

# Sermon on the Mount, 5

by John Wesley

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*John Wesley's sermon emphasizes the enduring nature of God's moral law and the importance of fulfilling it through faith and obedience.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:17

**Topics:** "Righteousness in Christ", "Fulfillment of the Law"

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## Description

John Wesley emphasizes that Jesus did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them, asserting the enduring nature of God's moral law. He warns against the false hope of a new, easier religion and stresses that true righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, who were known for their strict adherence to the law but lacked true spiritual depth. Wesley explains that the moral law remains in effect and that every commandment, no matter how small, is significant in the eyes of God. He calls believers to a higher standard of righteousness that encompasses both outward actions and inward purity, urging them to live out their faith authentically. Ultimately, Wesley encourages Christians to embrace the fullness of the law through love and obedience, which leads to greatness in the kingdom of heaven.

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## Transcript

"Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you: Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For verily 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." Matt. 5:17-20

1. Among the multitude of reproaches which fell upon Him who "was despised and rejected of men," it could not fail to be one, that He was a teacher of novelties, an introducer of a new religion. This might be affirmed with the more colour because many of the expressions He had used were not common among the Jews: either they did not use them at all, or not in the same sense, not in so full and strong a meaning. Add to this, that the worshipping God "in spirit and in truth" must always appear a new religion to those who have hitherto known nothing but outside worship, nothing but the "form of godliness."

2. And it is not improbable, some might hope it was so, that He was abolishing the old religion, and bringing in another, -- one which, they might flatter themselves, would be an easier way to heaven. But our Lord refutes, in these words, both the vain hopes of the one, and the groundless calumnies of the other.

I shall consider them in the same order as they lie, taking each verse for a distinct head of discourse.

I. 1. And First, "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law, or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."

The ritual or ceremonial law, delivered by Moses to the children of Israel, containing all the injunctions and ordinances which related to the old sacrifices and service of the temple, our Lord indeed did come to destroy, to dissolve, and utterly abolish. To this bear all the Apostles witness; not only Barnabas and Paul, who vehemently withstood those who taught that Christians ought "to keep the law of Moses;" (Acts 15:5;) not only St. Peter, who termed the insisting on this, on the observance of the ritual law, a "tempting God," and "putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers," saith he, "nor we, were able to bear;" but all the Apostles, elders, and brethren, being assembled with one accord, (Acts 15:22,) declared, that to command them to keep this law, was to "subvert their souls;" and that "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost" and to them, to lay no such burden upon them. (Acts 15:28.) This "hand-writing of ordinances" our Lord did blot out, take away, and nail to His cross.

2. But the moral law, contained in the Ten Commandments, and enforced by the prophets, He did not take away. It was not the design of His coming to revoke any part of this. This is a law which never can be broken, which stands fast as the faithful witness in heaven. The moral stands on an entirely different foundation from the ceremonial or ritual law, which was only designed for a temporary restraint upon a disobedient and stiff-necked people; whereas this was from the beginning of the world, being "written not on tables of stone," but on the hearts of all the children of men, when they came out of the hands of the Creator. And, however the letters once wrote by the finger of God are now in a great measure defaced by sin, yet can they not wholly be blotted out, while we have any consciousness of good and evil. Every part of this law must remain in force, upon all mankind, and in all ages; as not depending either on time or place, or any other circumstances liable to change, but on the nature of God and the nature of man, and their unchangeable relation to each other.

3. "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." Some have conceived our Lord to mean, -- I am come to fulfil this by my entire and perfect obedience to it. And it cannot be doubted but he did, in this sense, fulfil every part of it. But this does not appear to be what He intends here, being foreign to the scope of his present discourse. Without question, his meaning in this place is, (consistently with all that goes before and follows after,) -- I am come to establish it in its fullness, in spite of all the glosses of men: I am come to place in a full and clear view whatsoever was dark or obscure therein: I am come to declare the true and full import of every part of it; to show the length and breadth, the entire extent of every commandment contained therein, and the height and depth, the inconceivable purity and spirituality of it in all its branches.

