

# Matthew chapter 5

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## True righteousness in relation to the Word of God

In verse 16, Jesus had just been speaking about the importance of His disciples demonstrating their righteousness publicly with their good works. Now He dealt with the more fundamental question of what true righteousness is.

**What is righteousness?** It is a character and conduct that conforms to the will of God.

This was important to clarify, since the religious leaders of His day misinterpreted righteousness and good works.

In the verse 17 onwards Christ in His sermon tries to elaborate how their good works would enable their light to be seen. By faithfully living according to the 10 commandments. He wanted to share with them His View of the Old Testament and explain it to His hearers.

In His discussion of righteousness, Jesus wanted to reveal God's will through His word, which was the Old Testament.

- Do you want to know the will of God for your life? Read the Bible.
- Do you want to live righteously? Read God's word and follow its regulations.
- However, we must note that God did not give the Jews the 10 commandments as a way of earning salvation by living perfectly, but as a regulation on how to live their lives. The purpose of the Mosaic Law was to reveal God's purpose and to regulate their lives but not to redeem. They were already a redeemed people, redeemed from bondage in Egypt.
- Some of the Jews may have already concluded that Jesus was a radical who was discarding the teachings of the Old Testament, their law. So Jesus wanted to show them the difference between His teaching and how their leaders interpreted or misinterpreted the law.

### **Verse 17**

***"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil.***

- The terms "the Law" and "the Prophets" refer to two of the three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible, the third being "the Psalms" (Luke 24:44). This was how the Jews referred to the Old Testament in Jesus's day.

***I did not come to destroy but to fulfil.*** Was Jesus referring to Himself when He said, "I came . . . to fulfil," or was He referring to His teaching? Did *He* fulfil the law, or did *His teaching* fulfil it? Since the contrast is "to abolish" the law, it seems probable that Jesus meant His teaching fulfilled the law. He did not intend that what He taught the people would replace the teaching of the Old Testament, but that it would fulfil or establish it completely.

- **GOD WILL NEVER CONTRADICT HIMSELF.**
- Of course Jesus did full Old Testament prophesy about the coming of the Messiah but that wasn't His primary focus here.

### **Matthew 5:18**

***"For assuredly, I say to you, (Listen, what I'm about to say to you is very important).***

***Till heaven and earth pass away, (As long as the world lasts), one jot (Yod in Hebrew referring to smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet) or one tittle (smallest or least stroke that was sometimes placed over certain Hebrew words) will by no means pass from the law (the entire Old testament and not just the Mosaic Law or Pentateuch) till all is fulfilled.***

### **Matthew 5:19**

***"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments (moral but not ceremonial, Mosaic but not traditional), 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 Jewish rabbis had graded the Old Testament commands according to which ones they believed were more authoritative and which ones less, the heavy and the light.
- Jesus corrected this view. He taught that all were equally authoritative.
- He warned His hearers against following their leaders' practice.
- Greatness in His kingdom depended on maintaining a high view of Scripture.

***2Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,***

- ***That the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.***
- *Some say that Jesus was referring to the Messianic Kingdom when he will rule for a thousand years in the New Jerusalem.*
- This verse distinguishes different ranks within the kingdom of heaven. Some individuals will have a higher standing than others.
- Everyone will not be equal. Notice that there will be people in the kingdom whose view of Scripture will not be the same as before they entered the kingdom. All will be

righteous, but their obedience to and attitude toward Scripture will vary. **Matthew 5:20** *"For I say to you, (I speak with authority) that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*

- The mixed views of the scribes and the Pharisees regarding the 10 commandments led to selective obedience which eventually led to superficial righteousness, a form of outward godliness. They were externally conforming to the will of God.
- That type of "righteousness," Jesus declared, would not be adequate for admission into the kingdom.
- When you repent from your sins, you cannot have selective obedience like the scribes and Pharisees, there must be a proper faith attitude.
- The religious leaders had an artificial, external righteousness based on Law. But the righteousness Jesus described is a true and vital righteousness that begins internally, in the heart. The Pharisees were concerned about the minute details of conduct, but they neglected the major matter of *character*.

**Matthew 5:21** *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother (believing brother), 'Raca!' (Aramaic Reka meaning Empty headed, worthless, imbecile, numbskull, blockhead, I spit on you) shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.*

**Matthew 5:22** *"But I say to you (For I have the authority to) that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.*

- Jesus warns that the act of murder finds its roots in an angry, murderous spirit. The same hatred that causes one to hurl insults is the same hatred that leads one to commit murder.
- This attitude of the heart is the same and it is the same attitude that makes one morally guilty before God.
- God, who examines the very thoughts and intents of the heart, will issue judgement upon unrighteous anger.
- Jesus also warns against name calling. Raca! It was an offensive name used to show utter contempt for another person. Jesus compared using such a word to murder and was deserving of the severest punishment by the law.
- Then He issues a third warning against those who call someone a fool.
- Sometimes the one calling another a fool is the biggest fool. (Share Butabika Joke)
- Jesus took the old law one step further by explaining its true spiritual significance. A deeper spiritual meaning they had never seen.
- Jesus' demonstrations of anger were appropriate for Him since He was God, and

God gets angry. His anger was always righteous, unlike the anger that arises from unjustified hatred. It is possible for humans to be angry and not sin (Ephesians 4:26). Here Jesus was addressing unjustifiable anger that can lead to murder (Colossians 3:8).

### **Matthew 5:23**

***Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,***

***Matthew 5:24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.***

- It is more important to lift the load of hate from another brother's heart than to engage in a formal act of worship.
- Ritual worship was very important to the scribes and Pharisees, and to all the Jews, but Jesus put internal purity first, even the internal purity of another person. ***Matthew 5:25 and 26***

***Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny***

- This second illustration stresses the importance of making things right quickly.
- It is important to try and settle your grievances out of court according to 1 Corinthians 6:1-11. The offender should cool down the other's anger and hatred quickly. Otherwise, the judge may make things complicated and difficult for the both of them.
- Likewise, God will make it difficult for haters, and those who provoke hate in others, if they come before Him with unresolved interpersonal disagreements. Malicious anger is evil, and God's judgment is certain. Therefore, disciples must do everything they can to end inappropriate anger quickly (Ephesians 4:26).

### **Conclusion**

We may surround ourselves with good deeds and Christian rituals like praying and fasting frequently, speaking in tongues, giving and tithing, quoting the bible excellently, going to church every Sunday and attending all the fellowship groups. But none of those things can earn us true righteousness. True righteousness can only be attained by walking in constant obedience with God and His word in its entirety. (1 Samuel 16:7).