention. Their words were addressed to God but expressed for the ears of people.

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You body might be in the posture of prayer. Your lips might be sounding out prayers. But if your mind is focused on gaining man's attention and if your goal is gaining people's approval and adulation, then you are not engaged in worshipping God. You are worshipping. You are just not worshipping God. You are worshipping yourself. The key phrases here are, "*that they may be seen by others*" and "*that their fasting may be seen by others*". Jesus calls them hypocrites because they were actors, playing the part of a person who wants to be close with God. They were essentially using God as a means to gain the esteem of men.

We don't have the problem of Christians seeking public places to pray in order to impress people, but I have been in conversations where pastors or other Christians have made a point to let others know how much time they spend in prayer. Prayer becomes a tool to elevate ones' social status.

Jesus point is simply this: When your giving, fasting and praying is done for the express purpose of gaining attention and adulation from men, then your giving is not giving and your praying and fasting is not praying and fasting.

For four grueling years, Michelangelo painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The work of painting the frescos which depicted 400 hundred figures and nine scenes from the book of Genesis damaged his eyesight. His exquisite masterpiece is considered one of the greatest artistic accomplishments of all time and it had a profound impact on other artists. When asked why he was working so hard on a dark corner of the chapel that no one would ever see, Michelangelo replied, "God will see."

The heart of authentic worship is an attitude that life is to be lived before an audience of one, the One who loved us and gave His life for us.

Additional Notes: Authentic Righteousness vs. Keeping the Law

*"...unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!
- Matt. 5:20*

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Matt. 5:20 sets up all that Jesus taught throughout the remainder of His sermon on the mount. His teaching is meant to contrast the pseudo-righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees (hypocrites) with a picture of the authentic righteousness Jesus expects His followers to exhibit.

It bears repeating that what Jesus meant by a righteousness that “is better than” or “surpasses” that of the religious leaders is what I have been referring to as “authentic righteousness”; righteous conduct that flows from righteous affections and attitudes. This righteousness is what is produced in the hearts of those who have been made new by the Holy Spirit through the redemption provided by Jesus at the cross. It is what the prophets predicted when they spoke of the day when God would establish a new covenant where the Spirit would write God’s law on our hearts. That is another way of saying God would give us His Holy Spirit Who would provide us with an understanding of what it means to live righteously and a desire to live righteously.

We must distinguish law-keeping from righteousness. They are not one and the same. Keeping the law can be an expression of righteousness but it is not necessarily. That was certainly the case among many of the religious leaders of Jesus day. Jesus criticized them frequently for being more concerned with rigid adherence to the law than they were with fulfilling the heart and intent of the law. Jesus also criticized them for creating their own laws and traditions that they considered to proper interpretations and applications of the law. Jesus described their traditions as distortions of the law. (Mark 7:5-13; Matt. 23:13-36).

This issue that Jesus was addressing is captured beautifully in Jesus rebuke found in Matt. 23:27-28.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” – Matt. 23:27-28

When Jesus called his disciples to a better righteousness he wasn’t calling them to step up their performance; he wasn’t warning them to be more

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religiously observant. He was calling them to a life of authentic hunger and thirst for righteousness in contrast to an appearance of righteousness which Jesus identifies as no righteousness at all.

This is important because some people make the mistake of equating the truth that those who are under the new covenant are no longer under the Mosaic law as indicating that they are therefore no longer under any demands to live righteously. That is completely absurd in light of all the commands of Jesus and the apostles in the NT to turn away from sin and pursue righteousness. The difference is that for the person who has placed his/her faith in Christ and has become united with Him, the motivation and ability to live righteously – in their attitudes, affections, and actions - comes from the Holy Spirit, not from the Mosaic law.

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