4. And this our Lord has abundantly performed in the preceding and subsequent parts of the discourse before us, in which He has not introduced a new religion into the world, but the same which was from the beginning: -- a religion the substance of which is, without question, as old as the creation, being coeval with man, and having proceeded from God at the very time when "man became a living soul;" (the substance, I say; for some circumstances of it now relate to man as a fallen creature;) -- a religion witnessed to both by the Law and by the Prophets, in all succeeding generations. Yet was it never so fully

explained, nor so thoroughly understood till the great Author of it Himself condescended to give mankind this authentic comment on all the essential branches of it; at the same time declaring it should never be changed, but remain in force to the end of the world.

II. 1. "For verily I say unto you," (a solemn preface, which denotes both the importance and certainty of what is spoken,) "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled."

"One jot:" -- It is literally, not one iota, not the most inconsiderable vowel: "Or one tittle," *\_mia keraia\_*, -- one corner, or point of a consonant. It is a proverbial expression which signifies that no one commandment contained in the moral law, nor the least part of any one, however inconsiderable it might seem, should ever be disannulled.

"Shall in no wise pass from the law:" *\_ou mE parelthEi apo tou nomou\_*. The double negative, here used, strengthens the sense, so as to admit of no contradiction: And the word *\_parelthEi\_*, it may be observed, is not barely future, declaring what will be; but has likewise the force of an imperative, ordering what shall be. It is a word of authority, expressing the sovereign will and power of Him that spake; of Him whose word is the law of heaven and earth, and stands fast for ever and ever.

"One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass till heaven and earth pass;" or as it is expressed immediately after, *\_hews an panta genEtai\_*, -- till all ( or rather, all things) be fulfilled, till the consummation of all things. Here is therefore no room for that poor evasion (with which some have delighted themselves greatly) that "no part of the law was to pass away till all the law was fulfilled: But it has been fulfilled by Christ, and therefore now must pass, for the gospel to be established." Not so; the word all does not mean all the law, but all things in the universe; as neither has the term fulfilled any reference to the law, but to all things in heaven and earth.

2. From all this we may learn, that there is no contrariety at all between the law and the gospel; that there is no need for the law to pass away, in order to the establishing of the gospel. Indeed neither of them supersedes the other, but they agree perfectly well together. Yea, the very same words, considered in different respects, are parts both of the law and of the gospel. If they are considered as commandments, they are parts of the law: if as promises, of the gospel. Thus, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," when considered as a commandment, is a branch of the law; when regarded as a promise, is an essential part of the gospel; -- the gospel being no other than the commands of the law proposed by way of promises. Accordingly poverty of spirit, purity of heart, and whatever else is enjoined in the holy law of God, are no other, when viewed in a gospel light, than so many great and precious promises.

3. There is, therefore, the closest connexion that can be conceived between the law and the gospel. On the one hand, the law continually makes way for, and points us to the gospel; on the other, the gospel continually leads us to a more exact fulfilling of the law. The law, for instance, requires us to love God, to love our neighbour, to be meek, humble, or holy. We feel that we are not sufficient for these things; yea, that "with man this is impossible:" But we see a promise of God, to give us that love, and to make us humble, meek, and holy: We lay hold of this gospel, of these glad tidings; it is done unto us according to our faith; and "the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us," through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

We may yet farther observe, that every command in holy writ is only a covered promise. For by that solemn declaration, "This is the covenant I will make after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws in your minds, and write them in your hearts," God hath engaged to give whatsoever he commands. Does he

command us then to "pray without ceasing?" To "rejoice evermore?" "To be holy as He is holy?" It is enough. He will work in us this very thing. It shall be unto us according to his word.

