

Mat 5:20 RIGHTEOUSNESS that EXCEEDS

PRELIMS. The Sermon on the Mount is a very **practical** sermon. It is addressed to Xns before the eyes of the world, and I believe, **deliberately**, so that the world may **know** who real Xns are! They will be able to spot them a ‘mile away’ because of their ‘righteousness’! Their lives are so different!

One of the greatest mistakes we can make is thinking that the **only** righteousness that God is pleased with is **perfection**! Yes, it is perfectly true that only the ‘righteousness of Christ’ can **justify** us, but as far as living in this world is concerned, we **can please** God! We can have a righteous way of life that is pleasing to God. We **can** bring glory to Him in our lives. We read in Scripture of those who pleased God. Hebrews tells us that Enoch “*had this testimony, that he **pleased God***” [Heb 11:5 AV] And we are **encouraged to do good** and to share what we have “*for with **such sacrifices God is well pleased***” [Heb 13:16 AV] We **can** do things and live in such a way that we please God despite our imperfections – so the Bible says!

Even during the OT age when God was ‘supposed’ to be an angry, intolerant God that sought perfection in every detail, and sent sinners to hell for the least demeanour, we read of saints pleasing God! The ‘OT God’ whom **Stefan Morkis** in quoting **Richard Dawkins** in the Courier this week said “the God of the Old Testament is one of the most distasteful characters in all fiction – a vengeful, jealous and neurotic deity...” was pleased with His saints Morkis/Dawkins views omit the **love** of God displayed so often in the OT. The love that overlooked so many sins of the Israelites. The love that was so **patient** with them despite all the favours and deliverances He showed them!

The Bible even goes so far as to say that some people “*were **perfect***”! Job “*that man was **perfect***” [Job 1:1 AV] Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth “*were **both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of***

the Lord”[Luke 1:6] So, there are **many** people, OT and NT. who please God and have a ‘**righteous**’ way of life.

Some Xns say, ‘everything we do, the very best thing we do is “*filthy rags*” before God. Nothing that we do pleases Him. That is so **wrong**! Yes, there is imperfection in the very best of things we do, but every act of ours is not necessary “*filthy rags*” before God! John Piper says ‘If I tell my children to, Go tidy your rooms’, and they immediately go and do it without grumbling and complaining, without slamming doors, and it is well done, I do not consider their obedience to me to be ‘filthy rags’ even although it is not perfect’! It is the same with God.

When Zacharias & Elizabeth walked blamelessly before God in all His commandments, God did not see their righteousness as ‘filthy rags’! It brought joy to His heart – even although they were not perfect in every detail!

Although all our ‘works’ are imperfect, God accepts what we **genuinely** tried to do to please Him. As Piper says God does **not** call **His own Spirit-wrought fruit** in our lives, ‘filthy rags’! Xns do many things as a result of God’s Spirit working in them, convincing them of their duty and obligations “*my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, work out your own salvation...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure*”[Ph2:13] “*may the God of peace ...equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight*”[He13:21] “*I can do all things through Christ*” “*our sufficiency is of God*”!

God’s grace **enables** us to obey/serve/work for God! “*I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me*”[1Cor 15:10] God made a **promise** to His Church “*I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey My rules*”[Ezek 36:27]! God will ‘**own**’ and acknowledge His own work in His people.

This doctrine, that we can please God, should be a great **encouragement** to us. Our Father in heaven is **not impossible** to please at all, despite the **caricatures** made of Him being a **severe** and **strict, intolerant** God. Piper says ‘like anyone with a very big heart, God is **easy to please**’ and delighted to see us run to serve Him! Like any good Father, God is delighted in his children’s obedience to him however, imperfect. There **is** a righteousness, which is imperfect, but pleases God.

That, I believe, is the righteousness that Jesus is talking of here in our text. Many commentators would say the verse refers to the ‘righteousness of Christ’ which is **imputed** to us in justification. But no, Christ is here, seeking to **drive home** to His disciples the **importance** of living a holy life in obedience to God. The Sermon on the Mount is full of **practical** Xnity. The sermon on the mount is **not** an **evangelistic** sermon for unbelievers, but instruction in righteousness for God’s people!

It is **contrasted** with the Phar’s righteousness. The Phar’s had **lists** of things ‘to do’, and things ‘not to do’! **1,000s** of them! The Jews had a **passion** for **definition!** A lot of their laws were **never written down** – thus “*you have heard that it was **said**”!* So it became necessary to have a written code, and thus arose the **Scribes** whose business it was to write down all the rules which teachers of the Law drew from the **principles** of the Ten Words! **[Read Barclay on Work, Burden, Write, Heal, p128]** I personally knew someone who would not put on the lights on Sunday and he was revered as a very godly man! No!

The Phar’s righteousness – (1) it was **important** to be ‘**seen**’ by people “*they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the **street corners**, that they may be **seen by others**” [Mat6:5], (but not too concerned about seen by God!); (2) it was mainly **outward/external** “*Woe to you, scribes and **Pharisees, hypocrites!** For you clean the **outside** of the cup and the plate, but **inside** they are full of **greed** and **self-indulgence**” [Mat 23:25];**

(3) it was **traditional** “*Why do your disciples **break the tradition** of the elders? **For** they do not wash their hands when they eat? He answered them, “And why do you **break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?”*** [Mat 15:2,3] The Phar’s was out of **fear** of man (offending friends/church)!

True Righteousness is doing something simply because it is the ‘**right**’ thing to do. **Even although** it may **hurt** me and **cost** me, and I may become **unpopular** for it. Doing it because **Jesus wants** me to do it! It may be **very sacrificial** like ‘pulling out your eye’, ‘cutting off your arm’ [29,30] True righteousness means **loving** your **enemies** [44], because you **understand** wickedness **and** have been **redeemed** from it!

True righteousness has a **pure Source**. It is service to God and man that comes from a **heart purified** by the grace of God! It is not just helping someone, or showing love (however excellent in itself) true righteousness **proceeds** from a pure heart. Hear Paul “*our charge is love that issues from a pure heart”* [1Tim1:5] “*pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace...from a pure heart*” [1Tim2:22] “*love one another earnestly from a pure heart*” [1 Pet 1:22] The **source** from which it springs must be cleansed by God. It **is possible** to have these things (to have faith/love/peace from an **impure** heart. Evil people can do good things but it is not ‘truly’ good unless its **source** is **pure...AND** ... it has a **pure Motive**. The **reason/object** is not only to do the right thing, but doing it to honour God and to show **His** love! Peter said we have been chosen “*that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you*” [1P2:9] You do it because **Jesus wants** you to do it. You do it because it is **God’s will!** You **don’t** do it “*to be seen by men*”, that is why most good works are done in **secret!** ***True righteousness** is doing the right thing **in faith** that you are obeying and **pleasing** Jesus “*without faith it is impossible to please Him*” [Heb 6:6]. Not just **knowing** it was right! Rather living to please God/Jesus!