

**Q&A 44: How should we in the church view the Sermon on the Mount (including Jesus’ statement “I never knew you!”), and the four Gospels? How do we know what’s for us in the church and what is for the Jews?**

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The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5 through 7) is one of the most written about, and talked about passages in all of Scripture. What has become known as the Lord’s Prayer, from the Sermon on the Mount is recited in unison at least weekly in many church services worldwide. In baffling contrast, the Sermon on the Mount is also one of the most misunderstood passages in all of Scripture. Whole denominations set aside principle teachings within it, even as they recite other parts of it with great regularity.

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**1. The perspective of the book of Matthew is Jewish, specifically in the Judaism of Israel in the first half of the first century AD. Matthew was Jewish and so was the audience he was writing to. He wrote the gospel about 40-55 AD. The target audience of each of the four gospels can be summarized as follows:**

Gospel Name & Author	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Addressed to	Jews	Romans	Greeks	All

**2. Christ gave the Sermon on the Mount in the first year of His three year earthly ministry. The Jews had been under Roman rule at this time since 63 BC.**

**3. The Jews had a prominent view that ‘Messiah ben David’ would come to drive out the Romans and establish David’s throne and kingdom. It was also understood that being of Jewish descent was sufficient to enter the kingdom.**

Some of the religious and political influences in Israel at that time included:

- **Pharisees** - the Jewish religious heroes, serving as missionaries for Judaism
- **Sadducees** - centered around Jerusalem & especially the temple activity
- **Essenes** - more secluded, & likely the source of the Dead Sea Scrolls
- **Scribes** – writers by occupation, but often connected with the Pharisees
- **Zealots** - covertly resisting Roman rule; this group grew over the next few decades
- **Sacarii** - terrorists against Roman rule; this group grew over the next few decades
- **Herodians** - supporters of the Herod family rule
- **Samaritans** – mixed populations of Jews & Gentiles from the centuries before when the Assyrians had relocated the Jews of the northern kingdom and placed Gentiles in the same area where the Jews had been.

**4. Jesus taught the Jews of the reign of the Messiah and the coming kingdom. He taught with more clarity and authority than the rabbis. His message was to the Jews alone.**

The first three groups listed above would have rabbis (teachers), and would follow the traditional rules for rabbinical systems. One would not think of being a rabbi without first being a disciple under a rabbi for some years. Jesus lived and taught quite differently from the rabbinical tradition, in that He taught with clear and astonishing authority, and was even called ‘rabbi’, though He had never studied under a rabbi Himself. But many of these rabbis would leave a remaining tension in their ‘teaching’, and quote others as authorities. This was especially true of the scribes, who majored more in their ability to write than in speaking with authority. The combination of Jesus’ lack of rabbinical training and His speaking authoritatively from the Old Testament and His tendency not to quote others was a frequent point of astonishment and amazement.

Matthew 7:28-29 (NASU)

When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; 29 for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

**5. Jesus was offering the kingdom to the Jews by offering Himself. The main issue of “the gospel of the Kingdom” was that the King was to be accepted for entry.**

Matthew 4:23 (NASU: just before the Sermon on the Mount)

Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, **teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom**, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.

Matthew 9:35 (NASU; after the Sermon on the Mount)

Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, **teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom**, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

Matthew 15:24 (NASU)

But He answered and said, "I was sent only **to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**"

***In general, we will find that the Sermon on the Mount was:***

- 1) spoken by the coming earthly kingdom’s rightful King,
- 2) to the Jewish people who were disciples of the rightful King of the coming kingdom,
- 3) with a view to their manner of living until the kingdom, and being qualified to enter,
- 4) and to enable them to pass along the same ‘gospel of the kingdom’ to others, as and when Jesus authorized them to do so.

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As we look at the Sermon on the Mount, we will find that what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount will on the one hand be fitting to the exclusively Jewish character of the audience, and at the same time shocking to hear because:

- The **way** that Jesus taught was radically different from the scribes and Pharisees.
  - The **content** of what He taught, in correcting the then-current errors, was startling.
  - The ‘repent in order to **qualify for entry** into the kingdom’ message was stunning.
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### **1. Jesus taught correctly the Old Testament teachings:**

As Jesus taught the Sermon on the Mount, He founded what He said solidly on what God had revealed to the Jews in the Old Testament, also correcting a number of then-current errors among the Jews. The centuries of accumulated Jewish tradition were stripped away, so that the Sermon on the Mount brought Old Testament teachings forward:

Matthew 5:21a

You have heard that the ancients were told...