4. But if these things are so, we cannot be at a loss what to think of those who in all ages of the Church, have undertaken to change or supersede some commands of God, as they professed, by the peculiar direction of his Spirit. Christ has here given us an infallible rule, whereby to judge of all such pretensions. Christianity, as it includes the whole moral law of God, both by way of injunction and of promise, if we will hear him is designed of God to be the last of all his dispensations. There is no other to come after this. This is to endure till the consummation of all things. Of consequence, all such new revelations are of Satan, and not of God; and all pretences to another more perfect dispensation fall to the ground of course. "Heaven and earth shall pass away;" but this word "shall not pass away."

III. 1. "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Who, what are they that make "the preaching of the law" a character of reproach? Do they not see on whom their reproach must fall, -- on whose head it must light at last? Whosoever on this ground despiseth us, despiseth Him that sent us. For did ever any man preach the law like Him, even when he came not to condemn but to save the world; when he came purposely to "bring life and immortality to light through the gospel?" Can any preach the law more expressly, more rigorously, than Christ does in these words? And who is he that shall amend them? Who is he that shall instruct the Son of God how to preach? Who will teach Him a better way of delivering the message which He hath received of the Father?

2. "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments," or one of the least of these commandments. -- "These commandments," we may observe, is a term used by our Lord as equivalent with the law, or the law and the Prophets, -- which is the same thing, seeing the Prophets added nothing to the law, but only declared, explained, or enforced it, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

"Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments," especially if it be done wilfully or presumptuously: --

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-- for "he that keepeth the whole law, and" thus "offends in one point, is guilty of all;" the wrath of God abideth on him, as surely as if he had broken every one. So that no allowance is made for one darling lust; no reserve for one idol; no excuse for refraining from all besides, and only giving way to one bosom sin. What God demands is an entire obedience; we are to have an eye to all His commandments; otherwise we lose all the labour we take in keeping some, and our poor souls for ever and ever.

"One of these least," or one of the least of these commandments: -- Here is another excuse cut off, whereby many, who cannot deceive God, miserably deceive their own souls. "This sin," saith the sinner, "is it not a little one? Will not the Lord spare me in this thing? Surely he will not be extreme to mark this, since I do not offend in the greater matters of the law." Vain hope! Speaking after the manner of men, we may term these great, and those little commandments; but in reality they are not so. If we use propriety of speech there is no such thing as a little sin; every sin being a transgression of the holy and perfect law, and an affront on the great Majesty of heaven.

3. "And shall teach men so." In some sense it may be said that whosoever openly breaks any commandment teaches others the same; for example speaks, and many times louder than precept. In this sense, it is apparent, every open drunkard is a teacher of drunkenness; every sabbath-breaker is constantly teaching his neighbour to profane the day of the Lord. But this is not all: An habitual breaker of the law is seldom content to stop here; he generally teaches other men to do so too, by word as well as example; especially when he hardens his neck, and hateth to be reprov'd. Such a sinner soon commences an advocate for sin; he defends what he is resolved not to forsake; he excuses the sin which he will not leave, and thus directly teaches every sin which he commits.

"He shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven;" -- that is, shall have no part therein. He is a stranger to the kingdom of heaven which is on earth; he hath no portion in that inheritance; no share of that "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." Nor, by consequence can he have any part in the glory which shall be revealed.

4. But if those who even thus break, and teach others to break "one of the least of these commandments shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven," shall have no part in the kingdom of Christ and of God; if even these shall be cast into "outer darkness, where is wailing and gnashing of teeth," then where will they appear whom our Lord chiefly and primarily intends in these words, -- they who, bearing the character of Teachers sent from God, do nevertheless themselves break his commandments; yea, and openly teach others so to do; being corrupt both in life and doctrine?

5. These are of several sorts. Of the first sort are they who live in some wilful, habitual sin. Now, if an ordinary sinner teaches by his example, how much more a sinful Minister, -- even if he does not attempt to defend, excuse, or extenuate his sin! If he does, he is a murderer indeed; yea, the murderer-general of his congregation! He peoples the regions of death. He is the choicest instrument of the prince of darkness. When he goes hence, "hell from beneath is moved to meet him at his coming." Nor can he sink into the bottomless pit without dragging a multitude after him.

