

Summary

In one of the most sobering warnings in Scripture, Jesus says, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7:23). But what did He mean by "lawlessness"? Were these people never saved? Or were they once believers who fell away?

In this message, we dive deep into the meaning of lawlessness, what it means to practice sin, how Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount reveal the true intent of God's moral law, and what Jesus meant by "I never knew you."

This message explains the difference between struggling with sin and practicing it, how love fulfills God's moral law, and why obedience proves true faith.

If you've ever wrestled with the meaning of Jesus' warning in Matthew 7:21–23, this teaching will help bring clarity and conviction—and point you to the righteousness that comes from a transformed heart.

Why This Series Is Important

a) An Influx of Content

- I received a text this week asking about a teacher.
- YouTube and social media feeds inundated with teaching and prophecies.
- Some good and truthful.
- Others unrighteous and promote false teachings or heresies.

b) My Responsibility as a Shepherd

- Equip you to discern false prophets and teachers.
- Help you to judge rightly—without becoming cynical or dishonoring true messengers of God.
- Train you how to discern, guarding against both naivety and a critical, cynical attitude.

c) Going Deep and Slow

- This series is going deep into Matthew 7:15-23, 2 Peter 2, and Jude 1.
- This will thoroughly equip you to discern the true from the false.

Introduction

a) Matthew 7:21–23

21 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."

b) Examine Three Key Phrases

- “Lawlessness”
- “Practice”
- “I never knew you”

c) Knowing the True Helps Discern the False

- Bank tellers know to spot counterfeit you get familiar with the real.
- Today's message not a deviation—training you in the real so you can spot the false.
- There's a *massive* difference between a false prophecy and false prophet.
 - *True prophet, incorrect word:* A person can give a wrong word but still be right in character, lifestyle, focus, and proclamation.
 - *False prophet, right word:* A person can give a right word but be wrong in character, lifestyle, focus, and proclamation.

What Is Lawlessness?

a) Does Lawlessness Mean Breaking the Mosaic Law?

- Some interpret “lawlessness” (*anomia*) as not obeying the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Law, including ceremonial and dietary laws.
- Example: I had a conversation with someone who believed Christians must keep the Sabbath, or risk going to hell.
- My response: The Sabbath was a sign of the Mosaic Covenant, not a requirement under the new covenant.
- Conclusion: This interpretation does not align with the New Testament view of the law fulfilled in Christ.

The Law and Its Purpose

a) Categories of the Mosaic Law

- *Moral Law* – Summarized in the Ten Commandments; reflects God's eternal righteousness and remains universally binding.
- *Civil Law* – Governed Israel's justice system; ceased with Israel's destruction in 135 AD.
- *Ceremonial Law* – Foreshadowed Christ's redemptive work; fulfilled in Him.
- *Dietary Laws* – Set Israel apart; declared obsolete by Jesus (Mark 7:18–23).

b) Jesus Fulfilled the Law (Matt. 5:17)

- *Moral Law:* Obeyed it perfectly and revealed its heart-level intent.

- *Ceremonial Law*: Replaced by His sacrificial death; fulfilled the feasts and rituals.
- *Purpose*: To lead people to Christ by exposing sin (Gal. 3:24).

d) Christ is the “end” (*telos*) of the law (Rom. 10:4):

- Ended the law as a system of righteousness for justification and sanctification.
- Fulfilled its purpose—pointing to faith in Christ.
- Embodied its intent—righteousness available through Him.

e) The Moral Law Remains (Matt. 5:18)

- Reflects God’s eternal righteousness and universal standard for all people for all time.
- Now inscribed on believers’ hearts (Jer. 31:33).

Lawlessness Is Disobedience to Christ’s Words

a) Connected to the Sermon on the Mount

- Jesus ties lawlessness to ignoring His words: “You who practice lawlessness. Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them” (Matt. 7:23–24).
- The Sermon on the Mount reveals:
 - God’s righteousness nature.
 - The true intent of the moral law.
 - The values and culture of God’s kingdom.

b) Foundation Metaphor

- Wise: Obeys Christ’s words = life built on rock.
- Foolish: Ignores His words = life built on sand.

Lawlessness Is Rejecting Christ’s Authority

a) Outward Ministry vs. Inward Rebellion

- They used His name but disobeyed His commands in the Sermon on the Mount.
- Exercised spiritual power without moral transformation and submission to His lordship.
- Appeared godly but lived in rebellion.
- Rejected Christ by rejecting His words.
- Lived in opposition to God’s kingdom values.

b) Lordship Demonstrated By Obedience

- Luke 6:46 – “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”

- Calling Jesus “Lord” is meaningless without obedience.
- If Jesus is not Lord of all then He’s not lord at all.

c) Lawlessness = Rejection of God

- Rejects God’s righteousness and moral law.
- Rejects Christ Himself.

