

The Sermon on the Mount

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Matthew 5:19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus Christ fulfilled God's Law in every area of His life.

1. He fulfilled it in His birth because He was made under the Law (Galatians 4:4). Every prescribed ritual for a Jewish boy was performed on Him by His parents. He certainly fulfilled the Law in His life, for nobody was ever able to accuse Him of sin. While He did not submit to the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees, He always did what God commanded in the Law. The Father was well pleased with His Son.
2. Jesus also fulfilled the Law in His teaching. It was this that brought Him into conflict with the religious leaders. He brought the people back to God's Word. He opened the Word to them in a new and living way - they were accustomed to the letter of the Law and not the grace of life.
3. But it was in His death and resurrection that Jesus especially fulfilled the Law. He bore the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13). He fulfilled the Old Testament types and ceremonies so that they no longer are required of the people of God. He set aside the Old Covenant and brought in the New Covenant.

When Jesus died, He rent the veil of the temple and opened the way into the holiest (Hebrews 10:19). He broke down the wall that separated the Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:11-13). Because the

Law was fulfilled in Christ, we no longer need temples made with hands (Acts 7:48ff) or religious rituals (Colossians 2:10-13).

How can we fulfill the Law? By yielding to the Holy Spirit and allowing Him to work in our lives (Romans 8:1-3). The Holy Spirit enables us to experience the righteousness of the law in daily life. This does not mean we live sinlessly perfect lives, but it does mean that Christ lives out His life through us by the power of His Spirit (Galatians 2:20).

It's important we understand all this before we hear Jesus say,

Matthew 5:19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

The mention of **commandments** immediately takes our thoughts to the Ten Commandments. They are a kind of summary of the whole Law. But Jesus was not saying we should live by the Law as a set of rules and regulations. He was saying, as we'll see, that you cannot do so even if you desire to. He was saying that the Law can be internalized, and we can both live by it for ourselves and teach it to others as a by-product of being in a living, personal relationship with Him.

- being changed to bring change -
I often use the imperfect illustration of marriage and adultery. If you are happily married and deeply in love, no one has to tell you to not commit adultery. You don't need to memorize, Thou shalt not comitt adultery.

You don't stay faithful to your wife as a result of your efforts to keep the rule; or because of the consequences of breaking it. You remain faithful because of love; because of the greater relationship itself. Your motivation is internal, not external.

It's like that in your relationship with Jesus. If you are happily engaged to Him and remain deeply in love, no one has to tell you to keep the Law. You don't stay faithful to Jesus as a result of your efforts to keep rules; or because of the consequences of breaking

them. You remain faithful because of love; because of the greater relationship itself. Your motivation is internal, not external.

You need to be righteous. The Jews thought they knew what that meant; they thought they knew who among them were righteous.

Jesus' hearers would automatically think of the scribes and Pharisees as the guys who were best at keeping the Law and, therefore, the most righteous. They would think that Jesus was describing the precise legal behavior of those guys – tithing even the small leaves and seeds of their spices!

These guys did have a kind of righteousness. But it was self-righteousness. So Jesus said,

Matthew 5:20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Telling the crowd that their righteousness must exceed that of these supposed religious giants would startle them! Without a further explanation, it would destroy the common man – who could never hope to even get to the level of the scribe or Pharisee, let alone beyond.

This was a stunning statement that would rivet everyone's attention! There was no way that any form of outward **righteousness** could exceed that of these men. Either no one could ever gain entrance into God's **kingdom**; or there must be another way to understand the **righteousness** God requires.

We already know, and will see in Jesus' explanation, that there is another way of righteousness. It is the imputed righteousness of Jesus. It is an exchange between Jesus and the person who puts his faith in the Lord.

It is best explained in Second Corinthians 5:21 where you read about a transaction involving sin and righteousness.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

You have sin. It was imputed to you before you were ever born because of what Adam did representing the human race in the Garden of Eden.

Imputed, by the way, is a banking term. It means *to put over into your account*. Sin was *put over into your account* because of Adam.

Jesus, in His first coming, is called the Second Man. Adam was the first man in that he represented all men. Jesus was the Second Man in that He, too, represented all men. When faced with the free-will choice to disobey God, Adam failed. Jesus, in the wilderness, did not fail. Thus, just as the sin of Adam was imputed to you, the righteousness of Jesus can be imputed to you.

The righteousness of Jesus – His perfect standing with God – is imputed to you when you trust the Lord as your Savior from sin. That is how your **righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees**. On paper – **it is the righteousness of Jesus placed into your account!** When God looks at you, He sees His Son, Jesus Christ.

Practically speaking, you still sin. But day-by-day, as you remain in a position of first-love with the Lord, His indwelling Holy Spirit empowers you to say “Yes!” to obeying God and “No!” to sin.

The key, as I understand it, is to remain in love with the Lord. Your love can wane and wax cold. Jesus called it leaving your first love (in His strongly worded letter to the Church at Ephesus). His solution was for you to first realize you had left your love. Not easy to do – since it doesn’t always involve sin or backsliding! The Ephesian believers were doing everything right – at least to outward observation.

The Lord saw deeper, into their motivation. With His help, you and I need to search our hearts... Then we can repent and return to our first, romantic love for the Lord.