6. Next to these are the good-natured, good sort of men: who live an easy, harmless life, neither troubling themselves with outward sin, nor with inward holiness; men who are remarkable neither one way nor the other, neither for religion nor irreligion who are very regular both in public and private, but do not pretend to be any stricter than their neighbours. A Minister of this kind breaks not one, or a few only, of the least commandments of God; but all the great and weighty branches of his law which relate to the power of godliness, and all that require us to "pass the time of our sojourning in fear," to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling;" to have our "loins always girt and our lights burning," to "strive," or agonize, "to enter in at the strait gate." And he teaches men so, by the whole form of his life, and the general tenor of his preaching, which uniformly tends to soothe those in their pleasing dream who imagine themselves Christians and are not; to persuade all who attend upon his ministry to sleep on and take their rest. No marvel, therefore, if both he and they that follow him wake together in everlasting burnings."

7. But above all these, in the highest rank of the enemies of the gospel of Christ, are they who openly and explicitly "judge the law" itself, and "speak evil of the law;" who teach men to break (ly sai, to dissolve, to loose, to untie the obligation of) not one only, whether of the least, or of the greatest, but all the commandments at a stroke; who teach, without any cover, in so many words, -- "What did our Lord do with the law? He abolished it. There is but one duty, which is that of believing. All commands are unfit for our times. From any demand of the law, no man is obliged now to go one step, to give away one farthing, to eat or omit one morsel." This is, indeed, carrying matters with a high hand; this is withstanding our Lord to

the face, and telling him that he understood not how to deliver the message on which He was sent. O Lord, lay not this sin to their charge! Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!

8. The most surprising of all the circumstances that attend this strong delusion, is, that they who are given up to it, really believe that they honour Christ by overthrowing his law, and that they are magnifying his office, while they are destroying his doctrine! Yea, they honour him just as Judas did, when he said, "Hail, Master!" and kissed him. And he may as justly say to every one of them, "Betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?" It is no other than betraying him with a kiss, to talk of his blood, and take away his crown; to set light by any part of his law, under pretence of advancing his gospel. Nor, indeed, can anyone escape this charge, who preaches faith in any such manner as either directly or indirectly tends to set aside any branch of obedience; who preaches Christ so as to disannul, or weaken, in anywise, the least of the commandments of God.

9. It is impossible, indeed, to have too high an esteem for "the faith of God's elect." And we must all declare, "By grace ye are saved through faith; not of works, lest any man should boast." We must cry aloud to every penitent sinner, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But, at the same time, we must take care to let all men know, we esteem no faith but that which worketh by love [Gal. 5:6]; and that we are not saved by faith, unless so far as we are delivered from the power as well as the guilt of sin. And when we say, "Believe, and thou shalt be saved;" we do not mean, "Believe, and thou shalt step from sin to heaven, without any holiness coming between; faith supplying the place of holiness;" but, "Believe, and thou shalt be holy; believe in the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt have peace and power together: Thou shalt have power from Him in whom thou believest, to trample sin under thy feet; power to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and to serve him with all thy strength: Thou shalt have power `by patient continuance in well-doing, to seek for glory, and honour, and immortality;' thou shalt both do and teach all the commandments of God, from the least even to the greatest: Thou shalt teach them by thy life as well as thy words, and so `be called great in the kingdom of heaven.'"

IV. 1. Whatever other way we teach to the kingdom of heaven, to glory, honour, and immortality, be it called the way of faith, or by any other name, it is, in truth, the way to destruction. It will not bring a man peace at the last. For thus saith the Lord, "[Verily] 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."

