

Six Contrasts in Interpreting the Law (Mt 5:21-48)

Law	Type	Pharisees	Jesus
Murder (21-26)	Command	Restrict to the Act	Extend to thoughts
Adultery (27-30)	Command	Restrict to the Act	Extend to thoughts
Divorce (31-32)	Permission	Extend for nearly any cause	Restrict to adultery
Oaths (33-37)	Command	Restrict to only certain promises	Extend to yes/no
Retaliation (38-42)	Permission	Extend to “just” Causes	Restrict to nothing
Love (43-48)	Command	Restrict to neighbors	Extend to enemies

1. Each of these six quotes appears to come from the law. However, when we get to the sixth, “love your neighbor and hate your enemy,” we can find the first part in Lev. 19:18, but this second half is not anywhere in the O.T. In addition, v. 31 is an interpretive paraphrase of Deut. 24:1, 3.
2. Jesus introductory formula, “You have heard that it was said (27, 38, 43) to men of old (21, 33)” aligns better with oral teaching than with the written word, which is normally introduced by “it is written.”
3. According to the context (17-20), Jesus affirms verbal inspiration of the text, while he criticizes the Pharisaic neglect of it. The following discussion naturally flows from Pharisaic misinterpretation.
4. Jesus elsewhere submits to the written word, yet is iconoclastic with oral traditions which supercede the word and subvert mercy.