

A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS
XLV. The Sermon On The Mount: False And True Righteousness
C. Christ's Righteousness As Revealed In Scripture
(Matthew 5:17-20)

I. Introduction

- A. Isaiah 9:1-2 predicted that when the Messiah arrived and ministered in the spiritual darkness of Galilee, the people would see a Great Light, that this light would shine upon those who dwelt in the shadow of death.
- B. Christ's great Sermon on the Mount, a pre-evangelism discourse, provided valuable insight on God's true righteousness, what Israel's religious leaders greatly lacked as seen in their dead traditionalism.
- C. One might think that the religious leaders were unfairly critiqued by Christ in not having the correct view of God's righteousness, but that was not so: in Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus clarified that God's true righteousness had all along been taught in the Hebrew Scriptures, so we view the passage for our insight and application:

II. Christ's Righteousness As Revealed In Scripture, Matthew 5:17-20.

- A. Immediately after His introductory presentation of the Beatitudes, Jesus directed His hearers not to think that He was offering a different view of righteousness than what God had been revealing to Israel throughout her history: indeed, He had not come to abolish the Mosaic Law or the Prophets, two classes of writings that referred to the Old Testament Scriptures in their entirety, but He had come to fulfill them, Matthew 5:17.
- B. Like the Apostle Paul stated in Romans 7:7-12, Jesus was not at all opposed to the righteous demands of the Mosaic Law, for "(t)he demands of the law of God were unalterable because it was a revelation of the holiness of God. The demands that God's holiness made on those who would walk in fellowship with Him were unalterable and unchangeable" (J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 177).
- C. To stress this point, Jesus clarified that Scripture's revelation of God's true righteousness in the Law was precisely accurate as interpreted literally, and Scripture was God's inerrant, infallible revelation, Matt. 5:18:
 - 1. Jesus strongly asserted that every "jot" (KJV) and every "tittle" (KJV) would in no way pass from the Law until all was fulfilled. A "jot" "is the smallest Hebrew letter, *yodh*, which looks like an apostrophe (')" and a "tittle" is "a very small extension or protrusion on several Hebrew letters which distinguish these letters from similar ones. The Lord's point is that every letter of every word in the O. T. is vital and will be fulfilled" (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Matthew 5:18).
 - 2. Since the presence or absence of a *yodh* or a tittle can change the spelling of a single word, and that single word can thus affect the meaning of an entire sentence, Jesus implied that Scripture is **verbally** divinely **inspired**, that this divine inspiration is **plenary**, namely, extending to the entirety of the Scripture canon, and that Scripture must be interpreted in its **literal, historical, grammatical** or **normal contexts!**
 - 3. [Since Jesus **also** spoke of His *fulfillment* of the Law, then contrary to Amillennialism (and its divergent view of postmillennialism) that was spawned by the non-literal interpretation of Scripture (John F. Walvoord, The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation, 1976, p. 12-15), we must interpret **prophecy** literally along with non-prophetic Scriptures, and that leads us to adopt the dispensational, premillennial view of future events! (Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today, 1970, p. 86-90, 156-161)]
- D. Accordingly, Jesus said that whoever broke one of the least commands of the Mosaic Law, and would teach others to do so also, would be called the least in the kingdom of heaven where whoever would practice and teach the least of the Law's commands would be called the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Matthew 5:19.
- E. Thus, except a person's level of righteousness exceeded the level of righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, he would by no means enter into the kingdom of heaven, Matthew 5:20!
- F. By implication, then, Jesus taught that the failure of the scribes and Pharisees to define the righteousness of the Law that God demanded of Israel was not due to a failure on God's part to clarify that righteousness, but it was due to a mishandling and misinterpretation of Scripture due to spiritual darkness! All Jesus was doing as God's "Great Light" of Isaiah 9:1-2 was clarifying the normal, literal teaching of the original Scriptures! After all, Jesus came as the Isaiah 9:1-2 "Great Light" because Israel had ignored Scripture in Isaiah 8:19-20!

Lesson: *The true righteousness of God that Jesus came to clarify was NOT something foreign to what God had been teaching Israel throughout her history but was God's ORIGINAL righteousness revealed in the Scriptures!*

Application: *May we realize that the insight we need from God on what He expects of us is NOTHING NEW, but what He has ALWAYS presented in His WRITTEN WORD, that we then heed and apply it for blessing!*