The Scribes, mentioned so often in the New Testament, as some of the most constant and vehement opposers of our Lord, were not secretaries, or men employed in writing only, as that term might incline us to believe. Neither were they lawyers, in our common sense of the word; although the word *\_nomikOi\_* is so rendered in our translation. Their employment had no affinity at all to that of a lawyer among us. They were conversant with the laws of God, and not with the laws of man. These were their study: It was their proper and peculiar business to read and expound the law and the Prophets, particularly in the synagogues. They were the ordinary, stated preachers among the Jews. So that if the sense of the original word was attended to, we might render it, the Divines. For these were the men who made divinity their profession: and they were generally (as their name literally imports) men of letters; men of the greatest account for learning that were then in the Jewish nation.

2. The Pharisees were a very ancient sect, or body of men, among the Jews; originally so called from the Hebrew word *\_PRS\_* -- which signifies to separate or divide. Not that they made any formal separation from, or division in, the national church. They were only distinguished from others by greater strictness of

life, by more exactness of conversation. For they were zealous of the law in the minutest points; paying tithes of mint, anise, and cummin: And hence they were had in honour of all the people, and generally esteemed the holiest of men.

Many of the Scribes were of the sect of the Pharisees. Thus St. Paul himself, who was educated for a Scribe, first at the university of Tarsus, and after that in Jerusalem, at the feet of Gamaliel, (one of the most learned Scribes or Doctors of the law that were then in the nation,) declares of himself before the Council, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee;" (Acts 23:6;) and before King Agrippa, "After the straitest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee." (Acts 26:5.) And the whole body of the Scribes generally esteemed and acted in concert with the Pharisees. Hence we find our Saviour so frequently coupling them together, as coming in many respects under the same consideration. In this place they seem to be mentioned together as the most eminent professors of religion; the former of whom were accounted the wisest, -- the latter, the holiest of men.

3. What "the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees" really was, it is not difficult to determine. Our Lord has preserved an authentic account which one of them gave of himself: And he is clear and full in describing his own righteousness; and cannot be supposed to have omitted any part of it. He went up indeed "into the temple to pray;" but was so intent upon his own virtues, that he forgot the design upon which he came. For it is remarkable, he does not properly pray at all: He only tells God how wise and good he was. "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers; or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week: I give tithes of all that I possess." His righteousness therefore consisted of three parts: First, saith he, "I am not as other men are;" I am not an extortioner, not unjust, not an adulterer; not "even as this publican." Secondly, "I fast twice in the week:" And, Thirdly, "I give tithes of all that I possess."

"I am not as other men are." This is not a small point. It is not every man that can say this. It is as if he had said, -- "I do not suffer myself to be carried away by that great torrent, custom. I live not by custom, but by reason; not by the examples of men, but the word of God. I am not an extortioner, not unjust, not an adulterer; however common these sins are, even among those who are called the people of God; (extortion, in particular, -- a kind of legal injustice, not punishable by any human law, the making gain of another's ignorance or necessity, having filled every corner of the land;) nor even as this publican, not guilty of any open or presumptuous sin; not an outward sinner; but a fair, honest man of blameless life and conversation."

4. "I fast twice in the week." There is more implied in this, than we may at first be sensible of. All the stricter Pharisees observed the weekly fasts; namely, every Monday and Thursday. On the former day they fasted in memory of Moses receiving on that day (as their tradition taught) the two tables of stone written by the finger of God; on the latter, in memory of his casting them out of his hand, when he saw the people dancing round the golden calf. On these days, they took no sustenance at all, till three in the afternoon; the hour at which they began to offer up the evening sacrifice in the temple. Till that hour, it was their custom to remain in the temple, in some of the corners, apartments, or courts thereof; that they might be ready to assist at all the sacrifices, and to join in all the public prayers. The time between they were accustomed to employ, partly in private addresses to God, partly in searching the Scriptures, in reading the Law and the Prophets, and in meditating thereon. Thus much is implied in, "I fast twice in the week;" the second branch of the righteousness of a Pharisee.

5. "I give tithes of all that I possess." This the Pharisees did with the utmost exactness. They would not except the most inconsiderable thing; no, not mint, anise, and cummin. They would not keep back the least part of what they believed properly to belong to God; but gave a full tenth of their whole substance yearly, and of all their increase, whatsoever it was.

