

“The Christian and the Law”

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Scriptural Foundation: Matthew 5:17-20, NIV

The Fulfillment of the Law

¹⁷ *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

The word that sums up the whole of Christian living is the word “righteousness”. Jesus begins The Sermon on the Mount with eight characteristics that mark the character of the followers of Jesus. The fourth trait that Jesus mentions refers to righteousness, and He says,

⁶ *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”*

This trait of righteousness so permeates the everyday life of the Christian that Jesus will conclude His list of eight descriptions this way, in Verse 10,

¹⁰ *“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness...”*

Jesus is assuming that our righteousness will so define our lives that the fallen world around us will, first, take notice of this righteousness in our lives, and then will reject us as they reject the righteousness that God lays out before them. So, I ask this question, “Are we, as believers, known for our righteousness that the world will look at the lives of those within Jesus' church and say, ‘Those people think differently from us. Those people talk, those people respond, those people behave completely different from us.’” Is that the observation of the world around us as they gaze through the windows of the church?

Recently, World Magazine published an article entitled, “Sex and the Evangelical Teen”. This article cites a recent study that casts a rather discouraging cloud over the Christian and practical righteousness. Let me share a part of this article with you.

“There is evidence that evangelical teenagers on the whole may be more sexually immoral than non-Christians. Statistically, evangelical teens tend to have sex, first, at a younger age compared to liberal Protestants, and young evangelicals are far more likely to have had three or more sexual partners than non-evangelicals.” These findings by sociologist by the name of Mark Regnerus, who himself is a believer and who wrote a book entitled, “Forbidden Fruit”¹. This World Magazine article goes on to editorialize, “We can blame the culture. Regnerus gives evidence that correlates the sexual activity in the school that Christian kids go to with their own behavior. So, peer pressure is real and Christian teenagers are not immune. But, might we also blame the culture of the church. Not only because so many of today’s evangelical churches follow the path of cultural conformity as a way to grow bigger and bigger, but it goes deeper than that. Churches used to teach and exemplify self-control, the necessity of keeping one’s emotions in check, the discipline of self-denial, and the mortification of the flesh. Today the typical evangelical church, in its example and practice, cultivates ‘letting go’, emotionalism, self-fulfillment, and an odd religious sensuality. The Bible is utterly realistic about the weakness of our fallen flesh. The Law alone, and external restrictions, cannot make anyone righteous. We need Christ for that.”

¹ Oxford Press, 2007

It appears as though the evangelical and born-again teenagers surveyed by this sociologist themselves need to hear the Gospel. They need not only to be able to call themselves born-again, but truly be transformed by God's grace through faith.

If you are a teenager in the church today, I do not cite this study to condemn you as the unrighteous generation among us. No, in today's church, every generation, I believe, is falling woefully short of God's intention for practical righteousness. Each one of us needs to be awakened to our great need for God's righteousness to fill our daily lives. We cannot fill our lives with God's true righteousness through self-effort, through self-determination, or through hard work. No, we need God to transform us by the power of the Gospel at work in us. We are so easily deceived and we deceive ourselves concerning the condition of our heart. We look around at others and see how others are missing the mark of God's righteousness and we fail to see our own failings, our own frailty, and our own feebleness. We believe, then, that we are truly righteous before God's sight.

God has a word for us today in Matthew 5. It is a loving word, but it is a word that exhorts us to pursue practical righteousness, true righteousness, God's righteousness, not the righteousness that the religious community sets before us that is external and that is driven by restrictions and regulations, but a righteousness that pertains to our heart and to the very inner nature of our being.

Jesus, in these four verses, reveals four precious truths that enable us to be filled with God's righteousness. The first is that God's righteousness anticipates an eternal reward. The second truth concerns itself with little commands. The third is that God's righteousness grows strong through the teaching of the truth. The last principle that Jesus unveils, perhaps the most profound and the most important, is that God's righteousness is necessary to enter Heaven.

We want to look at the first truth: God's righteousness anticipates an eternal reward. In the prior study we learned of Jesus' relationship to the Law. In that there were two big ideas. First, the Old Testament Scriptures were fulfilled, not abolished, by Jesus. That is to say, everything in the Old Testament Scriptures point to Jesus and were completed in Him, in His life, in His work upon the cross, and in His resurrection, ascension, and second coming. The dietary laws, the sacrifices, the ritual cleansings, the holy days, and the moral law code all found their end, completion, and fulfillment in Jesus. When we read the Old Testament it is important to read with a view to seeing Jesus on the pages, for He is there.

