

Sermons on Matthew
Commandments and Traditions
(Part 2)
Matthew 14:34-15:9

With Study Questions

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When they had crossed over, they came __ to the land of Gennesaret. ⁻³⁵⁻ And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent out into all that surrounding region, brought to Him all who were sick, ⁻³⁶⁻ and begged Him that they might only __ touch the hem of His garment. And __ as many as touched *it* were made perfectly well.

^{15:1} Then __ the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, ⁻²⁻ __ “ _Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread. _”

⁻³⁻ He answered and said to them, “ _Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? ⁻⁴⁻ For God commanded, saying, __ ‘ _Honor your father and your mother_ ’; and, __ ‘ _He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death._ ’ ⁻⁵⁻ But you say, ‘ _Whoever says to his father or mother, __ “ _Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God_ ”— ⁻⁶⁻ then he need not honor his father __ or mother._ ’ Thus you have made the __ commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. ⁻⁷⁻

__ Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

⁸ [] These __ people _draw near to Me with their mouth,

[] And honor Me with their lips,

[] But their heart is far from Me.

⁹ [] And in vain they worship Me,

[] Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men _.’ _”

(Matthew 14:34-15:9)

Review

Healing

We previously discussed Jesus’ public healing ministry and how those who truly care about others make the effort to bring people to Jesus,

who is capable of redeeming the souls of men and of making them perfectly well (Matthew 14:34-36). It is important to understand that Jesus' healing power over the body merely served as a tutorial of His healing power of men's souls (Matthew 8:17; Isaiah 53).

Violating traditions

Then we read of the Pharisees (the contemporary clergy) coming to Jesus, spoiling for a fight. They accuse Jesus of being a poor master; his followers don't follow the tradition of the elders. Jesus responds to this by pointing out that this particular so-called sin is not a sin at all. Eating bread without washing hands only sounded like the law of God. The most dangerous laws are the ones that sound biblical!

But more importantly, laws being biblical weren't a necessity for these Pharisees. The commandments of God aren't even brought into their accusation: **"Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?"** is the accusation. As if the elders—the church—were the last say regarding that which is sin. We must always ask ourselves if what we believe comes from the mind of men or the mind of God—the Scriptures.

The Pharisees had developed a form of piety which gave them license to utterly disregard the Fifth Commandment (honor mother and father); Mark records it as "korban" (Mark 7:11). It worked something like this: "Mom, dad, I was going to provide for you but I gave it to God instead. I'm sure he'll take care of you."

The response of Jesus is something that is not only scoffed at by the world, but most Christians as well. Jesus announces that what these Pharisees are doing is not merely sinful; it's criminal and deserving of the death penalty. Jesus quotes two sources in His indictment against the Pharisees: Deuteronomy 5:16, which is from the Ten Commandments, and Leviticus 20:9: **"_For _everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death." (Leviticus 20:9a)**

Because of the shocking nature of this passage, I think we should pause here and scrutinize the implications.

Vain worship

This warning of Jesus should hit pretty close to home because He is speaking to, and about, God's covenant people. In the New Covenant vernacular, these would be people who attend church on a regular basis, read their Bibles, have a active prayer life, support the ministry, participate

in the sacraments and display all the outward trappings of faithfulness—they were priests! Yet Jesus finds them reprehensible, pinning them with the moniker of “hypocrite.”

These are people who talk a good game, drawing near to God with their mouth and honoring God with their lips, but their hearts are from God. It is worth understanding the distinction between hypocrisy and weakness. David, in the weakness of his sinful flesh had sinned greatly against God, but that didn’t mean he was a hypocrite. He understood all too well who knew his heart. Thus the advice to his son:

_As for you, my son Solomon, _know the God of your father, and serve Him _with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for _the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. (1 Chronicles 28:9a)

I don’t know your heart. I can only make a guess. God alone truly knows the heart of man. But let us take heed. Jesus speaks here of people who do not have a heart for God, and although they worship God, their worship is in vain—the adverb (____ [*maten*]) meaning “worthless” or “to no end.” I am going to make the assumption that none of us want to be an Isaiah 29:13 kind of person.

What earmarks the person who worships God in vain?

It is the person who teaches the commandments of men as doctrines, presumably God’s doctrines. In other words, the person who supplants the law of God with the law of man worships God in vain. This is one of the reasons we ask new members if they acknowledge the Scriptures as the sole infallible message from God to man. This is also why we ask them if they acknowledge Jesus as Savior and *Lord*.

We tend to be quite persnickety when people tinker with the gospel; verses like this inform us that we should be equally persnickety when they tinker with the law. Those who seek to alter the law of God worship God in vain. There is good reason for this and it’s not because we’re all such good law-keepers.

Anti-law = anti-gospel

The reason a proper respect for the law of God is so critical is because the person who is anti-law is also anti-gospel. There are huge camps

within evangelicalism who, in the name of grace, downplay the law and seek to remove it from the Christian equation altogether. They quote Paul who taught that **“...Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” (Romans 10:4b)**

They somehow understand this to mean that the law of God is no longer a system of ethics. They don't understand that the word translated as “end” is the Greek word *telos* which means purpose, not termination. To draw the conclusion from Paul that the law of God is no longer God's standard would put Paul at odds, not only with the whole of the Old Testament, but with Jesus, and himself, since he had just previously written, **“Therefore __the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.” (Romans 7:12)**

But how is anti-law also anti-gospel? Or to put it in fancy language, what are the soteriological (the study of salvation) consequences of antinomianism (“anti-law-ism’)? Simply stated, to downplay the law of God is to downplay the need for Jesus.

