

Repentance And Righteousness (Part 2)

Doing Right

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If you recall the first sermon, I began by showing that we observe the first and last Days of Unleavened Bread for the same reasons. God said in Exodus 12:17 that He has us keep these feast days, He has us keep them holy, and He has us convene on them in a holy convocation, because He has brought us out of the land of Egypt.

And we concluded from this that our journey out of sin—out of this world, out of Satan's way of life—encompasses our entire Christian lives from here on out. Then, at the end by a great miracle, God saves us completely. He then translates us into the Kingdom of the Son of His love, as told us in the New Testament.

We then saw what part that repentance plays, and what repentance is. And we will review this for a moment because there are several points I would like to pick up again to get a good running start in today's sermon. And, if you will remember, we used both Old Testament and New Testament words as an outline to show what repentance is, and how it works.

The first point was that repentance has a very strong emotional flavor to it. It is very hard. It is bitter. It is painful. And, we should feel great sorrow and regret for what we have done, and for what we are, that we are such weak human beings with such a sinful outlook that has been "bred" into us, in a way, and from the nurturing of society. But the repentance should not stop with the emotional qualities. Because, an entirely emotional repentance may not be a true repentance, which leads to the second point.

Repentance must cause us to turn, or return from the wide path that leads to death and destruction, and onto the narrow path that leads to eternal life. Like we heard in a sermonette, a life that is truly life. If we have not repented, it is a life that leads to death. We do not want that life. We want to turn off that path, and go to the life that is truly life. So, a change in our way of life is the essence of repentance.

The third point is that repentance must follow deep consideration—taking stock. We must deeply understand our sin, and how we allowed ourselves to become involved in it, and how we will avoid it in the future. We must accept our guilt, and comprehend our depravity before we can truly see ourselves in comparison to God who has no guilt, and is not depraved at all. He is totally perfect, and we have got to see ourselves in comparison to Him, because He is the only true standard of righteousness. If we

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compare ourselves among each other, Paul says that that is not wise, because we are not comparing ourselves to a very good standard at all.

The fourth point is that repentance is through thinking twice, like the Greek word "metanoia," which means, "an afterthought." This means that we are thinking twice about what we are doing, and that thinking twice causes us to change our mind. Changing our mind, then, causes us to change direction. And, we found from looking through the examples of John the Baptist, and his message of repentance, that when you repent, truly repent, then your heart is prepared to practice righteousness. Without that repentant attitude, any righteousness that you may do afterward is not worth very much. So this prepares us and gets us ready to do what is good and right, and pleasing to God.

The fifth point is from David's example of repentance showing how to truly repent, having a real godly repentance. We saw there that we must put ourselves entirely at God's mercy. We must confess our transgressions, and really seek a change of heart; not just to want forgiveness for what we have done, but truly desire to change. And not just to change our actions, but change what is in here—in our heart and mind—so that we will not make those mistakes again, because we will not *want* to make those same mistakes again.

And of course, we do this—changing our mind, and changing our actions—by God's help through the Holy Spirit, which David pleaded with God not to take away from Him. "Give me more, God, because I need it, because without it, I am just a worm. I can't do anything."

When we ended that sermon last week, we were beginning to see just how repentance and righteousness cannot be separated. Repentance is the beginning of righteousness, as I have already said. And, righteousness is the fruit of repentance. We saw the example of John the Baptist before the Pharisees, "Are you trying to flee from the wrath to come? Let's see some fruits of your repentance. Let's see that you really mean it."

So, repentance without righteousness, as well as righteousness without repentance does not work. One without the other brings them both to nothing.

So, let us look at the second part of this equation and the righteousness aspect.

Hebert Armstrong used to talk about how much harder it is to *unlearn* something that we have been taught, or believe. We have all come out of this world; we have all learned a lot of false teachings and things in our lives. And, it takes years and years of time to put

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those things behind us, and really begin to think along the same lines that God does. It is so much easier if we learn it right the first time. And, this is especially hard when we have been living and thinking this wrong way, and having this wrong attitude from our very childhood.

Now, this unlearning of things we have been taught and have come to believe is something I have been going through recently, regarding the subject of righteousness. It is not something like what we have learned in the past is wrong—I am not implying this at all—but it was incomplete. There is a whole lot more beyond what we have learned. To put this in a nutshell, righteousness is so much more than just keeping the commandments.

Now, the church of God has for 2000 years stood their ground for saying that righteousness is keeping the commandments of God.

Psalm 119:172 My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness.

That is a Bible definition of righteousness. It is absolutely correct. My "inspired" margin has, "Keeping the law is righteousness." And I have a little note that say to look at Romans 7:12. This is a memory scripture.