Secondly, we learned that Jesus holds an incredibly high and lofty view of Scripture. In Verse 18, we read Jesus telling us the truth,

¹⁸ "...not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."

In this Jesus is teaching us that all the Scriptures are from God and they carry the weight of His authority, so that there is not one part, not a sentence, not a word, not even a part of a word that is in error or that does not have the full weight of God's authority pressing down upon it. Jesus' view of Scripture is lofty.

We have to ask the question, "How is it that the Old Testament Scriptures connect this principle that righteousness and eternal reward go hand-in-hand and that they are connected together? Jesus answers this for us in Verse 19,

¹⁹ "Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus is referencing a group of people, all of whom, in this particular group, enter into Heaven. In Verse 20, He is going to mention another group and that is a group of those who do not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Of those who enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, there is a difference of degree. There will be those who will be called "least" and there will be those who will be called "greatest". Jesus, throughout this Sermon, is going to present before the believer this idea of rewards and this idea of God's pleasure and delight in offering His people a glorious reward for their faith and their sincerity in following Him by grace through faith.

We see this has been true throughout the Old Testament; that this is what God has done from the beginning of time. For instance, Abraham, we remember in Genesis 12, God comes to Abram and says,

¹ ...Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."

What would cause a person to be willing to follow God with that kind of commandment: to leave your country, to leave your family, and to leave your home? Everything in life is settled at this point. You have a nice job, a nice home, a wife, an extended family, and everything is set, and God tells you, "Leave it all and go to the place I will show you." God goes on to say,

² "(Abram) I will bless you...³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." ⁴ So Abram left...

On the basis of the blessings that God promised, Abram left. Why did Abraham follow God and pursue righteousness, a righteousness that believed God and that had the best of life itself? Why did Abraham do that in the face of such great cost? The New Testament gives us an explanation and that explanation is found in Hebrews 11,

⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Abraham acted in true righteousness and he went which is the difficult aspect of the entire command. He did not know where he was supposed to go; he was just told to "leave" from a place where he used to be around family who respected him and who loved him. Abraham had lived in a nice home and now this went on for at least the third generation. Abraham was looking for God to fulfill the promises of eternal reward and that is why he obeyed.

That is why any of us will pursue a life of true righteousness; it is through anticipating the eternal reward that God has laid out before us. Hebrews 11 tells us,

⁶ ...without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that (God) exists and that (God) rewards those who (diligently) seek (after) him.

If we are to be righteousness, we must look toward the reward that God sets in front of us. We must crave and long for this reward and we must not let it out of our sight. Someone may ask the question, "This sounds incredibly selfish – to look after our own reward as the motivation for our life. Isn't that selfish?" I will say, "No," and give you three reasons. First, God Himself sets the reward before us as a great goal and as a lofty aspiration.

If God sets something before us cannot we consider that something will be immensely profitable to our soul, will be helpful to the progress of our life, the progress of our faith, and the progress of our worship and enjoyment of God Himself? Yet, Jesus, over and over again, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, places before His Disciples this idea of an eternal reward He wants them to grab onto. From the very beginning, in the Beatitudes, He says,

³ *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

He is saying that here is the reward that is going to be laid out for all of those who recognize that they do not have the righteousness that they need in order to be accepted by God and thus begin to mourn over their lack of righteousness and begin to pursue its faith, the Source of righteousness. In Verse 12, after talking about the blessing of those who are persecuted, He says,

¹² *"Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven..."*

In Matthew 6, Jesus continues this theme,

¹ *"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven."*

Then He goes on to talk about three issues of the Christian life: giving, praying, and fasting. He says to them, "If you give in secret your Heavenly Father will see you and reward you.² If you pray in secret your Heavenly Father will see you and will reward you.³ If you fast in secret your Heavenly Father will see you and will reward you.⁴" Each time He is giving them a picture of practical righteousness and the motivation, "Your Father will see you and He will reward you," and that is a really good thing.

