

Just quickly to go back to the Matthew passage for a moment.

They had asked about God's rules.
Jesus laid down the law to them.
"You've got it wrong!"

And they were silent. Stunned by Jesus' wisdom.

So Jesus goes on to answer the question they should have asked next.

"Who are you to tell us what God wants!"

Jesus was not one of the Jewish leaders
not a Scribe or a Pharisee
not a Priest or a Council member.

He was not from a family in the ruling classes.
He was the son of the wife of a carpenter
from the provincial town of Nazareth.

The discussion gets a bit complicated -
we won't go into it now.

But it is about who Jesus is.

And he is hinting, that he is the Lord.
Higher even than their favourite old King, King David.
The Messiah will be David's Son, and David's Lord.
And they couldn't argue with his logic.

Paul's letter - different situation
but dealing with the same question -
where is God's authority - what about God's laws.

Paul had been a Pharisee - a very good one -
but he had moved on from there.

He was now teaching grace, not law.

He was ministering forgiveness, even to Gentiles
when the Pharisees would have been pronouncing Judgement.

And there were some Pharisees at Thessalonica.

Some had followed him from Philippi, and Berea.

They saw that Paul no longer followed strict Jewish ways.

And therefore he was a bad influence - a bad person.

He must have impure motives -
he must be in it for the money.

And they were saying these things to discredit him
and to get the early Christians
to turn back to Judaism.

Paul therefore writes in this letter
a bit of self-defence.

Not because he needed to defend himself
but because his converts were in danger
of rejecting his teaching, and going back to their old ways.

I didn't do it for the money, he says.

In fact, his stay in Thessalonica cost him.

He and his companions paid their way.

Also - his teaching was verified
because they had been blessed by God.

Remember last week - in chapter 1.
They received not just his words
but also the power of God, and conviction.

Far from delivering some sort of convincing sales pitch
which would be aimed to please -
he did not please any human faction.
But his ministry was pleasing to God -
evidence, the power and conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Paul and his companions were living out
the sort of teaching we had in the gospel
about Jesus.

Jesus was teaching -
that the Messiah was David's Son
and David's Lord.

Now we don't really get
these Jewish theological arguments.

We could explore this more
and if we were Pharisees we would love to.

But just some obvious examples.
Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ,
is Lord, and he is Servant.

Last Sunday evening we had Mark 10.45
a most important verse in the Bible.

*For the Son of man came not to be served
but to serve
and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

Not to be served, but to serve.
Son of Man as well as Son of God.

A ransom - the one who pays the punishment for our sin
and yet he is also the Lawmaker, who demands justice.

Priest, and sacrifice.

The one who is our Righteousness
and who also became Sin for us.

The paradoxical language is everywhere
in our understanding of who Jesus is.

Because he was God - and emptied himself.
He is the Judge, and he allowed himself to be condemned.

This reasoning is poetry in the best Hebrew style -
the juxtaposition of opposites
and the rhyme in the meaning.

Sometimes parallels in the same direction
sometimes parallels in the opposite direction
and somehow -

the same line - the same truth - the same person.

The Servant King.

So Paul, was among them as one who served.

And yet he claims Apostolic Authority over them

And even as you love your neighbour as yourself
you are not becoming your neighbour's slave
but you are simply being a faithful servant of God
because that is the law of God.

Can you see how it all ties up in a backwards sort of way.

The first shall be last.

True greatness shows in humility.

The Son of God stoops to wash his disciples' feet.

And the most important things we do in our lives
may never be known except by us and God alone.
But there is no better audience.

And so public acclaim doesn't matter.
Only, did you do right? Did you please God?

So what is the Law of God?

*Love the Lord your God
with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your mind.
And love your neighbour as yourself.
All the Law and the Prophets
hang on these two Commandments.*

It really is very simple. And very hard.
But that is what God asks of us.

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Setting the Scene

Before we look at the Bible passage
I have some announcements to make.

I have decided to make some more rules
about the way behave in church.

I am not happy with the way
some husbands and wives talk to each other
during the service

So we are going to go back
to the way they did things
in the Jewish synagogue in Jesus' day.

All the men are going to sit on one side
and the women on the other.
And we are going to move the screens
to go down the middle
so I can see you, but you can't see each other.

I am also not happy
with the casual way some of you dress on Sundays
so we are going to have a dress code -
more formal style.
I will hand out a list after the service
so you know what is expected.

There will be two levels
smart-casual - for the Café style service
and smart-formal for the other services.
The Churchwardens have instructions not to let you in
if you are not properly dressed.

And small children -
instead of the extra space at the back
it would be easier for me if pre-school and infants
were kept out in the crèche all the time.
But I am also putting a sidesman on duty
out in the crèche
to make sure you do not turn the sound off.
You have to listen to the service.

And the coffee after the service
is getting a bit untidy.
You seem to be getting together in groups
when you should be in an orderly queue
for the drinks.

So we are going to smarten it up a bit.
Men first - queue quietly to get your drinks
then the women, not the ones with children
then when they all have their drinks
can you sit back down in your places to drink
and the women and children can get theirs.

I've written all this down
so that you can take the new rules away
and learn them before next Sunday.

I've put a copy on the web-site as well.

Just to help -
I have also made a **PowerPoint** presentation
so you can look at the new rules
at quiet points during the service.

It's not true - we are not Pharisees.
Forget all that! - Were you worried?

That is what the Bible story was about.

There were people in Jesus' time - called Pharisees who thought that being religious was about keeping rules.

And they kept making new rules - and they said - you will go to hell if you don't keep them.

And they were trying to trick Jesus just like the people last week.

Everyone had their favourite rule which they thought everyone ought to keep - and a few others they thought it was all right to break.

But they couldn't agree which were important and which were not so important.

A bit like people today, really.

And so they tried to catch Jesus out - and asked him

Out of all God's rules

what do you think is the most important rule?

now Jesus could have found a way to avoid their question and so to avoid their trap.

But like last week - he thought it a good opportunity to teach them something important.

So he told them the most important rule

What was it?

*Love the Lord your God ...
with everything you've got*

They knew that -

And love your neighbour as yourself

That was a bit new.

Their teachers said - don't do to others
what you don't want them to do to you.
I.e. don't do bad stuff.

Jesus said - DO to others
what you would want them to do to you
I.e. DO GOOD STUFF.

He was saying - that what God wants
is not keeping lots of rules
but try to do what you think God wants
and be nice to people.

It is more complicated than that, but that is a good start.

So - no new rules today -
but do think - what does God want of me?
How can I express my love for Jesus?
And - be a nice person to know as well.

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More later

[Birthdays and presentations](#)

Testimony time, Collection.