

Was Jesus teaching the Old Law in the Sermon on the Mount, or the Gospel?

I have heard several times from preachers that Jesus was NOT teaching the Gospel in the Sermon on the Mount, but was “just correcting the false interpretations of the Law, by the Pharisee’s.” We all understand and agree that the Church was not yet established, because Jesus said in Matt. 16:18 “upon this rock I WILL build my Church.” And we all agree that the Church was established on Pentecost in Acts 2. And Jesus never violated the Law, or He never taught others to violate that Law, because they were still amenable to the Law of Moses at that time. For instance, Jesus told the Pharisee’s that they were right in paying tithes. (Matt. 23:23) In another place Jesus instructed the man healed of Leprosy to go and show himself to the priest and offer a gift that MOSES commanded. (Matt. 8:4)

But was Jesus just giving the correct interpretation of the Law of Moses in the Sermon on the Mount? I don’t believe so.

I want to point out FIRST that several verses before the start of the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 4:23, Jesus went about all Galilee teaching in the synagogues, and preaching the GOSPEL of the Kingdom. Jesus was preaching the GOSPEL of the kingdom. He was NOT preaching the Law of Moses, or correcting the interpretations of the Pharisee’s. We also notice in Matt. 4:16 that the people that sat in darkness saw a great light. And in verse 17 Jesus was preaching Repent for the kingdom of Heaven was at hand. Jesus was preaching the Gospel of the coming Kingdom. John the Baptist also preached the Gospel of the coming kingdom. Matt. 3:2 says that John preached repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. John was preparing the way for the Lord.

We also notice that in Luke 16:16 our Lord says “the LAW and the PROPHETS were UNTIL John: SINCE that time the kingdom of God is PREACHED, and every man presseth into it.” Notice that the Law and the prophets were UNTIL John, not passed John. As far as the preaching was concerned, the Law and the prophets were not preached after John. So, Jesus, and John and the apostles were preaching NOT the Law of Moses, but the Gospel of the coming Kingdom. They were preaching things that would be contained in the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Let’s look particularly at the Sermon on the Mount. I believe if we say that Jesus was “just correcting false interpretations” we COULD lose some valuable truths. Notice starting in verse 21 Jesus quotes the Old Law EXACTLY. “Ye have heard it was said of them of old time.” This is Ex. 20:13. The ones of “old time” were the prophets. Now, in verse 22 Jesus says “but I say unto you.” See the contrast? He said it was said in the Law of Moses...but I say unto you. Jesus was giving a higher standard in the Gospel, or for those that would be under the New Covenant. No matter how you try to “get around” the “higher” standard that Jesus gives in this verse, it STILL says you should not be angry with someone without a cause, or to call someone a fool.

Jesus does this five more times in the chapter. In verse 27 He quotes EXACTLY Ex. 20:14, and then says in verse 28, BUT I SAY unto you, and gives a higher and more strict command about looking on a women and lusting for her. In verse 31 He quotes Deut. 24 exactly, and gives in verse 32 the ONE exception for divorce and remarriage. Much more specific, and LIMITED, than the Law of Moses, when he said putting away for uncleanness. In verse 33 Jesus quotes Lev. 19:12 and shows that swearing was allowed if they

did not do it falsely, and they kept their oaths. But in verse 34 Jesus says SWEAR NOT AT ALL. How could Jesus say it any more emphatically, and clearly? No amount of “hypothetical” situations and scenarios are going to change what our Lord said in this verse. We are not to swear AT ALL. James says the SAME thing in James. 5:12. Verse 38 is a quote from Ex.21:24. Jesus then says in verse 39 that we are not to RESIST evil, but to turn the other cheek if someone “smites” or hits us, does us wrong physically. If a man knocks our eye out, we are not to go and knock his eye out. How much more clearly could our Lord say what He is saying here? We are not to return evil for evil (Rom. 12:17) under any circumstance according to this verse. And this principal of not giving evil for evil does not change even if it’s done for the government, or law enforcement agency. Lastly, in verse 43 our Lord refers to Lev. 19:18, and Deut. 23:6 when He says that they heard they were to love their neighbor and hate their enemy. The neighbor to the Jew (in his way of thinking) was his fellow Jew only. Jesus says in verse 44 “but I say unto you love your ENEMIES.” He was telling them not to hate their enemies like David said in Psalm 139:22, but to love them. Clearly Jesus was NOT teaching or correcting some false interpretation but giving a HIGHER standard, for those that would be a part of His kingdom. I believe this was the point of the account of the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10:29-37)

One other thing I would like to notice is all the times Jesus said “them of OLD time.” This could NOT be just correcting the Pharisee’s because they were NOT of OLD time. Their teaching would be what they were teaching during the time of Christ. If Jesus was in fact correcting them, but those of OLD time were the prophets. Jesus was teaching the Gospel of the coming kingdom, and what He taught in Matt. 5, Matt. 19:9, and Mark 16:16 is just as binding, and applicable as Acts 2:38. Let’s just believe and preach what is written.

(The ideas and points of this article were taken from articles and sermons by Pat Donahue, and Carroll Sutton.)