Then, most clear of all is Matthew 6,

¹⁹ *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

This is the only other option that a person has: we will seek out treasure that is of a temporal nature or treasure that is of an eternal nature, but God has set in our heart the pursuit of treasure and it will either be of foolish treasure which is temporary and corrupting to the soul or it will be God exalting treasure which is eternal and which brings life and strength to our soul and to our relationship with Him. Verse 20 is a command and we must understand that the pursuit of the eternal reward whereby, if we win, another person loses. That is one of the reasons why it is not selfish. In fact, when we win the treasure and when we receive the reward, our pursuit of the reward and our receiving of that reward causes others in the family of God to progress, also, along with us, because our sights upon the reward causes others to see the reward and desire it as well. It is the most unselfish thing we can do: to pursue this treasure.

Furthermore, it is not selfish to pursue eternal reward because Jesus set this example for us. In Hebrews 12, we see our focus,

² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross...

For the eternal reward that was set before Him of sharing in the Father's Glory and receiving back the glory that was rightfully His as God come in the flesh, He despised the shame and He submitted to the Father's will.

The last reason why the pursuit of the eternal reward is not selfish, and perhaps the most important, is by looking to our eternal reward we glorify God because our reward is, first, all of His grace. Our reward is not of merit. We do not "earn" rewards. Anything we would receive is completely of God's gracious goodness, so every reward we might possibly be able to receive in eternity goes back to praise unto God, "God, you are such an awesomely gracious God. I came to you as a beggar and I came to you with nothing in my hands to bring to you that could merit anything in order to receive back a return for it, but you gave and you gave and you gave."

Furthermore, not only is this eternal reward always by grace, but our eternal reward is connected to God's person. This is the reason why, in the Beatitudes, Jesus would say,

⁸ *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."*

One of the great aspects of our eternal reward is that God is connected to this and that there will be an enjoyment of God that will surpass all ability to comprehend as a result of the reward that God provides for us, and that is what we pursue.

Let me use a rather weak, human analogy to attempt to help us understand. Image that you have four children and you care about the future of these four children, yet, you realize that one of the weaknesses in each of these children is that

² Matthew 6:4

³ Matthew 6:6

⁴ Matthew 6:17-18

they really do not like to read. You recognize that reading is an important skill for their education and for opportunities in the future. You come to them and say, “I have a prospect for you this school year. I have set aside some family resources for the purpose of rewarding you richly if you will read these ten books. If you read these ten books we will take a trip to one of the most fantastic places on this planet and we will do all of the fun things you could ever possibly imagine and we will do them together. You will be with me and your mom and we will do them as a family.” Imagine, if your children would say to you, after you have unfolded this plan and you are all excited about this plan; it is a gracious plan, but they say, “Dad, I am not really excited about that because if I were excited I would be selfish.” Their reading does not merit such a trip. Their reading only connects them to your graciousness and your willingness to give, but can you see how disappointed you would be. Here you are offering such a generous, gracious reward and now they are throwing it back, almost with contempt, in your face. You explain, “No, it is not being selfish. It is not as though only one of you is going to receive this reward; all of you can receive it together. We will do this as a family.” Then they say, “Dad, I don’t really believe you. I think that you are going to have us read these books and at the end there won’t be that big of a trip. It will probably be to McDonalds!” But, you say, “No, when I promise you something it really is true. Believe it, if I say that it is more wonderful than you can ever possibly imagine, you can believe it and trust that it is true.” One of them responds, “Well, dad, quite frankly we would rather spend the time with our friends. We really don’t like to spend time with you and mom anymore.”

Do you see why pursuing God’s reward is a Christ-exalting thing? If we value Christ we will value His reward. As we value His reward we will value Him all the more because His person is connected to the reward that He offers us.

Jesus would say to us, in Matthew 5:19, that there will be those who will be called “least” in the Kingdom of Heaven and there will be those who will be called “great”. What makes this distinction between groups of believers? It is righteousness.

The second truth is that God’s righteousness concerns itself with little commands. He speaks, in Verse 19, of the “least of these commands”. What is He referring to? He is, first, acknowledging that some parts of the Law of God are heavier than other parts in terms of the destruction that disobedience can bring in the life of a person, but He is also acknowledging that every part of the Law is from God, and thus carries the authority of God equally with it. He says, “Those who disobey the least parts of these commandments, and teach others to do the same...”, when He speaks of the least of these Commandments we gain an understanding of what He means through the words that follow. He is going to give us six illustrations of commandments that religious people in His day considered to be “matters of insignificance”.

