

The Righteousness of the Kingdom ó Part I
(Matthew 5:21-22)
By Randy Wages
2/26/06

Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

Be turning in your bibles once again to Matthew Chapter 5. Today's message will be the 9th in a series of messages that I've delivered from this passage commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount. Some of you may recall in the introductory message, we saw that the great theme of the Sermon on the Mount is the Gospel of the kingdom and the nature of the kingdom of heaven itself. We reviewed how this doesn't speak necessarily of a kingdom with geographical borders, but rather of a dominion or reign. And that this reign is a reign of grace ó as the verse on the front of your bulletin, Rom 5:21, asserts ó ***...grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.***

Today's message is certainly in keeping with the overall theme of the sermon, for it too speaks of this reign ó of a kingdom that reigns how? ó that is established how? that is entered into how? ó Through righteousness, ***...grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life...*** And for any who may not have heard the previous messages, let me assume nothing and review once more what is meant by the word "righteousness" that you'll hear me use throughout this message. So I'll ask that you others bear with my repetition while I review this for just a few moments.

As we saw in vs. 20 of Matthew 5, it, righteousness, is the entrance requirement for heaven itself. It is what you and I must possess if we're to enter into the kingdom of heaven. And when the word "righteousness" appears in the Bible in such a context, referencing that which is required for acceptance before a holy and just God, then it refers to the merit of that which our Lord Jesus Christ came to do (and did accomplish) in His life and death. As He said back in vs. 17, it (the establishment of righteousness) is what he came to do ó He came to fulfill the law ó every jot and tittle (dotting every "i" and crossing every "t"). And thereby, He established righteousness as a Substitute for each and every sinner for whom He lived and died.

So too, in today's message, this is the righteousness that I will be talking about ó perfect satisfaction to God's law and justice (both perfect obedience and the payment of the penalty, the sin debt due unto God's justice for all to whom He will be reconciled ó a payment of such value that it would satisfy the debt owed to a holy God). And that is none other than the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, who paid the sin debt on the cross of Calvary for all the sins that were laid upon him. And thereby justice was satisfied and those sins were put away forever.

The Lord Jesus Christ (and He alone) provided that double cure as a Substitute and Representative on behalf of all the objects of God's everlasting love ó fulfilling and completing all that was required by what He accomplished in both His life and His death ó His obedience even unto death. He walked on this earth without sin, in complete and perfect obedience, in perfect conformity to the will of God the Father. In other words, He satisfied the precepts of the law by obeying it perfectly, both in thought and deed. Secondly, He met the law's penal demands ó sin demanding death. And His death paid the debt in full for all the sins that were laid upon Him.

So beginning today, we will begin a study of a section of the sermon that describes for us the extent of the righteousness demanded by God's holy law. We saw in verse 20 where Christ said, ***“For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”*** Now, does this really speak of perfection ó that none can produce? How much must your righteousness exceed that of the most outward moral, law keeping group of folks who perhaps ever lived, the scribes and Pharisees ó how much must it exceed theirs if you're to enter the kingdom of heaven?

In this section of Christ's sermon (vss. 21 through the end of Chapter 5, vs. 48), He elaborates rather extensively on the extent of the law ó of just what is required. So I plan to title the messages taken from these verses, “The Righteousness of the Kingdom,” and today's segment will simply be Part I. Now it's clear that Christ is speaking primarily in reference to God's requirements under the Old Covenant ó the Law of Moses found in the Old Testament ó a covenant that He did not come to destroy or simply cast aside, but rather a covenant that He did come to bring an end to ó but doing so by way of fulfillment ó every jot and tittle.

