

“Kingdom 101 ~ Interpretation vs. Reality” [6.14.09]

“commUNITY Home Build”

Today’s Scripture is filled with challenge; Jesus lays down a practical litmus-test to help us gauge how we are progressing as His disciples.

Progression is the natural goal of any healthy endeavor;
Progression for Christians’ = a growing reflection of Christ-like character & attitude.

An interesting note about the title ‘CHRISTIAN.’

- It was the unbelievers that 1st called the disciples “Christians.” What the world saw in those early disciples was a Christ-like character & power.
- Question: I wonder if the world today would call the church in America, “Christian,” had the word not already been established?
 - Would they see us His followers like Jesus in character & power; or would we maintain our present status (title) the world calls us...hypocrites?
- This is a unique intention of the Sermon on the Mount: to remind us Christians that we really are to BE DIFFERENT...

In our hearts, inner attitudes & our actions - fueled by our desire to make other people’s lives better in Jesus’ name!

So, how is your heart progressing, developing, maturing? Jesus offers us a few more challenging issues to help us measure our progress.

I. Teaching about VOWS = TRUTH-TELLING

A. (R) Matthew 5: 33 – 34a or p. 736 in pew Bible

- B. “You have heard that our ancestors were told,” vs. “But I say;”
- Remember when Jesus quotes the O.T. He says, “It is written,”
 - But when He contradicts – corrects - a man-made teaching He begins, “You have heard” or “It has been said”
 - Indicating that what He was rejecting is not O.T. law, but He is rejecting human interpretations- -oral traditions.

C. re(R) Matthew 5: 33

- This is another example of a man-made distortion of the Mosaic Law. This is not even an actual quotation of any one law in the Torah. It’s actually an abbreviated version of several O.T. precepts.
- It was the religious leaders’ way, of bending the truth to fit their selfish agenda.

D. (R) Matthew 5: 34 – 36

- In Jesus’ day people had begun to take these elaborate oaths to make their stories or their arguments more convincing.
 - They were more concerned with the ‘divine formula’ they were concocting; than actually keeping their vows = keeping their word
- Sometimes we subconsciously do the same kind of things:
 - “I swear on a stack of Bibles” or “I swear to God,” or “As God as my witness & may lightening strike me if I’m telling a lie.”
 - Our word means so little; we now back them up w/unnecessary vows

- The religious establishment had become such ‘good liars’ that they actually taught you could break your word - your promise - if you did not use God’s divine name.
 - It was their sophisticated way of ‘crossing their fingers.’
 - (R) Matthew 23: 16 - 22
 - [INSERT] Paul Harvey story = challenges of TRUTH-telling ☺

E. Jesus says = (R) Matthew 5: 37

- Can’t be much simpler than this; limit your words to ‘YES’ an ‘NO’.
 - Sociologists tell us that we will be exposed every single day in some way & some fashion to (300) lies every day.
 - It’s actually only (200); but you see what I mean; lies come easy.
 - Institute for Behavior Motivation says that 97 out of 100 people lie on average of (3) times a day.
 - [INSERT] Ted Ingstrom quote

II. Teaching about REVENGE

A. (R) Matthew 5: 38

B. This was the O.T. law of ‘lex talionis;’

- The principle of an exact retribution whose purpose was both to lay the foundation of justice.
- It had the double effect of defining justice & restraining REVENGE; it prohibited the taking of the law into one’s own hands by the ghastly vengeance of the family feud.
- [INSERT] FOX news report

C. (R) Matthew 5: 39 – 42

- The religious leaders conveniently ‘twisted the truth’ of this principle from the law courts (where it belonged); to the realm of personal relationships (where it didn’t ever belong).
- They once again ‘twisted the truth’ in order to justify personal revenge, although the law explicitly prohibited this act.
 - (R) Leviticus 19: 18 or p. 95 in pew Bible

D. Revenge is a natural response to any sort of abuse or injustice:

- [INSERT] Truck driver in Broken Bow, Nebraska

E. Jesus says, our response to injustice should be a refusal to retaliate! We are to follow His example of taking the ‘HIGH ROAD.’”

- LOW ROAD = revenge & retaliation when wronged; plays the same game as others; guided by emotions - - up & down; reactive & inconsistent ☹
- HIGH ROAD = unconditional love & forgiveness; refuses to play games - - lives by principles that are guided by character & values; authentically follows Jesus!

F. (R) I Peter 2: 21 – 23 or p. 935

III. Teaching about 'LOVING ENEMIES'

A. (R) Matthew 5: 43

- This was the most appalling perversion of the Scripture from the religious leaders
 - The command to 'hate our enemy' is not even in the O.T. law.
 - The religious leaders had once again 'twisted the truth' to limit their responsibility to love down to people that were just like them in race & ethnicity.
 - If you were not a pure blooded Hebrew; they taught hatred is expectable.

B. (R) Matthew 5: 44 – 47

C. Who is our ENEMY? From the context we can see that He means a wide range of feeling from very severe opposition to minor snubbing:

- How's your heart progressing in this area? As you hear these categories pray that God will use His Word, even now, to give you the heart to love them.
 - Those who persecute you = 1st meaning comes out of v. 44; "...those people who oppose you & try to hurt you."
 - Those opposing you in less dramatic ways = those who admit they are 'enemies of God;' the unrighteous people who openly defy God's law.
 - Anyone who doesn't love you or is not your brother = those who do things that offend you, or dishonor you, or hurt your feelings, or anger you, or disappoint you, or frustrate you.
 - Jesus says, we are to love our enemies as well as our neighbors by simply praying for them and practically meeting their physical needs!
 - Proverbs 25: 12 instructs us, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him, & if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

D. [INSERT] Corrie Ten Boom

Alfred Plummer once wrote; "To return evil for good is devilish. To return good for good is human. To return good for evil is divine."

E. (R) Matthew 5: 48 = "...you are to be PERFECT"

- This perfection is not sinlessness but a complete control of God's spirit!

That's progress, NOT perfection: submitting our hearts to be like Jesus!