

Not More Laws, More Meaning

Intro. God gave the Israelites Ten Commandments. Over the years they came up with six hundred *more* laws. Every time the state legislature and the U.S. congress meet, *they* pass *hundreds* more laws. What is it about human beings that we like or need so many laws! Maybe it is because someone always *finds* a loophole in the law. Or someone *wants* a loophole to sidestep the law and its consequences. Today we hear more from the Sermon on the Mount about the Lord's respect and understanding of the law, religious and civil.

I. He continued to spell out his beliefs about what kind of people he expected his followers to be. What he told the crowd was something that must have surprised them: their "righteousness" must *surpass*

that of the scribes and Pharisees. To some people that seemed an easy standard. The scribes and Pharisees were supposed to be leaders but people knew some were not good models of fidelity to God's will [Sacred Pagina, Matthew, p. 81]. The same could be said for many leaders, including priests and bishops and popes.

The Lord came, not to make *new* laws but to remind people what the true meaning of the law was. Most people were not murderers. But most people *had* been angry at someone. We know calling someone a fool is bad; but calling someone "raqa," an infidel, a Satan is much worse. It is an escalation. Anger is the *first step* to hurting others. Most people were not involved with adultery. But most had lustful thoughts about each other. If not careful, those thoughts are the first steps to *worse* behavior. Most

people were not divorced. However, in the patriarchal society of the day, there was little respect for women. Husbands could easily divorce their wives. Most people didn't swear falsely against their neighbor in court. But most let a few, choice words and lies slip out every now and then. In the Lord's view *all* the commandments apply to *all* of us, not to a few. The Lord re-interpreted the law to focus on the heart and soul of it.

Concl. Following the letter of the law too closely can lead to worship of the law rather than God. Law without love doesn't lead to a relationship with God [M. McGlone], but *can* lead to fear of God. The Lord was clear he was not changing or getting rid of the law or the traditions of the prophets. He was teaching people - and us - to look *deeper* into the commandments, to the *spirit* of the law.

We know some attitudes and behaviors might be legal, but that doesn't mean they are right or moral. Many times laws are just the *minimum requirements* for good behavior. Disciples of the Lord are held to a higher standard. I do not believe we need more *commandments* and we may not need more laws. **We might need to just sharpen our understanding of and obedience to the commandments we already have.**

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