Well, for God to be reconciled to any of us who live in this day and age, must His law and justice be satisfied as it pertains to us, who aren't under the Law of Moses? Consider what Christ tells us in the New Testament when a lawyer among the Pharisees came to Christ with this question in Matthew 22:36 where he asks, ***“Master, which is the great commandment in the law?”*** ³⁷ ***Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*** ³⁸ ***This is the first and great commandment.*** ³⁹ ***And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*** ⁴⁰ ***On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.***

Now that describes what is required if you're to establish a righteousness that exceeds the scribes and the Pharisees ó that will give you a right standing with God so as to gain entrance into heaven. In the book of James, chapter 2, verse 10 it reads, ***“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”*** You too then must be in perfect compliance and conformity at all times to the will of God if you think righteousness comes by the law ó by your compliance to the law ó to this, His revealed will by way of commandment.

And as long as someone thinks that salvation is conditioned in any way or to any degree on something that proceeds from them (their faith, their religious endeavors, whatever) ó then that exposes that they are banking upon their compliance, presuming they can meet the requirement. And sadly that ðwayö of salvation (that all of us set out upon initially) is tragically described later in this sermon as the broad way that leads to destruction. It is a ðwayø that is the consensus of most religionists and one that naturally seems right to all of us initially, but it is a way that leads to eternal death. In Galatians 2:21, we read clearly, that such thinking is in opposition to God's way of grace and is to really scorn and place contempt upon the work of Christ, including His death on the cross, to establish the only righteousness, the only satisfaction, that the Bible says can reconcile sinners to God. Whether one recognizes it or not, to think that salvation is conditioned on the sinner to any degree is to view the death of the Son of glory as a vain work. As Paul wrote there: ***“I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, (i.e. ó by your meeting a condition) then Christ is dead in vain.”*** (Gal. 2:21)

So this means í if you don't continually have your mind and affections on God, loving Him with all your heart, soul, and mind, constantly ó every minute of the

day ó you fall short. The Bible also tells us that our neighbor includes our very worst enemies. So if you ever (from the cradle to the grave) harbor even the slightest ill will toward your very worst enemy, then you too are guilty of all according to the scripture. You see, holiness and the righteousness of God know of no degrees. God is holy and cannot and will not commune where even one sin is found. As the latter part of Galatians 3:10 reads, ***“Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.*”**

Well, let’s just get it on the table up front ó how far must your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees? Look at vs. 48 where Christ tells us saying, ***“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”*** Here Christ sums up the preceding verses ó including all of the section we’re now considering. Here in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ shows that in order to produce the righteousness required to enter the kingdom of heaven, we would have to love God perfectly and love our neighbor as ourselves ó perfectly and continually.

Now it’s important that we also understand that this holy standard of character and conduct is something for which we should all strive towards as we walk on this earth, but we should never think that any progress towards that end (or even our efforts toward that end) measure up to God’s requirement of righteousness or contribute to it in any way. To think otherwise is to miss the very thing Christ is teaching here. Remember, the New Testament tells us the purpose of God’s law. As it reads in Romans 5:20: ***“Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. ...”*** The law’s purpose is to expose our sin (our total inability to meet its strict and holy demands) and to show us our need for pure, unadulterated grace. And as we read in Galatians 3:24: ***“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ,...*”**

You see, it is through Christ ó through His righteousness ó that grace reigns. His fulfillment of the law is the righteousness of the kingdom ó the righteousness of the reign of grace. And I believe the clear and most important message to be taken away from this section of His sermon (that we’re about to examine in more detail) is this ó Christ is saying: ***“You are in need of a righteousness you cannot produce. But there’s good news ó that’s why I’m here.”*** Let me repeat that. This is the summary of what Christ is communicating in verses 21 ó 48: ***“You are in need of a righteousness you cannot produce.”*** But Christ is also saying, ***“There’s good news ó that’s why I’m here ó it’s what I came to do.”***

So with that central message in mind, let's consider our text for today. Verses 21 ó 48 seem to neatly divide into 5 subsections and we'll only get into the first section this morning. But if you look at the first verse of our text, verse 21, notice that it begins, *“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time,...”* and then in vs. 22, *“But I say unto you,...”* Now this pattern, *“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time,...But I say unto you,...”* is repeated in some form or another in each of these 5 sub sections. Throughout these verses, Christ is exposing the sin that deceived them, the sin that naturally deceives us all. That is, the sin of thinking that their efforts to keep the law could gain them favor before God or contribute to the salvation they presumed to be theirs. Christ shows them the foolishness of this by exposing their sinfulness, showing them that they fell way short of the standard.

