

A SERIES ON WHAT JESUS BELIEVED AND TAUGHT—AND LIVED

fifth lesson

Beyond “the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, Part 2

- I. Beyond the okayness of the scribes and Pharisees (S & Ps) is a righteousness of the kingdom of heaven which doesn't just not kill, but has such tenderness that it rules out groundless anger and verbal abuse (Matt 5:21-22), a tenderness more important than religious ritual (vss Matt 5:23-24) or getting our way through the courts (Matt 5:25-26).
- II. In sexuality, kingdom rightness would be pained to see others subject to the purposeful imaginings which serve to roil up “hot” feelings to be savored and slobbered over. (Matt 5:27-30) A person whose heart is filled with welcomed lusts, and who uses the presence of others to excite themselves, has a sexually corrupted heart (“adultery in the heart”), and has little to boast about for not “doing it,” since they only lacked opportunity. — And one can't be righteous in divorce just by arranging for a legally proper “pink slip” for the one cast away. In Jesus' day, a woman divorced had her life ruined. She would never again know any but degraded sexuality. (Matt 5:31-32) You can't love a marriage partner and do such a thing to him or her.
- III. True okayness does not try to overwhelm others by verbal fireworks, calling in God and “betting your head” that such and such is the truth. Just state it and let it stand. Allow people to make up their own minds. More than: “It is this way” or “It is not that way” comes from an evil tendency of the heart to control people. Don't swear. The point has nothing to do with “cussin.” (Matt 5:33-37)
- IV. The person living from the Kingdom does not need to “get even” (vs Matt 5:38), strike back (Matt 5:39), refuse aid to someone who has beat them in court (Matt 5:40), refuse to further assist someone who has already compelled them to go out of their way (Matt 5:41), or have any reason but the request itself to give to someone who asks them for something (Matt 5:42). They find it easier to love than to hate their enemy (Matt 5:43), and are able to act (Matt 5:44) in a way that reveals the family resemblance in the family of God. (Matt 5:45-48) Thus they are “the children of your Father which is in heaven.”
- V. In specifically religious “righteousnesses” (ten dikaiosunen, Matt 6:1), the kingdom dweller conceals his activities of giving (“alms”), prayer and fasting (Matt 6:2-18), and orients himself solely toward his “Father which is in heaven.” S & P okayness looks for rewards from man, gets them, and is ignored by “heaven,” since heaven was not sought anyway. (vss Matt 6:2, Matt 6:5, Matt 6:16) By contrast, “heaven” falls upon those who seek it only.
- VI. Kingdom okayness finds all its “treasures” in relation to heaven (Matt 6:19-25), is content

with what the Father provides (vss Matt 6:26-34, and gives first priority to securing the rule of God and the kind of okayness God has. (Matt 6:33) It doesn't borrow evil from the future, because each day has enough in it. (vs Matt 6:34)

- VII. Kingdom okayness doesn't try to "manage" others by condemning them (Matt 7:1-5) or by pouring the "best stuff" on them (Matt 7:6). It works through prayer (vss Matt 7:7-11) and considerate love (vs Matt 7:12).
- VIII. Entering the kingdom is a matter of doing the will of the Father, understood as going beyond S & P righteousness in the manner above illustrated. Miracles won't take the place of kingdom love and trust. (Matt 7:13-27)

THE LATEST DECALOGUE¹

Thou shalt have one God only; who
Would be at the expense of two?
No graven images may be
Worshipp'd, except the currency:
Swear not at all; for, for thy curse
Thine enemy is none the worse:
At church on Sunday to attend
Will serve to keep the world thy friend:
Honor thy parents: that is, all
From whom advancement may befall;
Thou shalt not kill; but need'st not strive
Officiously to keep alive:
Do not adultery commit;
Advantage rarely comes of it:
Thou shalt not steal; an empty feat,
When it's so lucrative to cheat: B
ear not false witness; let the lie
Have time on its own wings to fly:
Thou shalt not covet, but tradition
Approves all forms of competition.

Arthur Hugh Clough

¹ Arthur Hugh Clough, *Poems, with a Memoir* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1862).