-What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, __I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, __“_You shall not covet.” (Romans 7:7)

Therefore __by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)

Hopefully we all realize that we are saved by grace through faith and not by the works of the law (Galatians 2:16), but it is by hearing the law of God and seeking to walk in that law that we are ever made aware of our need for Jesus. The moment the law is downplayed—either in our evangelistic efforts or our own lives—the need for the cross of Christ is also downplayed.

But Jesus pushes this to a deeper level.

God's law: its full force

Most Christians are acquainted with the idea that they have sinned before God and that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). But God is gracious. The author of Hebrews comforts us:

But we see Jesus, __who was made __a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death __crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death _for everyone. (Hebrews 2:9)

But Jesus does more in this passage than speak of man's sin before God which deserves judgment; He speaks of man's sin before man which deserves capital punishment by men. That is the context of passage He recites.

_For __everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. (Leviticus 20:9a)

Be it known that this isn't addressing six-year-old Johnny who spills his milk being stoned by the elders at the city gate. Jesus is addressing adult children who have no respect or regard for the authority of their parents, which in the Old Testament represented the ultimate authority system.

Biblical examples would be people like Phinehas and Hophni (1 Samuel 1-4) or Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10) who were religiously and politically so corrupt and dishonoring to their parents, that it cost the lives and souls of those under their care; think of the Menendez brothers.

A point which needs to be wrestled with here is that our Savior does not repeal nor abrogate this law. Some may argue this is no big deal; it should be assumed that since Jesus was born under the law (Galatians 4:4), He operated under the laws of the Mosaic economy which ended with the Old Covenant. But in the parallel passage from Mark, Jesus does something which should raise our eyebrows. He repeals the Old Covenant dietary laws.

And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; _because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and –is eliminated?" (Thus He declared –all foods –clean.) (Mark 7:18, 19)

In the passage before us, Jesus, rather than repealing the Old Covenant civil law, restates it in full force. And the law He restates is one which is often used by Christians and non-Christians alike as a law that borders on the ridiculous—putting to death those who curse their parents.

We must understand that the full force of God's law is revealed in civil punishments (Matthew 15:4). Certainly not everyone has committed crimes which the Old Testament civil law would have determined worthy of death; I think I have though. But consider this:

Any society which ignores what God has determined to be a capital crime worthy of execution is a society which will begin to ignore that the wages of sin is death.

To understand that the wages of sin is death, one must understand justice. In a society where there is no observation of God's justice, justice itself becomes a confusing proposition. And if justice becomes a confusing proposition then divine justice becomes a confusing proposition; and the cross of Christ itself becomes a muddled affair.

Repealing commandments

A quick word on repealing commandments may be in order. The church no longer sacrifices animals, engages in ceremonial festivals and washings, practices circumcision, has a priesthood, *etc.* But these Old Covenant practices were designed to foreshadow Jesus. They were specifically repealed by New Testament apostolic authority because they were mere shadows of the "good things to come" (Hebrews 10:1). There is no longer a need to sacrifice a lamb because the Lamb of God has come (John 1:29).

Because the modes have changed (e.g. we have a bloodless sacrament of the Lord's Supper rather than a bloody sacrifice of the Passover Lamb), we should not think that what they represent has changed. And it is a huge mistake to think that the ethics and justice which flow from the character and nature of God have somehow mutated. God is immutable as are His statutes.

The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever. (Psalm 119:160)

Conclusion

The civil law of God and its attending punishments generally finds itself bantered about in eschatological or political discussions. But Jesus places the implications of this form of antinomianism (anti-law) smack dab

in the middle of a discussion which delineates the faithful from the unfaithful; those who worship in spirit and truth and those who worship in vain. For the sake of the gospel, may the church take rank with the psalmist who wrote in glowing terms of God's law:

⁷ **□□□□ The law of the Lord *is* perfect, __converting the soul;
□□□□ The testimony of the Lord *is* sure, making __wise the simple;**
⁸ **□□□□ The statutes of the Lord *are* right, rejoicing the heart;
□□□□ The commandment of the Lord *is* pure, enlightening the eyes;**
⁹ **□□□□ The fear of the Lord *is* clean, enduring forever;
□□□□ The judgments of the Lord *are* true *and* righteous altogether.**
¹⁰ **□□□□ More to be desired *are they* than __gold,
□□□□ Yea, than much fine gold;
□□□□ Sweeter also than honey and the __honeycomb.**
¹¹ **□□□□ Moreover by them Your servant is warned,
□□□□ And in keeping them *there is* great reward. (Psalm 19:7-11)**

Questions for Study

1. Discuss the purpose of the healing ministry of Jesus. How should we respond to this (Pages 2, 3)?
2. Discuss the place of tradition (page 3).
3. What are the earmarks of the person who worships God in vain (pages 3, 4)?
4. Why is it anti-gospel to be anti-law (page 5)?
5. How does Jesus present the full force of God's law? What do we learn from this example (pages 6, 7)?

6. Discuss repealing commandments. Why are certain commandments repealed? Does this mean God changes (pages 7, 8)?