The Pharisees had taught them, (not based on the Old Testament Scriptures but based on certain oral traditions which they regarded as equal in authority with the Scriptures), that sin was only in the outward act. They had contaminated the Scriptures with their own oral traditions, and Christ sought to set them straight. So each time when He says, *“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old....,”* it is as if He is saying, *“I know this is their spin, their take on the law ó but here's what I, the eternal Son of God standing now here before you in the flesh ó here's what I have to say.”* In the original language, that phrase, *“But I say unto you...”* was commonly used to refute a false notion. So Christ was making it clear that their perspective of the law and its extent (as had been handed down and communicated to them) was perverted and in error. And each time He responds this way, you will observe 2 things regarding the extent of the law:

1. That sin, the transgression of the law, lies in more than just the outward act ó for the law penetrates to the thoughts and motives ó to the very heart.
2. And that, as such, none meet the standard ó that all sin and fall short of the glory of God ó that none are righteous, no not one.

Christ is not simply teaching them a higher standard of morals and ethics. He is showing them the reality of the Old Testament Scriptures in light of the Law and the Gospel. He is showing them why salvation must be by God=s free and sovereign grace, while at the same time showing them a higher standard of conduct and character.

Although the Pharisees were considered the most pious and pure practitioners of the law, it's important to see how that the traditions of men (including of these Pharisees) had come to promote very low thoughts of both sin and righteousness. They had taught the people that sin was in the outward act and not in the heart C the thoughts and motives. They had also taught that the sin problem could be cured by religious practices and duties as if to say that these religious exercises fulfilled a person=s responsibility to God=s law C the law summarized by -love God perfectly and love our neighbor as ourselves.ø

Think about that ó it isn't much different in today's religion is it? They taught that sin could be canceled and righteousness attained by something proceeding from the sinner ó some form of penance, religious activity, reformations, obedience, whatever ó some condition they met. Christ took this opportunity to set forth the high standard of righteousness required in God=s kingdom. It is a righteousness that no sinner can establish based on anything proceeding from himself. It is a righteousness that must come from God alone in Christ. They dared to place their efforts in a position of rivalry with the very thing He came to accomplish. And sadly, that's what all of us do when we first approach God for acceptance based on something that proceeds from us. This exposes our very own sin nature, even in our pondering the natural question that springs to mind whenever we first give serious consideration to our eternal destiny ó we wonder, "What must I do to get to heaven?"ö

But for those who are given spiritual life to hear and understand what Christ is teaching here, they learn better as God the Holy Spirit teaches them through the Gospel, even as Christ presents it here in the Sermon on the Mount ó they discover the folly of our natural, but sinful presumption that something we can do will procure our spiritual and eternal well being. We see here that Christ begins to show part of the purpose of the law towards sinners B to bring them in guilty and slay them from having any hope of salvation based on their best efforts to keep the law. Christ does this by showing them the extent of the law.

I believe that the first sub section of this passage on the righteousness of the kingdom should include verses 21 ó 26. There Christ is dealing with the laws demands as it pertains to:

I. MURDER, ANGER, AND RECONCILIATION

Although I believe the verses on reconciliation are closely related to what Christ says about murder and anger, given our remaining time today, we will just examine verses 21 ó 22, where He talks about murder and anger.