Yea, the stricter Pharisees (as has been often observed by those who are versed in the ancient Jewish writings,) not content with giving one tenth of their substance to God in his priests and Levites, gave another tenth to God in the poor, and that continually. They gave the same proportion of all they had in alms as they were accustomed to give in tithes. And this likewise they adjusted with the utmost exactness; that they might not keep back any part, but might fully render unto God the things which were God's, as they accounted this to be. So that, upon the whole, they gave away, from year to year an entire fifth of all that they possessed.

6. This was "the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees;" a righteousness which, in many respects, went far beyond the conception which many have been accustomed to entertain concerning it. But perhaps it will be said, "It was all false and feigned; for they were all a company of hypocrites." Some of them doubtless were; men who had really no religion at all, no fear of God, or desire to please him; who had no concern for the honour that cometh of God, but only for the praise of men. And these are they whom our Lord so severely condemns, so sharply reproves, on many occasions. But we must not suppose, because many Pharisees were hypocrites, therefore all were so. Nor indeed is hypocrisy by any means essential to the character of a Pharisee. This is not the distinguishing mark of their sect. It is rather this, according to our Lord's account, "They trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." This is their genuine badge. But the Pharisee of this kind cannot be a hypocrite. He must be, in the common sense, sincere; otherwise he could not "trust in himself that he is righteous." The man who was here commending himself to God unquestionably thought himself righteous. Consequently, he was no hypocrite; he was not conscious to himself of any insincerity. He now spoke to God just what he thought, namely, that he was abundantly better than other men.

But the example of St. Paul, were there no other, is sufficient to put this out of all question. He could not only say, when he was a Christian, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men;" (Acts 24:16;) but even concerning the time when he was a Pharisee, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." (Acts 23:1) He was therefore sincere when he was a Pharisee, as well when he was a Christian. He was no more a hypocrite when he persecuted the Church, than when he preached the faith which once he persecuted. Let this then be added to "the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees," -- a sincere belief that they are righteous, and in all things "doing God service."

7. And yet, "except your righteousness," saith our Lord, "shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." A solemn and weighty declaration, and which it behoves all who are called by the name of Christ seriously and deeply to consider. But before we inquire how our righteousness may exceed theirs, let us examine whether at present we come up to it.

First, a Pharisee was "not as other men are." In externals he was singularly good. Are we so? Do we dare to be singular at all? Do we not rather swim with the stream? Do we not many times dispense with religion and reason together, because we would not look particular? Are we not often more afraid of being out of the fashion, than of being out of the way of salvation? Have we courage to stem the tide? -- to run counter to the world? -- "to obey God rather than man?" Otherwise, the Pharisee leaves us behind at the very first

step. It is well if we overtake him any more.

But to come closer. Can we use his first plea with God, which is, in substance, "I do no harm: I live in no outward sin. I do nothing for which my own heart condemns me." Do you not? Are you sure of that? Do you live in no practice for which your own heart condemns you? If you are not an adulterer, if you are not unchaste, either in word or deed, are you not unjust? The grand measure of justice, as well as of mercy, is, "Do unto others as thou wouldst they should do unto thee." Do you walk by this rule? Do you never do unto any what you would not they should do unto you, Nay, are you not grossly unjust? Are you not an extortioner? Do you not make a gain of anyone's ignorance or necessity; neither in buying nor selling? Suppose you are engaged in trade: Do you demand, do you receive, no more than the real value of what you sell? Do you demand, do you receive, no more of the ignorant than of the knowing, -- of a little child, than of an experienced trader? If you do, why does not your heart condemn you? You are a barefaced extortioner! Do you demand no more than the usual price of goods of any who is in pressing want, -- who must have, and that without delay, the things which you only can furnish him with? If you do, this also is flat extortion. Indeed you do not come up to the righteousness of a Pharisee.

