

Righteousness – “That Exceeds That Of The Scribes & Pharisees”

Matthew 5:17-20 [New King James] *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 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. 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.”*

We need to understand very clearly exactly what Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord was saying to His disciples as recorded in these verses.

Too many people have been wrongly taught what these words of Jesus Christ mean by mis-interpretation, based on one word, “*fulfil*,” backed up by some words of Paul taken out of context.

Matthew 5:17 [New King James] *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil.”*

There are four very important words we need to know the original Greek meaning of if we are to understand the righteousness that Jesus Christ is speaking about.

Destroy – the Greek word translated destroy is “*kataluō*” from a root word “*kata*” meaning to be against, in opposition to, pull down or overthrow completely.

Jesus Christ’s coming was **not** to get rid of the original law which He had given to humanity through His servant Moses.

Law – the Greek word translated law is “*nōmōs*” from a root word “*nēmō*” meaning to give food that will nourish and give growth to animals or humans. Food that will sustain life.

John 10:10 [New King James] *“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”*

Jesus Christ is the good shepherd who gives abundant life to His sheep.

John 10:11 [New King James] *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”*

Even to the extent of sacrificing His own life for the sheep. This was said by Jesus Christ in the context of an eternal, spiritual relationship with Him and God the Father.

John 6:48-51, 53-58 [New King James] *“I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” ... “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.’”*

The words of Jesus Christ are given to us to digest and make a very part of ourselves to inherit eternal life.

Both the words of Jesus Christ, Who is the very Word of God, [John 1:1-4], through His servant Moses and personally when on earth as the Son of God and Son of Man.

John 6:66-69 [New King James] *“From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you also want to go away?’ But Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’”*

Belief in both the Person of Jesus Christ as the very Son of God and the words He has given to humanity within both the Old and New Covenants, [1 Corinthians 10:4; Mark 2:27-28].

Jesus Christ as the Son of Man kept the law He had given to Moses perfectly and made it new by lifting it to a spiritual level. Not just a physical act but the motivating power within our thoughts and the resulting actions towards God and other human beings.

Galatians 3:19-25 [New King James] *“What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”*

The original purpose of the law was to remind us of sin, and continues to do this [Romans 7:7-12] and Paul calls it “holy and just and good.”

The law has never been a means to become righteous in the sight of God and receive the gift of eternal life, [Romans 6:23] only faith in what Jesus Christ has done for us can bring us the gift of true righteousness, Jesus Christ’s righteousness in us, as it was in Abraham.

Romans 4:13, 16, 18-24 [New King James] *“For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.” ... “Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all” ... “who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore ‘it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. **It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,**”*

The righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to us through faith in Him, His birth, life, death and resurrection.

Prophets – not only did Jesus Christ live out all that was told by the prophets that the Messiah would do, He introduced the New Covenant that the prophet Jeremiah spoke about.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 [New King James] *“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with*

the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

The keeping of this New Covenant would only be possible with the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, which was prophesied by the prophet Joel.

Joel 2:28-29 [New King James] *"And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days."*

Given to a limited number of people at the time of Jesus Christ's First Coming, [John 6:44; Acts 2:1-4] but to all human beings at Jesus Christ's Second Coming.

Acts 5:32 [New King James] *"And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."*

But only to those who obey the Word of God, that is Jesus Christ in Person and the Word of God, the Christian Bible.

Notice that both Jeremiah and Jesus Christ lifted the law of God from the physical level to the spiritual level, a very change of mind to that of God, that reflects His very character, [Galatians 5:22-25].

Jesus Christ lifted the law to a spiritual level in His commandments to all His disciples, [Matthew 5:21-48].

Fulfil – the Greek word used is "*plērōō*" which means to complete fully, verify, accomplish, fully preach, perfect.

This is why Jesus Christ said that no part of the law, given under both the Old and New Covenants, would "pass away," [Matthew 5:18].

Matthew 22:35-40 [New King James] *"Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."*

When Jesus Christ mentioned both law and prophets He was referring to both law given through Moses and the New Covenant, the spiritual expression of the same law that He brought that could only be kept with the active indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who was **not** available to those under the law given through Moses, except for a select few with special work to do for God.

Romans 13:8-10 [New King James] *"Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'You shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilment of the law."*

Paul is saying exactly the same as Jesus Christ, that the laws given in both Old and New Covenants were fulfilled by love.

1 Timothy 1:8-10 [New King James] *"But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine,"*

This is how Paul tells us that the law should be used correctly.

The law was **not** a means of our being made righteous, justified before the Holy God, **but a means of defining what was sin that all those listed here and in Revelation 21:5-8 and Revelation 22:12-21** may be brought to a position of repentance by the work of the Holy Spirit, first with them, then in them, [**John 16:8; John 14:17**].

Progressing then to fulfil the original purpose for the creation of human beings, to be formed in the “likeness” [character] of God [**Genesis 1:26**] as well as the “image” of God [outward form].

2 Peter 3:9 [New King James] *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”*

Only then can a Holy God give the gift of eternal life to a human being who is prone to sin, [Romans 6:23].

John 17:3 [New King James] *“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*

It would take more than eternal life to “know” God the Father and Jesus Christ, as we understand the word “know,” but the Greek word used is “ginōskō” meaning an intimate relationship and this relationship can begin now with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, [1 John 5:11].

Jesus Christ will live His life again in us now **if** we allow the Holy Spirit to direct our lives, [**Romans 8:9**].

John 14:15-18 [New King James] *“If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”*

Notice this includes the keeping of the commandments given by Jesus Christ, physically and spiritually.