Romans 7:12 Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

This too is absolutely correct. You cannot take away from that at all. Can you find fault with that? No. Like I said, what we have learned in the past is true and right. And yet, there is more beyond this, though, than just keeping the commandments. If we go back a few pages to Romans 3:

Romans 3:31 Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

Again, another very clear New Testament scripture by the apostle Paul (whom God used to write fourteen books of the Bible) that the law is established under the New Covenant, and it is entirely valid.

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So, what can you say? The law has not been done away with. The law is still here for us to use. It is absolutely necessary that we keep the law. But, like I said, this is only the beginning of this.

I have heard the book of Romans called the constitution of the church of God. That is an excellent way to remember this book, because it touches on all the major doctrines of the church.

Paul did not start the church in Rome. It was started while he was elsewhere. But it was in his territory, so he was writing a letter to them, making sure that they had all the bases covered, so that when he came to them, they would not be lacking in any knowledge about this way of life. And it also touches on the basic foundation for understanding the entire gospel, and the Kingdom of God.

Romans 1:11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established.

He wanted to make sure that they were rightly founded in all the ways of God, and then he also showed them how the church of God differs from Judaism, as well as some of the pagan religions around them—getting them firmly established. And in this book, he not only covers the basic doctrines—justification, baptism, righteousness, among others—but he also tries to explain this understanding of righteousness further. And I do not know if we have completely gotten it. I do not know that I have completely gotten it. But, Paul did not just leave it at the basics. He gave them the whole smear as their basic foundation. And it is interesting that maybe now we are just getting to it. How long have we been around? Maybe we have understood it; maybe we just need to be reminded of it. Maybe I am the one who is slow. Maybe I am just catching up. But, these past couple of months I have really come to understand it a whole lot better.

You know, in a way, it is easy to follow a set of rules and regulations. We do this when we play games all the time. Basketball has a set of rules. They have a book that lays out all the rules of the game that you need—length of the court, the width, what foul lines are and where they go, and how the players may interact with one another—what they can do, and what they cannot do—and what the aim of the game is, and how it is won, and the duration to get there.

We normally tend, those of us who are even mildly athletic, to start a pickup-game of basketball and conform to most if not all of those rules. It is not very hard to do. And though these rules may be very stringent—if you step on that line, you are out of

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bounds, the ball goes over to the other team—they are much easier to follow than a set of principles. I do not know any principles that are applied to basketball, as far as playing the game goes, because it is only a game.

But we are talking about life. God gave Israel a set of ten grand eternal principles, which we call the Ten Commandments. Jesus later told us that they can be boiled down into two major principles—love toward God, and love toward neighbor. And then, later on, it was revealed even further that God is love.

So, these 10 can be funneled down into two, and then down into one. And you have this wonderful overlying principle that God says defines His character. God is love. And He has told us to be just like Him. "I want you all eventually to say, Jim is love, and George love, Mary is love, and Alice is love." This is what we are shooting for.

But, you know what Israel did. They turned these things into the 10 "rules." They wanted a "foul line," or "out of bounds line" to tell them at what point they would step out of bounds. There is a huge difference between the rules and the principles.

Now, before we go on, I want to inject that the principles are far more stringent than the rules.

Generally, rules are narrow guidelines that describe conduct. Now, do not confuse this narrowness with stringency, because a rule takes a particular action and makes a guideline just for that one thing. So if you step out of bounds, you have broken one rule. But, the principle is that the ball must stay in play within those lines. The rule is that if you touch the end line, you are out of bounds. Or, if you touch a side line, you are also out of bounds. But the principle is that the game is played on the court. The rule describes conduct.

Let us switch metaphors: My son Johnny has an awful habit of taking off his shoes first thing coming in the house. And, this really is not so bad, but he drops his shoes right where he is at the time, and they usually stay there. And so, I come home from work, or whatever, and there are these shoes that I have to avoid tripping over if I can. Luckily, at this time, his shoes are just little things, maybe three inches long, but still it can be wearying after a while. "Johnny, pick up your shoes." So, we have a rule at our house, and it proscribes this one narrow aspect of his conduct. It says, "Johnny, don't leave your shoes in the hallway, or in the doorway, because other people will trip over them and could get hurt. So, put them away in your closet, or at least in your room."

Back to our theme. Principles are broad, comprehensive, fundamental laws, or truths.

They are core ideals. They are core standards of conduct.

