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**HOW JESUS CHANGES SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS**

In both testaments, God cares about both our inner *and* material life. Yet Old Testament writers see the biggest threats as *external****:*** such as their enemies, uncleanness, and a loss of physical life or prosperity**.** Therefore, *they* expect that God’s embrace of obedient people will be most seen in replacing such fears with an also *external* **P**rosperity, **P**lace, **P**urity, and **P**ower.

**1.** *External* **Prosperity** (without suffering) is what God often promises. For ex: “If you obey Moses’ law, God *will* grant you abundant prosperity…you willalways prosper and be kept alive.” But if you disobey, “God will afflict *you* with diseases… blindness… poverty… attacks… disaster.” For it’s the wicked who *die* “because of their sins.” But the righteous “live long and prosperously… and *no* harm comes to *them*!”

(Dt 28,30; 6:24; Pr 11:19; 3:2; 12:21; Jer 13:22; Jos 1:7f; cf Jesus-Jn 9:2f; Lk 13:2f; 11:14-22)

But **Jesus reverses all this**, and turns us to deeper realities. A man is apt to “gain the world, yet forfeit his soul.” Thus he says, riches are in fact an enormous *barrier* to experiencing God’s kingdom. So rather than promise prosperity, he says, that kingdom’s blessings belong to the *poor*. And *his* promise is that “you *will* have tribulations,” *and* suffer *because* you’re righteous. For *it*’s a mark of being a *blessed* one! His promise is not long life. It’s that “you are put to death(!)… *yet* not a ‘hair' on your head will perish**.**” Thus “famine and sword” *can* kill us. For the real promise is, “*Nothing* separates us from God’s love!”

(Mt 16:26; 5:10; Lk 18:24f; 6:20,24; 21:16-18; Jn 16:33; Rom 8:31-8)

Israel had ample food in Egypt, and thus grumbled in the desert that God was no longer good! So only (*external*) ‘manna’ can convince them God is still good**:** “I will rain down bread from heaven” (Ex 16:1-5). So, Jesus’ disciples say that believing in him requires that he too provide such a physical sign. But *he* says, *no*, pursue the “food that endures,” the bread that assures that we “will never go hungry” (Jn 6:27-35).

“Pagans run after *things*.” Yet “*life* does not consist of possessions,” but in being “rich toward God.” For the only assured thing is “treasure in ‘heaven,’ where your *heart* is.” So our need is “seek the ‘purse’ that won’t wear out… the spring of water that quenches all thirst.” We see this promise is *not* external water on a hot day. This internal reality is about the “fruit of the Spirit,” as “we live by the Spirit.”

(Lk 12:30,15,21,33f ; Jn 4:14; Gal 5:22-25)

**2.** *An* *External* **Place** is also where one expects to find God’s presence. For the *Temple* in Jerusalem is seen as literally “the building where God lives forever,” and so is the place where God is to be found*.*

(Ps 26:8; 27:4f; 132:13f; Ex 29:43; 25:8; 1Kgs 8:13) But Jesus declares this temple will be destroyed, and that external places do not matter in pursuing God. For what God seeks is those who “worship in spirit and truth” (Mk 13:1f; Jn 4:20-24). Thus, his view implies, “*We* are the temple of the living God, the dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (2Cor 6:16; Eph 2:22; 3:17).

**3.** *External* **Purity** and Regulations were a key to being uncontaminated by the world, and before God. For ex.**:** It’s vital to ostracize everyone that’s externally “unclean” or unwashed, not even sharing space with “cripples, all with defects,” women on their “period” etc. (Num 5:1f; Lev 5:2f; 7:21; 12-15; 21:16-21; 22:3-6). But Jesus opposes & violates this, and urges *us* to embrace the very ones God’s law required be shunned!

(Lk 5:12f; 8:40-54; 14:13) Obeying external days is also required, with execution if one does ‘any’ provision on a Saturday of needs that can wait! Thus “All must stone a man to death found gathering sticks.” *But* Jesus defends his men’s similar actions, *and* regularly violates Sabbath, declaring it is a good day for important work. He admits, “I am *working*,for my Father is alwaysat work.” Since David also broke the Law to benefit others, Jesus can appeal to the basic needs of our humanity, and reason that Sabbath must be “made *for* man.”

(cf Num 15:32-36; Ex 31:12-17; 35:2f & Mt 12:1-14; Lk 13:10-17; Jn 5:10f,17; Mk 2:27).