8. A Pharisee, Secondly, (to express his sense in our common way,) used all the means of grace. As he fasted often and much, twice in every week, so he attended all the sacrifices. He was constant in public and private prayer, and in reading and hearing the Scriptures. Do you go as far as this? Do you fast much and often? -- twice in the week? I fear not! Once, at least, "on all Fridays in the year?" (So our Church clearly and peremptorily enjoins all her members to do; to observe all these as well as the vigils and the forty days of Lent, as days of fasting or abstinence.) Do you fast twice in the year? I am afraid some among us cannot plead even this! Do you neglect no opportunity of attending and partaking of the Christian sacrifice? How many are they who call themselves Christians, and yet are utterly regardless of it, -- yet do not eat of that bread, or drink of that cup, for months, perhaps years, together? Do you, every day, either hear the Scriptures, or read them and meditate thereon? Do you join in prayer with the great congregation, daily, if you have opportunity; if not, whenever you can; particularly on that day which you "remember to keep it holy?" Do you strive to "make opportunities?" Are you glad when they say unto you, "We will go into the house of the Lord?" Are you zealous of, and diligent in, private prayer? Do you suffer no day to pass without it? Rather are not some of you so far from spending therein (with the Pharisee) several hours in one day that you think one hour full enough, if not too much? Do you spend an hour in a day, or in a week, in praying to your Father which is in secret? yea, an hour in a month? Have you spent one hour together in private prayer ever since you was born? Ah, poor Christian! Shall not the Pharisee rise up in the judgment against thee and condemn thee? His righteousness is as far above thine, as the heaven is above the earth!

9. The Pharisee, Thirdly, paid tithes and gave alms of all that he possessed. And in how ample a manner! So that he was (as we phrase it) "a man that did much good." Do we come up to him here? Which of us is so abundant as he was in good works? Which of us gives a fifth of all his substance to God? Both of the principal and of the increase? Who of us out of (suppose) an hundred pounds a year, gives twenty to God and the poor; out of fifty, ten; and so in a larger or a smaller proportion? When shall our righteousness, in using all the means of grace, in attending all the ordinances of God, in avoiding evil and doing good, equal at least the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees?

10. Although if it only equalled theirs, what would that profit? "For verily I say unto you, except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." But how can it exceed theirs? Wherein does the righteousness of a Christian

exceed that of a scribe or Pharisee? Christian righteousness exceeds theirs, First, in the extent of it. Most of the Pharisees, though they were rigorously exact in many things, yet were emboldened, by the traditions of the Elders to dispense with others of equal importance. Thus they were extremely punctual in keeping the fourth commandment, -- they would not even rub an ear of corn on the Sabbath-day; but not at all in keeping the third, -- making little account of light, or even false, swearing. So that their righteousness was partial; whereas the righteousness of a real Christian is universal. He does not observe one, or some parts, of the law of God, and neglect the rest; but keeps all his commandments, loves them all, values them above gold or precious stones.

11. It may be, indeed, that some of the Scribes and Pharisees endeavoured to keep all the commandments, and consequently were, as touching the righteousness of the law, that is, according to the letter of it, blameless. But still the righteousness of a Christian exceeds all this righteousness of a Scribe or Pharisee, by fulfilling the spirit as well as the letter of the law; by inward as well as outward obedience. In this, in the spirituality of it, it admits of no comparison. This is the point which our Lord has so largely proved, in the whole tenor of this discourse. Their righteousness was external only: Christian righteousness is in the inner man. The Pharisee "cleansed the outside of the cup and the platter;" the Christian is clean within. The Pharisee laboured to present God with a good life; the Christian with a holy heart. The one shook off the leaves, perhaps the fruits, of sin; the other "lays the axe to the root," as not being content with the outward form of godliness, how exact soever it be, unless the life, the Spirit, the power of God unto salvation, be felt in the inmost soul.