To use Johnny again, he is too young right now to grasp the overall principle. So, he must be taught a rule that governs one small area of his conduct—where to put his shoes. He is too young to understand the principle about these shoes, which is, "Don't let what you do cause people to stumble and fall down."

Now, I think it is best to teach them together to our children. You tell them the rules, and you tell them the principles as well, so as they grow up, they learn to do other things just by instinct (so to speak) because they learn that the principle covers not only the shoes left in the hallway, but also their coat. And maybe someday, they will be able to notice down the aisle here that somebody's briefcase is accidentally jutting out, and they will then quietly move the briefcase over a bit so as not to cause an accident for somebody else.

Now, the same thing applies to us when we are spiritually young and immature. It is the same when we are first converted—we have to learn the rules, and follow them, before we can fully grasp the principles behind them.

Rules without principles seem groundless after a while. Did you even think about that? If you just follow a bunch of rules—"why are doing these dumb things? What does it mean? This doesn't help me any."

But, if we know that those rules mean something greater, that God—or whoever is in authority that made those rules—has a greater overriding principle that He is trying to get across, such as in basketball so that the game will be played in a fairly peaceful manner, so that something will be accomplished in it, so that someone will win, then you have to have rules. And then we can say, "Well, yeah. That makes sense. We need to do this to make sure the game goes well, and no one gets hurt."

Another thing—rules can be very mean spirited if the principles behind them are not taught to the child. I think parents do this all the time. "Mommy, why do I have to do this? Why do I have to hang my shirts up?" And they reply, "Because I said so! I am your mother." That is mean, and it has no basis. It is not because you are the parent, but because God wants us to be neat and orderly. That is the principle behind the rule. And, if the child learns the principle while keeping the rule when he is young, then maybe someday he will keep his own house, yard, and car—maybe his whole life—neat and orderly, because he has learned the principle why he needs to pick up his clothes off the floor and put them neatly away where they belong.

Turn to Galatians. Let us get some proof of this. In the *New King James Version* this section is titled, "The Purpose of the Law."

Galatians 3:19-21 What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! [Paul is saying, here, that the law fits in perfectly with what God is accomplishing on this earth.] For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.

If there is anything that would have worked, it would have been the law. But, that is not the way that God set it up. Righteousness by the law cannot give you eternal life. It is just that simple. God did not do it that way. Paul says here that the law is such a good and holy and just thing that if there is anything in this old world that would have worked, it would have been the law. But that is not how it works. It is by the promise, and faith in that promise.

Galatians 3:22-25 But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Paul, here, confirms everything that I have said up until now. The rules that God gave us in the Old Testament are our tutor to bring us to Christ.

Now, most Protestants (and maybe even some of us still, though I hope not) believes this to mean that the law was only valid until Christ came, and then He died for us, so there is no longer a need for the law. But this is not true at all. That is not what he says. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He does not alter the grounds or means of salvation of one people over another. To do that would be respect of persons. And we know for sure that God is no respecter of persons.

Referring to verse 24, "to bring us to Christ," does not have anything to do with time—it does not have anything to do with a certain point in history. It has everything to do with

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growth. Maybe this is a new way of looking upon it, and something that we ought to think about. Look at the analogy that Paul uses. He says that it was a tutor to bring us to Christ. It talks about education. A tutor was during Bible times maybe a slave that not only took the children to school, but had a lot to do with their education. The master of the house used him to bring the young heir up, so that he could eventually take over the master's business affairs, or estate. This tutor was not only a tutor, but also a guardian of the young heir. He was a teacher.

Now the law is a teacher, a guardian that brings us to a certain point—Christ is that point. And it is at this point that we are no longer confined to the narrowness of the rules. But now we are free under the broader principles of God's way of life.

You might say, "Now wait a moment here! That sounds awfully liberal to me! Do you mean that we no longer need the law?" Not on your life! Go back to the analogy. When someone who is 18 or so graduates, or 22 and graduates from college, does that young person throw away everything he has learned up to that point? No. Those things were necessary for that person's education. In fact, he takes what he has learned, and he applies it in making a living the rest of his life.

So, the rules and the lessons that he learned while going through school provides a foundation for what he is about to do.

Now, let us bring this back to our lives. Paul is saying that once we are spiritually mature, strict application of the rules of the law become less important than the correct application of the principles of God's character as exemplified in the law. The rules are still tremendously important, because they provide him with the experience and the understanding of God's way of life. But now he is free to apply the principles that are behind those rules in every aspect of his life, even if there is a rule that does not specifically apply to any of his situations.

You might go thumbing through the Bible and see that there is no rule that applies to your recent traffic accident that you caused. So what do you do now? What are the principles of the law that applies to this car accident situation? See? Now you are free to think, and look beyond the rules to apply the principles that God functions by.