He begins with the teaching that the Pharisees gave and He ends with His application and the importance of “little things” and of “little commands”. For instance, in Verse 21, He uses the illustration of the Commandment against murder. We would all say that is a very big Commandment, “Thou shall not murder. That is what you have heard.” Then He says, “But I say to you” and He speaks of the little things, “anyone who gets angry with his brother and calls him a name...”, and it isn’t even of the worst of names. It is on the list of mild names, “you fool”, that could be called to another person in anger.

In Jesus day, and I believe it is true in our own, most people would consider that not to be a real significant matter for the soul. If I were to ask for a show of hands of those of you who have gotten angry, even in the past week, and said something disrespectful to another person, how many of us would have to raise our hand in admission and say, “Yes, I did that!” Now we ask, how many of us thought of that as a big thing and a very serious matter that is significant to the health of our soul? Or, did we just let it pass by and say, “I got a little angry. Maybe I should not have said it. Maybe they didn’t deserve that,” and just walked right on by that? Jesus says that those who do this are endanger of Hell. It is the little things that rob us of God’s righteousness.

He also uses the illustration, “Thou shall not commit adultery.”⁵ That is a big thing, but if you have an impure thought about another person in your head, that endangers your soul.

Those who are interested in pursuing God’s righteousness understand that the little commands are really important. There are no such things as “little white lies” or “acceptable levels of bitterness or anger”. There is no reasonable amount of impure thoughts or corrupt communication. In this, God’s Word is a huge challenge to us because the truth

⁵ Matthew 5:28-28

of the matter is we tend to accept certain kinds of sins and certain amounts of sins in our lives and consider them not to be very serious at all.

Satan is constantly looking for a foothold. That is all he needs and once he finds it he makes a huge inroad into a person's life to bring grave corruption. If we do not attend to the little things, we will find great destruction to our soul and we will find ourselves, as Jesus says, in danger of Hell itself.

Recently, my house had a leaky faucet. Finally, I decided to try my hand at attending to it and in the middle of it I had to "phone a friend". As I cleaned out the stuff that was underneath the sink, I discovered that not only was this faucet leaking at the top it was also leaking underneath, and evidently had been for some time – drip, drip, drip. Underneath the sink there is a half-inch thick piece of plywood, and do you know that there was a hole in that plywood about one inch by one inch because of the little things – drip, drip, drip. How long? I do not know; maybe a year or a year and one-half. I can tell you that it corrupted a hole out of a board of wood one-half inch thick.

Friends, it is the little things and God tells us that true righteousness concerns itself with little commandments, so we learn to pray, "Lord, search us." We are so prone to self-deception that we cannot even trust ourselves to identify the little sins, the things, that when we practice them, no one else around us will confront us. Our culture will not confront us; they will even laugh if they hear that we are concerned about it. Our Christian friends will not even confront us because they realize that those things are evident in their lives also and they are too little to bring up. Not even in the church will we hardly be confronted, so if we are to be confronted to identify our little sins, it will be because we open up the Book and say, "God, teach me wonderful things out of your Law. Search me through the Spirit as I open up the Word and know me and see if there are any wicked ways in me, and if there is, help me to see that so that I can live a life of righteousness. Lead me in the way of everlasting." That is the passion of one who is on a path toward righteousness.

The third truth is that our righteousness is strengthened through the teaching of the Word. Not only does Jesus talk about those practicing disobedience, but also about those teaching others about disobedience: "...these will be called the least." But, on the contrary side, the positive side, if we practice and we teach others to follow God in true righteousness then we will be "called great". However, the emphasis that Jesus makes is on "teaching". He wants us to understand that teaching has great influence over practical, everyday life, and that teaching sound doctrine makes a huge difference in our pursuit of practical righteousness. Our understanding of the truth and our ability to help others to understand the truth provides for them a foundation upon which to build their lives and to grow in true holiness and true righteousness.

Jesus is going to spend the rest of the chapter confronting the false teaching of the Pharisees and of the teachers of the Law. He is going to say, "You have heard that it was said..." He makes that statement six times: in Verse 21, Verse 27, Verse 31, Verse 33, Verse 38, and Verse 43. We know that it is not just that He is pointing to the Old Testament Scriptures, but He is pointing to the application of the teaching of the Pharisees in regards to the Scriptures, particularly because of Verse 43, when he says, using the same pattern,

⁴³ *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'"*

This is the teaching that the Pharisees were giving, "You have to love your neighbor, but it is okay to hate your enemies." This teaching was corrupting the people who were living in Israel and it was moving them away from righteousness. Jesus is emphasizing the influence of the teaching of sound doctrine upon the man's and the woman's and the child's heart in regard to righteousness.