Understanding the Sermon on the Mount

a) Perspectives of the Sermon on the Mount

- The moral and spiritual framework of the kingdom.
- To the new covenant what Mount Sinai was to the old covenant.
 - Moses received the law; Jesus reveals its true meaning.
- God’s moral law no longer just external; it’s now written on our hearts (Jer. 31:33).
- The constitution of the kingdom of God.

b) Not Requirements for Salvation, but the Expectations for the Saved

- A vision of transformed righteousness—not external legalism.
- A call to embody God's character in daily life.

c) Requires Regeneration to Obey

- The Sermon on the Mount is the law written on the heart.
- The Sermon on the Mount is impossible to keep without justification, regeneration, and the empowerment of the indwelling Spirit.
- Only Christ who obeyed the law perfectly for us can obey it perfectly in us.
- The new covenant changes the way we obey.
 - From willpower, behavior modification, and discipline
 - To heart desires transformed by grace.

The Sermon on the Mount and God’s Moral Law

a) The Beatitudes (Matt. 5:1–12) – The Character of Kingdom Citizens

- Poor in spirit → Humility before God.
- Mourning → Grieving over sin.
- Meekness → Surrendering self-will.
- Hungering for righteousness → Desiring holiness.

- Merciful → Extending mercy.
- Pure in heart → Internal holiness.
- Peacemakers → Promoting reconciliation.
- Persecuted → Suffering for righteousness.

b) Jesus Reveals the Law's True Intent (Matt. 5:17–48)

- Murder → Hatred is sin.
- Adultery → Lust is sin.
- Divorce → Upholding God's design for marriage and revealing God's faithfulness.
- Oaths → Integrity should be natural.
- Retaliation → The kingdom ethic is grace.
- Loving enemies → True righteousness extends love.

c) Love Fulfills the Law (Matt. 5:48)

- *Teleios* = mature, complete.
- God's completion is shown in impartial love.
- Our hearts must be fully aligned with God's nature.
- The call to be mature and complete is a call to obey Jesus' words in this sermon, which reflects God's nature—especially His love.
- We fulfill the law by loving as God does (Matt. 22:37–40).
- True obedience flows from a heart transformed by grace.

d) Practicing True Righteousness (Matt. 6:1–18)

- Giving → Done in secret.
- Prayer → Private and sincere communion with God.
- Fasting → Personal devotion, not performance.

d) Total Devotion to God (Matt. 6:19–24)

- Store treasures in heaven.
- The eye is the lamp → What we focus on shapes our hearts.
- Divided loyalties corrupt the heart.
- Cannot serve both God and money.

- e) Seeking God's Kingdom First (Matt. 6:25–34)
 - Trust God's provision.
 - Anxiety reflects misplaced priorities.
 - Seek first His kingdom and righteousness.
- f) Righteous Judgment (Matt. 7:1–6)
 - Judge with humility and self-examination.
 - Remove your own sin first.
 - Discernment, not condemnation.
- g) The Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12) – The Essence of Righteousness
 - Mirrors God's character.
 - Transforms relationships.
 - Sums up the law and the prophets.

Obedience Demonstrates True Faith

The Sermon on the Mount calls us to:

- Cultivate kingdom character (Beatitudes).
- Live out the moral law from the heart.
- Practice righteousness to please God.
- Maintain undivided loyalty.
- Trust God and seek His kingdom first.
- Judge righteously and humbly.
- Love others with active righteousness.

What Does It Mean to Practice Lawlessness?

- a) Definition and Greek Word
 - *Ergazomai* = to engage in ongoing, habitual action.
 - Lawlessness = persistent, unrepentant rebellion.
 - Embracing sin and excusing it—not fighting it.
- b) Paul's Warning (Gal. 5:19–21)
 - Practicing sin as a lifestyle = forfeiting the kingdom.

c) Football Analogy

- Athletes build their lives around the game.
- Lawless people build their lives around sin with equal intensity.
- Not occasional stumbling—but committed disobedience.

d) Practicing Lawlessness Involves:

- Persistently ignoring Christ's commands.
- Living in unrepentant sin.
- Claiming Jesus as Lord but refusing submission.
- Prioritizing gifts over heart change.
- Relying on experiences over transformation.

e) Summary

- It's not about struggling with sin—it's about embracing it.
- A life built on sand collapses under judgment.

What Does "I Never Knew You" Mean?

a) *Ginōskō*

- Means to know intimately, relationally.
- Not just intellectual knowledge—but covenantal, personal relationship.
- Used in both Hebrew (*yada*) and Greek contexts for deep relational knowing.

b) Aorist Tense

- "I never knew you" = never at any point had a relationship.
- Jesus is not saying, "I once knew you but no longer do."

c) Evidence of Past Relationship

- They cast out demons in Jesus' name—something only believers with spiritual authority can do (see Acts 19:15).
- Suggests these were once genuine believers—now apostates.

d) New Testament Warnings

- 2 Tim. 2:12 – "If we deny Him, He also will deny us."
- Luke 12:9 – "He who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God."
- Titus 1:16 – "They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him."

e) Denial Illustrated by Peter

- Peter denied Jesus verbally: "I do not know the man."
- These false prophets denied Him by their lives.
- Just as Peter denied Christ, Jesus will deny those who reject Him by how they live.

f) Final Summary

- These false prophets were apostates:
 - Once gifted and called by God.
 - Over time, they drifted and hardened their hearts.
 - Because gifts and callings are irrevocable, they could still operate in their gifts while inwardly in defiance.
 - They rejected Christ's authority, and in turn, He denied knowing them.
 - They did not enter the kingdom of heaven.