

The Laws of the Kingdom, Part 1

Introduction

In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 we are given the record of Jesus' first recorded sermon. He may have preached others before this, and they may have been on the same topic but this is our first record.

In it, Jesus is exploring what true righteous living looks like in the Kingdom of God.

I'm breaking these down into four "Laws of the Kingdom":

1. Law of Anger
2. Law of Purity
3. Law of Honesty
4. Law of Love

In **Matthew 5:20**, Jesus says: *"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*

The Pharisees and scribes were EXPERTS in righteousness! How could Jesus expect these disciples to exceed the righteousness of the experts?

The answer is simple. This righteousness is a righteousness that is given to us upon entrance into the Kingdom. **George Ladd puts it this way:**

*"The righteousness required for entrance into the future realm of God's kingdom is the righteousness that results from God's reign in our lives. **The Kingdom of God gives to us that which it demands; otherwise we could not attain it.** The righteousness that God requires is the righteousness of God's kingdom which God imparts as He comes to rule in our lives."*

It's important to understand this, BECAUSE:

Any time we start getting specific about how a citizen of the Kingdom of God, a Christian, should live we immediately begin to react defensively with something along the lines of "don't be so legalistic!" or "what about grace!".

The truth is that these "laws of the kingdom" are in themselves a means of grace. It's not only that God will bring you to the point of eventually meeting the high standard of the law, but He will use the high standard of the law to bring you there.

If you just throw these things out as impossible expectations and don't engage with them in your heart, then you are throwing out one of the primary means of grace filled change in your life. We should celebrate these things as promises of what we will become as citizens of the Kingdom, not as measurements of judgement (those NOT in the kingdom WILL be judged by these).

And by the way, minimizing them as optional add-ons to the Christian life *is the same as throwing them out altogether.*

1 - The Law of Anger

READ Matthew 5:21

OT Law, Rabbinic Law, even modern day law in the US recognizes that different punishments should be given out for different motivations or types of homicide. Premeditated murder is different from accidental manslaughter.

But Jesus went much further.

READ Matthew 5:22-26

The point Jesus is making here is not that cursing is as bad as murder. It isn't that simple. Rather Jesus is saying that the Pharisees put the emphasis on the external act of murder. But God puts the emphasis on the condition of the heart. There must be anger, malice, or contempt IN THE HEART before there can be murder. The sin begins in the heart with the anger, and then later manifests as the outward act of murder. Murder is anger full-grown.

True righteousness is found in the condition of the heart. If down in the heart is smouldering anger, hatred, and contempt for another person but it never gets expressed in anything more than angry words muttered under the breath, God would say that this is a person condemned before God as a sinner.

When Jesus says that your righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees, He means that what you *are* is more important than what you *do* because what you *do* flows from what you *are*.

Sum it Up

Kingdom righteousness means that I must have no evil in my heart towards my fellow man.

Obviously, this is not something you and I can simply produce on our own. God must give to us what He demands from us. This kind of righteousness can only come from God's reign in our hearts.

"Lord, let your kingdom come **in my heart** as it is in heaven."

2 - The Law of Purity

READ Matthew 5:27-32

Scribal law said that all illicit sexual relationships were forbidden. As long as you refrained from it, you were innocent.

But, of course, Jesus takes it much further.

Just like with murder, adultery begins in the heart. Our hearts condemn us long before our bodies do. Kingdom righteousness begins in the heart.

The key here is the phrase “lustful intent”. He is talking about a man looking at a woman with the intent to satisfy his sexual desires, or vice versa. It’s the lingering eye that satisfies a sexual desire that Jesus is addressing.

In this day and age, you end up seeing a lot of things that you wish you didn’t see. From internet ads to what people wear walking down the street. You can’t control that. It’s the world we live in and ranting about it does nothing to change it.

And, men, blaming your lust on how another woman dresses is a cop out that will not exempt you from the demands of kingdom righteousness.

What you can do something about is your own “lustful intent”.

Gouge Out My Eye?

The serious nature of this issue is illustrated in verses 29-30. This is not something to be treated casually.

It needs to be clear - Jesus is not advocating gouging out your eye, or cutting off your hand. Following these with legalistic literalism would be missing the point.

Lust does not lodge itself in your eye or in your hand. It lodges itself in your heart. Trying to solve your lust problem by an external act (gouging out your eye, cutting off your hand) would be missing the very point of Jesus’ sermon!

The point is this: IF you could get rid of your lust by gouging out your eye, you should do it. If your lust problem was actually your hand, you should cut it off. It’s that serious.

But it’s not in your eye, or your hand. It’s in your heart where only Jesus can reach.

Again, this is a high standard that we cannot attain on our own. **God must give to us what He demands from us.** There is no other way!

Divorce

In **verses 31-32** Jesus gets in their business. At least in the business of the men.

It was common practice at this time for a man to get tired of his current wife and want to change to a younger model.

He would accuse his wife of some form of sexual indecency and divorce her “legally”. He would throw the old wife out and get a new one to satisfy his lust. All while obeying the letter of the law as to remain “innocent”.

Technically, women could divorce their husbands, but was simply “not done” in that culture because women had little rights.

Jesus calls them on it publically and it's a wonder they didn't try to stone him on the spot. He is saying that their divorce is not legit. Even though they followed the law externally, in their hearts there is nothing but lustful intent. God does not recognize their divorce and so when they remarry it is as if they are committing adultery anyway.

Simply put, divorce for the purpose of marrying another is sin. It's nothing but lust.

(If this is something you are guilty of, this does not mean you should divorce your current spouse. Committing a sin does not fix a previous sin. Just repent with your new spouse and move on to wholeness.)

Conclusion

At this point we need to be reminded of how we started this morning.

God must give to us what He demands from us. For the Christian, for the citizen of the Kingdom of God, these "Laws of the Kingdom" are promises of what we are becoming. They are themselves a means of grace. As God reigns in our hearts, we will become like this more every day.

Our task is to come under these Laws of the Kingdom and say to Jesus "I want to be like this. Help me to be like this." We do not shun them as impossible standards. Instead we embrace them as promises of what Christ is converting us to.

PRAYER

"Lord, let your kingdom come in my heart as it is in heaven."

Next week → the Law of Honesty and the Law of Love