A. MURDER AND ANGER: Beginning at vs. 21 it reads:

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: {22} But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”

The sixth commandment of the Law of Moses stated, **“Thou shalt not kill.”** The people had heard from their ancestors that anyone who murdered someone else would be subject to judgment. The threat of judgment was part of the Law of Moses. Murderers under the Mosaic Law were to be judged and punished with death. The context and the implication here though is that their ancestors taught that not committing the act of murder was part of the righteousness required, based upon which they could enter the kingdom of heaven. It was if they were saying, **“If I don’t literally murder (as in kill) another human being, then that is enough. I have kept the law in that area, and this will recommend me unto God and gain me entrance into His presence in heaven.”**

Christ shows them that this issue of murder reaches to the heart C to the thoughts, motives, and attitudes. He shows them here that perfect compliance to the law of God requires more than simply not committing the act of murder. It requires me to love my enemies, to love my neighbor as myself, and, therefore, forbids even the thought of murder, which would include anger, malice, and hatred. He is showing us that if we think that not committing the act of murder recommends us unto God and contributes to any part of our salvation, **then we are debtors to do the whole law C precept and penalty.** Not committing the act of murder does not make me righteous before God. I am still a sinner who falls short and who is in need of a righteousness I cannot produce.

Christ shows this by exposing anger and hatred and malice that lies in the heart. The anger here refers to that which is the result of who we are ó sinners full of self-love and selfishness. It has to do with anger, temper, wrath, or rage that comes

when we are personally affronted and offended. Such anger would desire to harm another person in some way.

ARaca@ is an Aramaic expression of abuse. It is spoken out of anger, expressing that someone else is worthless or empty. It was often used to suggest that someone was empty-headed or stupid. As I studied this and considered its application in light of our modern vernacular, it seems to me this may have been equivalent to our calling someone an "air-head" today, although "Raca" seems to have had a much stronger connotation of contempt.

Similarly, to call another person a fool in this context was also an expression of contempt towards them. "Fool" here (unlike many other places in the scripture) does not refer to being dull minded or lacking in understanding, but rather the word here was equivalent to calling someone corrupt, or wicked & deserving hell itself. The law does not forbid using the literal words, "You fool," for elsewhere Christ Himself uses similar expressions to describe those lacking in understanding. In short, Christ is teaching here how that it is wrong to murder a person's character and reputation out of anger. It is character assassination. This makes us guilty of the sin of murder in God's sight, according to His law that requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves. These were expressions of anger the Jews used casually and thought nothing of them & Just as we're apt to do when someone seems to cross or irritate us & to suggest that they're not worthy in some way & that "air-head" for example. But Christ teaches here that even in these expressions of anger there is proof that sinners do not love their neighbor as themselves and are guilty of the sin of murder in their heart.

Now we see in these two verses, and will see in the verses that follow, the extent of God's law (the conditions or requirements according to which He, the judge of all, sees and judges things). And here Christ teaches us that it goes all the way to the heart and the motive. This inevitably prompts people to foolishly ask, "Does this mean that if we think it, we may as well go ahead and do it?" This is foolish reasoning. God's word never condones putting our evil thoughts into action. It is sinful to think it, but we tragically compound our sin when we bring our sinful thoughts to fruition. And in acting out our sinful thoughts, we subject ourselves to the greater consequences of these sins. Keep in view that Christ is showing here how we are all sinners and in need of a righteousness we cannot produce. He is showing that based on character and conduct, none of us are righteous or have the righteousness required to enter the kingdom of heaven.

As it says in Romans 3:19 ó 20: *“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”*

Although we should all strive to love our neighbor as ourselves, it’s imperative that we derive no confidence from that, but rather that we flee to Christ and plead His righteousness as our only ground salvation ó as the sole and complete basis upon which I, a sinner, can be reconciled before a holy God ó One whose inflexible justice shall not clear the guilty. I need a Substitute. In this light we should repent of ever thinking that anything proceeding from ourselves could save us or even contribute to any part of salvation. When our efforts to comply with God’s will, though commendable and highly esteemed in this world ó particularly among religious folks ó when, or if, we assign any merit to those things, they fall into the category of “dead” works of which we’re commanded to repent. And when God gives spiritual life to someone, that’s exactly what they do as they see the evil of daring to place something that proceeds from them in a place of rivalry with that which only the God-man, Jesus Christ Himself, could and did accomplish.