Lacking the external mark of circumcision also “cuts one off from God.” It is an “eternal” requirement, even for foreigners (Gen 17:9-14,27; Ex 12:48f; Ps 119:152,160). Likewise, ingesting many external foods ‘defiled’ and kept them from God (Lev 11:1-47; 20:25,26; Dt 14). *But*, “Jesus declared all foods *clean*,” reasoning that, “*Nothing* entering from *out*side can defile them,” *or* affect their “heart!” (Mark 7:1-23; Lk 11:38-41; Acts 10:15)

He warned about emphasizing externals, because “God knows your heart… that *inside* you are full of hypocrisy & perversity.” So, “first clean the inside, and then the outside will be clean.” For “all evils come from *inside.”* He saw “good fruit” comes from a *good* source. So, the key is “what the heart is full of.” And our real need is ‘purity of *heart,*’ that transforms our *inner* drives (Lk 16:15; 6:43-45; 11:39-41;

Mt 23:25-28; 12:33-35,43-45; 7:16-20; 5:8; Mk 7:23)

He knew we need a deeper “righteousness than the Pharisees;” their focus is external taboos (like murder, adultery, illegal divorces: Mt 5:20-32). But to display the “light” the world needs to see (14-16), one needs to gain freedom from angry & destructive desires “in his *heart*” (22,28), and move toward *love* for all (43-47). Thus he exposes three destructive internal tendencies we need to manage: being driven by anxiety about our needs, being judgmental toward others, and distrusting how deeply we are loved by God (6:25-7:11).

God’s great law of love is already internally “written” on our hearts. Still, Jesus says, we need internal “*eyes* that are healthy” and let in the “full light” that removes the blind spots or “darkness” in us (Mt 6:22f). So he says, what we practice “in secret” is crucial. For “in your room,” we need still times of “prayer” and self-“attention,” that may help us to recognize more clearly all that is in us, *and* what is truly good.

(Mt 6:1-21; 7:3-5; Lk 11:34-36; 1Tim 1:5; Eph 1:18; Rom 2:15; Jn 1:4; Heb 8:10)

**4.** *External* **Power** over perverse people: In the O.T., external physical destruction was seen as a key, even in dealing with wayward family. So, *killing* your rebel child, a spouse or child teaching false ideas, those with a sexual sin, doing work on Saturday, etc., is seen as the divinely required solution.

(Dt 13:6-11; 17:2-7; 18:20; 21:18-21; 22:22-4; Lev 20:9-13; 24:10-23; 27:29; Ex 31:12-17; 22:20; 2Kgs 2:23f; 23:30; 2 Chr 15:13)

Violence and ethnic cleansing were also the way to obtain land, and overcome pagan opponents. Thus, “Show them *no* mercy… kill everything that breathes… women, children, and infants.” Outside the land Israel seized**,** women can be enslaved as “spoils” of war**:** “Kill all the boys, *but* save every virgin girl foryourselves!” In Canaan, failing to slaughter *every* life made one unholy, and exposed to pagan values.

(Dt 7:1f,6,16; 20:14-19; 2:34f; 3:6; 1Sam 15:3; 27:9; Jos 6:21; 8:24f; 10:28-40; 11:11-20; Num 31:17f,27; Ps 106:34)

In O.T. times, the best evidence your god was more powerful, was enabling your side’s violent power to “cut down all your enemies.” For “*God* trains hands for battle… to beat them as fine as dust.” So, it is crushing “the nations” that shows Israel is “the only nation God went out to redeem” (2Sam 7:9-23; 22:35,43).

Similarly: “Through *God* we trample…and destroy them… May a double-edged sword in Israel’s hands inflict vengeance…  *This* is the glory of God’s faithful people!” Thus this call for vengeance celebrates violent “hatred**:**” For “*Blessed* is the man who seizes your infants, and dashes them against the rocks.”

(Psalms 44:5; 18:39f; 2:9; 149:6-9; 137:8f; 139: 21f; 55:15; 109:9-12; 60:12)

The prophets later believed Assyria & Babylon demolished Israel “because they’d sinned” (2Kgs 17; Eze 1-24 Isa 1-9; Jer 7-10; 32:21-24). Thus, carefully obeying God’s laws should re-enable them to crush such enemies & again gloriously dominate the nations. God promises to “summon my warriors to carry out my wrath, their infants will be dashed to pieces… I will restore you… so that your oppressors will bow at your feet.”

(Eze 25-48; Jer 49:2; Joel 3; Nah; Isa 13:1-16; 54:7; 60:12,14)

Mary & Zechariah cite this theme**:** God will “rescue us from the hand of our enemies… all who hate us… help Israel… bring down rulers from their thrones… and give Messiah the throne of our father, David.” (Lk 1:52-54,71,74,32) The O.T. achieved such victory by violence, and *Messiah* was to be a man like David whose military aptitude had liberated them (2 Sam 7). So, Jews were bound to expect this coming anointed king would again raise an army, and powerfully exterminate their own day’s pagan oppressor: Rome.