Thus, to do no harm, to do good, to attend the ordinances of God (the righteousness of a Pharisee,) are all external; whereas, on the contrary, poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, hunger and thirst after righteousness, the love of our neighbour, and purity of heart, (the righteousness of a Christian,) are all internal. And even peace-making (or doing good,) and suffering for righteousness' sake, stand entitled to the blessings annexed to them, only as they imply these inward dispositions, as they spring from, exercise, and confirm them. So that whereas the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was external only, it may be said in some sense that the righteousness of a Christian is internal only: All his actions and sufferings being as nothing in themselves, being estimated before God only by the tempers from which they spring.

12. Whosoever therefore thou art, who bearest the holy and venerable name of a Christian, see, First, that thy righteousness fall not short of the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. Be not thou "as other men are!" Dare to stand alone, to be "against example, singularly good." If thou "follow a multitude" at all, it must be "to do evil." Let not custom or fashion be thy guide, but reason and religion. The practice of others is nothing to thee: "Every man must give an account of himself to God." Indeed, if thou canst save the soul of another, do; but at least save one, -- thy own. Walk not in the path of death because it is broad, and many walk therein. Nay, by this very token thou mayst know it. Is the way wherein thou now walkest, a broad, well-frequented, fashionable way? Then it infallibly leads to destruction. O be not thou "damned for company!" Cease from evil; fly from sin as from the face of a serpent! At least, do no harm. "He that committeth sin is of the devil." Be not thou found in that number. Touching outward sins, surely the grace of God is even now sufficient for thee. "Herein," at least, "exercise thyself to have a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men."

Secondly. Let not thy righteousness fall short of theirs with regard to the ordinances of God. If thy labour or bodily strength will not allow of thy fasting twice in the week, however, deal faithfully with thy own soul, and fast as often as thy strength will permit. Omit no public, no private opportunity of pouring out thy soul

in prayer. Neglect no occasion of eating that bread and drinking that cup which is the communion of the body and blood of Christ. Be diligent in searching the Scriptures: read as thou mayst, and meditate therein day and night. Rejoice to embrace every opportunity of hearing "the word of reconciliation" declared by the "ambassadors of Christ," the "stewards of the mysteries of God." In using all the means of grace, in a constant and careful attendance on every ordinance of God, live up to (at least till thou canst go beyond) "the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees."

Thirdly. Fall not short of a Pharisee in doing good. Give alms of all thou dost possess. Is any hungry? Feed him. Is he athirst? Give him drink. Naked? Cover him with a garment. If thou hast this world's goods, do not limit thy beneficence to a scanty proportion. Be merciful to the uttermost of thy power. Why not, even as this Pharisee? Now "make thyself friends," while the time is, "of the mammon of unrighteousness," that when thou failest," when this earthly tabernacle is dissolved, "they may receive thee into everlasting habitations."

13. But rest not here. Let thy "righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees." Be not thou content to "keep the whole law, and offend in one point." Hold thou fast all His commandments, and all "false ways do thou utterly abhor." Do all the things whatsoever He hath commanded, and that with all thy might. Thou canst do all things through Christ strengthening thee; though without Him thou canst do nothing.

Above all, let thy righteousness exceed theirs in the purity and spirituality of it. What is the exactest form of religion to thee? the most perfect outside righteousness? Go thou higher and deeper than all this! Let thy religion be the religion of the heart. Be thou poor in spirit; little, and base, and mean, and vile in thy own eyes; amazed and humbled to the dust at the "love of God which is in Christ Jesus thy Lord! Be serious: Let the whole stream of thy thoughts, words, and works, be such as flows from the deepest conviction that thou standest on the edge of the great gulf, thou and all the children of men, just ready to drop in, either into everlasting glory, or everlasting burnings! Be meek: Let thy soul be filled with mildness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering toward all men; at the same time that all which is in thee is athirst for God, the living God, longing to awake up after his likeness, and to be satisfied with it. Be thou a lover of God, and of all mankind. In this spirit, do and suffer all things. Thus "exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees," and thou shalt be "called great in the kingdom of heaven."

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