Now also, we need to make some distinctions here. There is a righteous anger which arises because of jealousy over God=s glory. Christ expressed this when He drove out the money-changers from the Temple. Also, we have to distinguish between the hatred and murder that arises from anger mentioned here and the hatred and murder mentioned in other places in the scripture ó e.g. as it pertains to all who remain allied with Satan in opposition to Christ and His way of salvation. But here, the murder Christ exposes in the Sermon on the Mount is something of which we are all guilty, believer and unbeliever. This is why we need the blood of Christ to remove the guilt.

Christ has shown in vivid detail how we, who are born of Adam, need salvation by God=s free and sovereign grace, based on His righteousness alone. We, like David of old, are to hate every false way (as he expressed in Psa. 119), but we are also to desire the eternal salvation of every one of our neighbors, even our worst enemies. We know that if our enemies, those who make us angry, ever come to believe the Gospel that they will be our brethren in Christ. We know that our brethren, even those who make us angry, are precious in God=s sight and they are righteous in Christ, equally blessed with all spiritual blessings in Him.

Summary:

Well, I hope you see here how convenient it was for the Pharisees to have confined the extent of God's law to a condition or requirement they could meet. In these 2 verses today, by confining the meaning of the law to the literal killing of another, murder, they now have a law, a condition, they can meet. Fast forward to our time and consider how things really haven't changed much. That's what most of religion is all about and sadly, that also includes most who operate under the banner of so-called "Christianity." To think that something other than, or in addition to, the righteousness of God in Christ (the merit of His obedience and death) contributes one iota, one jot or tittle, to your acceptance before God, then you too have conveniently set up a lesser standard ó one that you can meet by your compliance ó your fulfillment of the condition ó your faith or believing, by your acceptance ó by whatever you think you can deliver that will grant you acceptance before God and entrance into heaven.

But if God is pleased to grant you spiritual life and the spiritual senses to hear, see, and understand what is being taught here ó you'll discover, that like all of us, the "god" you imagined would find merit in your sin-tainted works of obedience is not the god of this Bible, but rather a concoction of our sinful, fallen imagination ó an idol fashioned from our depraved imagination and not at all like the God of the Bible. And if you see that, you'll flee to Christ and rest in His righteousness alone, and repent of your former idolatry and dead works ó seeing all your hope wrapped up, sure and certain in Him.

That's what happens when the law and its extent "enters" ó as I read from Romans 5:20, when the law enters (when we understand its extent) the offence then abounds. But let me read that verse again in its context, including the verse before and after. Beginning in Romans 5:19 it reads: ***“For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, (Adam's sin imputed to all he represented ó all of mankind) so (in like manner) by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*** (Here's the good news ó all represented by the One and only One who was obedient, the Lord Jesus Christ ó His righteousness shall be imputed to them). ²⁰***Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:*** (If you become convinced of sin ó then you'll be satisfied with nothing other than salvation by grace ó looking to Christ who met the condition to the uttermost). ²¹***That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.***” That's the righteousness of the Kingdom.

So today I hope that all who hear this message are given an understanding to see just what Christ is teaching in these verses. I pray you will see the extent of the law that exposes the sin that would deceive us ó what the Bible calls “...*the deceivableness of unrighteousness.*” That is, the foolish notion that all of us, as fallen sinners are predisposed to hold ó to think that something other than His righteousness, some condition or requirement that I presume to meet, could equate to any degree of merit before the holy God of this Bible ó so holy that He cannot commune with even one sin. How am I, a sinner then, (a murderer in the heart), to be accepted before Him?

Well, this only magnifies our need for a righteousness totally outside of ourselves. And the righteousness we need is none other than that which Christ wrought out in His perfect obedience unto death, in complete and full satisfaction to God’s justice on behalf of all He represented ó for all whose sins were charged or imputed to Him so that He might redeem them at the cross ó pay the debt owed for all their sins ó including murder. And in turn, what great news: That God imputed (reckoned to the account) of everyone He represented, the merit of that very finished work ó His perfect obedience unto death ó His righteousness ó the righteousness of the kingdom.

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God’s grace found in the only infallible source, God’s word itself ó the Bible.

Randy Wages