Later, in Chapter 7, Jesus is going to say,

¹⁵ *"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are (like) wolves (seeking to devour you)."*

It is interesting that all through Scripture this emphasis upon the teaching of sound doctrine, and it is not just so that we can take a theology test at the End of Time and have all of the right answers, but it is because ideas have consequences and truth really does matter to life. It matters in our ability to follow God; that without a firm foundation of truth of sound doctrine upon which to rest our lives, temptation can come in and easily sway us and

deceive us so as to get off of the path, which God has marked out for us, that leads to blessing. I believe that this is one of the grave matters facing the church; that we have left the teaching, the focus, of God's Word.

Not only is this a precept of Scripture, but it is also revealed in study after study. I mentioned earlier of the study of the sociologist, Mark Regnerus. One bit of good news that came from the study is this: of those surveyed, sixteen percent of the evangelical Christian teens whom he surveyed identified themselves as, first, understanding the Scriptures and, second, being very committed to what they believe. Of that sixteen percent who understood the Scriptures and who were committed to what they believe, there was a remarkable difference in their lifestyle and behavior from the rest of the group.

There was another study done, in 2005, by a man by the name of Ron Sider which also bears this out. Listen to what this study revealed, "Superficial, non-doctrinal, non-serious Christians sin pretty much like the world, but more serious, more doctrinally-oriented Christians lead lives that are morally distinct." Do not misunderstand, it is possible to be rooted in sound doctrine and still sin, but the teaching of God's Word has a profound affect. Sider goes on to say, "These people believe that the Bible is the moral standard and that absolute moral truth exists and are conveyed through the Bible." That is the people who give evidence of transformed lives of different kinds of behavior. "All these people who were in this category believed that God is an all-knowing and powerful creator; that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life; that Satan is real; that salvation is a free gift and not something that we can earn; that every Christian has a personal responsibility to evangelize; and that the Bible is totally accurate in all that it teaches."

Those who had a biblical world-view had a remarkable contrast in their lives from the lives of those in the world around them. For instance, they were nine times more likely to avoid adult-only material on the Internet. They were twice as likely not to watch a movie specifically because of its bad content. Forty-nine percent of that group were giving themselves to the service of the poor and needy at least one hour per week, as opposed to only twenty-nine percent of believers who did not have a biblical world-view and who were not well taught. Sider's conclusion is, "The findings on the different behaviors of Christians with a biblical world-view underline the importance of theology. Biblical orthodoxy does matter. One important way to end the scandal of contemporary Christian behavior is to work and pray fervently for the growth of orthodox, theological belief in our churches."

Yes, we pray, but we also do the work of teaching. Parents, here is a huge application if we believe this to be true: sound biblical truth influences and affects profoundly the behavior of our children. What would that drive us toward? Would not that drive us, a dads, to open up the Scriptures and say, "The one thing I need to do is to teach my children the truths regarding who God is, regarding His grace and plan of redemption, regarding the future, regarding righteousness, regarding the glory of Jesus, regarding the meaning of the cross, regarding the glory of the resurrection, and regarding all these things that the Bible teaches, because those things will matter.

Furthermore, it causes churches, if we believe this, to give up on the entertainment model, simply to draw more and more people in whether it is kids or adults, and to help children, teenagers, and adults grow to reflect the righteousness of God and to enjoy the blessings of God through that righteousness, we must teach them. We have to abandon the entertainment model.

Parents, I want to encourage you on this. Many times, by the time children get to be in junior high and senior high school, parents begin to have a "hands off" approach to the youth ministries their children are involved in. Many times, in an innocent and unthinking way, they consider that as long as their children are not going to a meeting that is held by a cult and as long as the children enjoy it, because we want them to be excited about something spiritual, and as long as they are hanging around friends who seem to be nice people, then the decision is up to them. Wherever they want to go and whatever they want to do, that is okay with us; as long as they are not attending a cult and they are hanging around good and nice people and they are enjoying it, that is okay, end-of-story, let them go.