But Jesus *reverses* the O.T.’s way of seeking deliverance from evil. He never calls his followers to kill, but insists on rejecting violence toward our enemies. Jesus warns that rejecting his “path of peace” is what will “dash you to the ground.” For those “who draw the sword will *die* by it.” Thus, he *rebukes* them when they use a weapon, *or* cite Elijah’s way to “destroy” God’s enemies by “fire” (Matt 26:51-56;

Lk 1:79; 19:41-44; 9:51-56; cf 1Kgs 18:38-40; 2 Kgs 1:10).

Jesus fulfills Isaiah’s promise to “set the oppressed free.” *But*, he omits its’ “vengeance” on enemies, and infuriates Israel by saying he will *heal* their enemies, just as Elijah healed Naaman, a pagan general. As the *Passover*’s lamb, he is promising the Exodus’ theme of freedom. *Yet* he omits that *that* victory depended upon killing the nations. For he sees that the real enemy we need to overcome is *not* external “flesh & blood,” but the dark *internal* powers of sin and the Evil One (Isa 61:1f; Lk 4:16-30; 22:7-20; 12:4; Mt 6:13;

Jn 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7; Eph 6:12).

His only action toward the ‘Canaanites’ that Israel sought to annihilate, was to show “mercy” (Lk 15:21-28).

Israel wants “to make him king by force.” Yet Jesus will say, no “swords” were needed to capture him. Because, “*If* my kingdom were of this *world*, my servants would fight… but my kingdom is *not*!” And the apostles see him rejecting swords, even for self-defense. For despite many threats, they and Jesus’ church for centuries refused all violence, and followed Jesus’ call to lay down their lives. (Jn 6:15; 18:36;

Lk 26:52)

Israel boasted in vengeance and seizing their enemies’ wealth (Isa 61:2,5f). And God’s presence provided the ability to *destroy* the nations (Deut 31:1-5; 7:1f). But now Jesus claims Israel’s mission is dying to self, and *blessing* the nations with salvation (Mt 28:19f). He insists the only way to “be children of the Father” who is merciful, is to “love enemies who persecute you.” For only by imitating the *God* who is “kind to the wicked,” “will you be children of the Most High.” For “peacemakers” are God’s true children, and it is “the ‘gentle’ who will inherit the earth.” (Lk 6:27-35; 11:4; Mt 5:5-9, 38-48)

In the O.T., “love” was a command *only* toward neighbor Israelites (Lev 19:17f). *Enemies* are destroyed. So Jesus challenges this by saying, “You’ve *heard*, love your neighbor and hate your enemy. *But* ***I*** say, love your *enemies*, do good to them.” They’d heard in Scripture, “an eye for an eye,” but Jesus retorts, “***I*** tell you, do *not* resist evil ones,” but “turn the other cheek, forgiving everyone who sins against us.” For “sinners love those who love them.” But the test of following God’s way is to return good for evil.

Jesus truly redefined how God’s new Davidic king wins the battle that defeats evil. Instead of a warrior-king who enables them to shed their enemies’ blood, the need is for a servant who lets enemies shed *his* blood. In absorbing the worst that evil and Rome could do, Jesus exposed the violence that we rely on to deal with threats. And now we most see God, not in violent conquest, but in Jesus, and him crucified! Indeed, we see that it is through apparent weakness that God’s victory is truly won.

And the cross’ way of defeating evil is *not* only for Jesus, but shows how *we* are to overcome. For we too are to follow his “example,” take up our cross & lay down *our* life. Such “losing our life to save it” *looks* like defeat! But the real key to overcoming our enemies, as well as the evil in us, is to follow *Jesus*’ way of love & mercy, and “overcome evil with good” (Lk 9:23f; 1Pet 2:21; 2Cor 4:10f; Col 1:24; Rom 12:21).

**Conclusion** The Spirit’s work *in* us is more important than seeking control of our external world. And the fruit of this indwelling Spirit is *love*. Thus on each issue, we find Jesus chose an interpretation that leads to “*love* for God and neighbor.” Seeing the Law as “made for man” implies, “*all* the Law and Prophets (their Bible!) *hangs* on this” love. “So, in *every*thing, do to others what you’d have them do to you; for this *sums up*” the Scripture. Thus, “*no* command” is as “important,” since God’s “entire Law is fulfilled in this one command.” (Mk 2:27; 12:31,33; Mt 22:36-40; 7:12; 23:23f; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8; 1Pet 4:8; 1Jn 3:11-4:21)