Matthew 5:27a (see also Matthew 5:38a, 43a)

You have heard that it was said...

### **2. Jesus corrected the misunderstandings of the current teachings:**

Each of the above is followed by the statement of a teaching then current among the Jews, followed by Christ correcting the traditional teaching with a contrasting statement, “But I say to you...”. In making these corrections, Jesus underscored the continuing applicability of the Law to his Jewish listeners, and the depth of heart and the attitude with which the Law of Moses should be understood, and the coming earthly kingdom should be anticipated.

### **3. Jesus came to fulfill the Law.**

Matthew 5:17-19

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Also built into the verses quoted above was a series of specifically Jewish figures of speech common to the teachings of the rabbis:

- To ‘abolish’ the Law of Moses was to violate the Law.
- To ‘annul’ any part of the Law of Moses was to misinterpret it.
- “I did not come to” is primarily a reference to the *purpose* of Christ’s coming.
- To “fulfill” was to preserve and sustain the Law by interpreting it properly.

It is after verses 17-19 that Jesus proceeds to correct the teachings and practices of the Jews, so that the Law is properly interpreted, kept rather than violated, and therefore what the Law said originally Jesus preserved and sustained, so that the Law of Moses would be taught and kept properly.

#### 4. Is the Church under the law?

In the Church, however, it is clear that believers are not under the Law of Moses or any Principle of Law, and have been separated from the Law, having died to the Law, and are to live under the Principle of Grace.

Romans 6:14b (NASU; see also Romans 6:15)  
 ...for you are **not under law** but **under grace**.

### So what is the answer to the question?

#### 1. What is applicable to us in the Church?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NASU)

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

While we have been presenting that the Sermon on the Mount is directed to the Jews and in keeping with the anticipation of the coming kingdom, we do not want to convey that the Sermon on the Mount has nothing for us in the Church. There are indeed a number of ways in which the content of the Sermon on the Mount has direct application to believers in the Church = the Body of Christ:

- The character of God is always the same and God does not lie or change His mind (1 Samuel 15:29; Malachi 3:6; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 1:10-12; 6:18; 13:8; James 1:17).
- God is always the Creator & everything else has a creature relationship to Him (Genesis 1:1; Matthew 19:4; Mark 13:19; Acts 14:15; 17:24,24; Colossians 1:15) Once having fallen, all those “in Adam” have the same nature (Genesis 3:5; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:23; 5:14; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22; 42-49).
- Salvation for all those “in Adam” is always by faith in God’s provision (Genesis 22:1-14; Isaiah 12:2; Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 4:1-25; Galatians 3:6-9).

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- The earth that we walk is cursed until the time when all things are restored (Genesis 3:17-19; 5:29; Romans 8:18-25; Revelation 22:3). Though Israel has a different relationship to the kingdom that Christ spoke of in the Sermon on the Mount than we do, we also have a place in and a similar forward-looking time perspective on the coming Kingdom (Acts 28:23, 31; 2 Thessalonians 1:5).
- Like Israel, the entrance into the kingdom is not on the basis of something earthly, but is spiritual (Romans 9:6; 11:26; 14:7; James 2:5).
- While Israel was then under the Principle of Law, and we in the Church are under the Principle of Grace, we are going to find that the ethics, morals, and even some of the spiritual principles conveyed in the Sermon on the Mount have a lot in common with what is revealed for Church Age believers in the New Testament epistles (see Romans 12:8; 1 Corinthians 13:1-7). Why? Because God does not change. Is there any encouragement, for example, to simply repeat prayers again and again, in either the Sermon on the Mount or the epistles? Is there not encouragement to forgive in both the Sermon on the Mount and in the epistles?

## 2. The Law of Moses: getting it right

Jesus would take the Jews back to the original content of the Law of Moses, clarifying the original intent of the Law of Moses. He stripped away the various traditions and developments which changed the original content and the original intent of the Law of Moses, which was a law that started at the heart level – not just external compliance.

Jesus made clear that the original intent of the Law of Moses was exactly what God had in mind for the Jews, and that God intended it to start from the heart. The culture had come to see that the scribes and the Pharisees - the cultural heroes – were the ones who had the Law of Moses ‘down pat’. Most people saw these men as exemplary<sup>1</sup>. Jesus saw these men otherwise.

## 3. A new concept for the Jews: ‘Will I be *qualified* to enter the kingdom?’

Matthew 7:21-23 (NASU)

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'