That is not okay. Our goal for our children is righteousness and we need to get them involved in places where they are going to learn sound doctrine and where they are going to have to learn the Scriptures. It is this that has a profound influence, so true righteousness is strongly influenced by the teaching of the truth.

The last truth we will look at is that God's righteousness is required in order to enter into Heaven, as we see in Verse 20,

²⁰ *"I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter..."*

Now it has not to do only with the rewards of those in the Kingdom, but it has to do with entrance into the Kingdom. What we need is righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law. This is an astounding statement. I would have loved to have been there when Jesus made this statement to His Disciples because I would have loved to have seen their faces. Their faces would have registered absolute shock and dismay.

If you were to ask these Disciples at this time, "Who are the most righteousness people you know," they would have said, "The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law. They are the most righteousness people we know. They are the most straight of the line, honest, good-hearted people we know. My righteousness has to surpass theirs?"

First of all, Jesus is saying that the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law are not going to enter Heaven because their righteousness does not surpass their own standard. How can my righteousness surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees? The Pharisees had a righteousness that was based upon self-effort and attention to the Law; they looked at the Law and said, "If we only try harder, if we only do more, and we do better tomorrow than we did today, then we will grow in righteousness." But, God says, "No, you are basing your acceptance of Me upon a faulty standard. It is a righteousness that is completely corrupt and devoid of value as currency in the Kingdom of Heaven. What you need is a righteousness that is absolutely pure. It is not 'just' external and it is not 'just' conforming to a standard of restrictions and regulations and obedience, but it is internal and it is one that changes your heart."

It is not enough to "act" in a loving way; you must have a heart that loves. It is not just enough to "act" in a way that is pure; you must have a heart that is pure. It is not just enough to "act" in a way that is generous; you need a heart that is generous. We cannot make our hearts pure and loving and generous. Only God can do that.

When Jesus came, He lived out a perfect life so as to fulfill every demand of the Law for us. When He died upon the cross He met the just condemnation, the penalty that the Law laid against us, and He paid completely and in full. Where can we go to get this righteousness? It is a righteousness not of degree, but it is a righteousness of kind. He is not saying, "Look at the Pharisees and the kind of righteousness that they had. You need more of that kind of righteousness." No, He is saying, "You need a different kind of righteousness."

Let me use an illustration. Imagine that you want to purchase a property that is a beautiful, retirement home that is located on the ocean. You get a bag of money and you lay it down on the porch and you ring the doorbell. The owner opens the door and you say, "I want to buy your home." "How much do you have there?" "I have ten million dollars!" "That is a really good price. The house is only worth half that." The owner opens the bag, sees that it is Monopoly money, looks at you and says, "You are going to need a lot more money than this or you cannot enter this house." You go back and get ten more bags and you lay them down on the porch and say, "I got more money!" He opens up those and sees one hundred million dollars worth of Monopoly money, and he says, "You are going to need a lot more money and also you are going to need to get these bags off of my lawn."

What does he mean when he says, "You are going to need a lot more to enter this house and in order to own this place?" He is not saying that you need to bring more of the same kind, but you need to bring more of a different kind, "the currency that is of value to Me." When Jesus says that you have to have more righteousness than the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, He is not saying that you need more of their kind, to do better, to work harder, and to try more. That is external! You need a righteousness that reaches your heart and that changes you, because He will not lower His standards to our abilities. He knows that we are not able to acquire this righteousness on our own, but He will not lower His standards to our abilities, but here is what He will do, He will send His Son for us, so that we can have, as Paul would write in Romans, "A righteousness that is revealed from Heaven by God and is by faith."⁶

⁶ Romans 5:21-22

How are we to exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees? I tell you, there is only one way and that is through receiving as a gift the righteousness that Jesus offers from His person. That is the only way. As we receive it we are able to live it out so that our heart reflects what this righteousness reveals on the outside.

Friend, I ask you, as you approach the Gate of Heaven, what currency are you bringing. Are you going to bring the currency of the Monopoly money of your own self efforts, of your own righteous deeds and lay them at the Gate of Heaven and say, "God, let me in!" I tell you, that currency is worthless in Heaven and it has no value whatsoever.

There is only one way: it is necessary to have righteousness to enter into Heaven. That is what Jesus is saying, but we need the righteousness that God supplies through Jesus. He offers it to you and He calls you to repent of your sin and believe in Jesus as Savior and as Lord and this righteousness will be yours.