Do you think that God only functions by rules? No! God is love! That is the overall principle. And, every action that He takes has to conform to that principle of love—outgoing concern for everyone. We can look at multiple examples in the New Testament of God in the flesh saying, "In order for me to be loving towards these people, I must do this thing..." But see? They do not conform to the strict application of

the rules.

But the Pharisees were always, "Don't do that! That's breaking the law!" And Christ would say, "If you would understand what, 'I require mercy and not sacrifice' means, then you would have a different attitude." See? They were so bound in the narrowness of the rules, that they could not see the wider applications and principles that He was applying.

But, He still followed the rules. So, never let yourself think that the rules do not apply. The rules do apply. And this is what I meant earlier, that the principles are far stricter than the rules, because the rules are narrow in their application, but the principles are broad in their applications. And, we are always held by God to the application of all the principles.

I thought of a very interesting and simple illustration that will let you see this. I happened to be in the shower at the time, and this is what I thought of. What if my house was burning down while I was in the shower? I was buck naked and my son was trapped in his bedroom and could not get out. Now, there is no time for me to put on my clothes and then go save his life and get out of the house.

Okay. What is more important?—me to conform to the rules, which says that it is a shame for a man to be seen by others while naked, or to save my son's life? Which one shows more love?—strict conformity to the rules that no one should see my nakedness, or saving a life? This is a no-brainer. That is easy.

This was a simple little illustration to show that sometimes the strict application of the rules must be superseded by the strict application of the principles. "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice."

Turn to Galatians 5. Much of this chapter is about Christian liberty.

Galatians 5:13-14, 16-17 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." . . . I say then, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

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Remember in Romans 7, Paul kept saying that he wanted to do this, but end up doing that; I really wanted to do this, but I could not because there is a law in my members that is stronger than I am; the law of my mind—I really wanted to do it—God be thanked that Jesus Christ is there, and His sacrifice, that I can be forgiven, and go on. Paul is saying the same sorts of things right here, just in a different fashion.

Galatians 5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

If you are led by the Spirit the rules do not have very much to do with you at all. See? You are not working by the rules, but you are working by the principles—if you are led by the Spirit.

Remember, that in other places, Paul said, "The law is a killer, in a fashion, because it condemns you, because there is where the punishments are. If you break it, this will happen to you (it will break you). But we are under grace now, we are living by the Spirit, and if we can we have been freed from the law—now we are living under grace, and we are living by the principles behind the law.

Let me interject once again—this does not do away with the law. It makes things more difficult, because now we are living under God's principles, which are much more strict in how we behave.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit [Which means, what living by the Spirit produces] is love [first off—the most important], joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. [Listen to what he says next:] Against such there is no law.

Nothing has ever been written down that says that you cannot do these things. They are perfectly good and right and holy and just all the time, because they show you God's character. In no way can we be breaking the law if we are doing those things. If your life is full of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, you will not break the rules. It is as simple as that.

Simple? Yes. Easy? No. It is easy to say, but hard to do.

Galatians 5:24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Because, those things are against these fruits of the Spirit. Paul mentioned those things in verses 19 through 21—the works of the flesh.

Galatians 5:25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

If this is how we aim to live, in our hearts and our minds, with this repentant attitude, is what we have decided and committed ourselves to, then, let us live and walk and conduct ourselves by all these things. If we are truly a mature Christian, we are not doing fleshly carnal evil things. We are living by the principles of God. If you are led God's Spirit, then you will conduct yourself according to the Spirit.

This is a very similar idea of what we have heard in past sermons that what we believe is what we will do. What we think is true and right, will come out in our conduct. In other words, our entire world—all our time and energy, thoughts, emotions, desires, words, actions—will be guided by God's Holy Spirit. Every one of them. When we reach that point, Paul says, "No law comes into effect. We are at that point, beyond law. We are no longer merely guided by the law, but by the principles, and our own replica of God's character in us built in us by the Holy Spirit.

Have we reached that point yet? I do not think so. I sure have not.

Turn back to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. I thought that this was really interesting when I started putting these things together. This will be from the section, "Christ fulfills the law." Remember back in Galatians 3 a few moments ago the law brings us to Christ? Okay, now we are going to see what Christ did to bring us to this point. (Maybe some of us have not gotten to this point yet.)

Matthew 5:17-24 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, 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. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 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.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever

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says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

That is interesting. We could go on, actually, through the remainder of Matthew 5, and it would just add to what we have already seen. Verses 17-20 I like to call The Preamble to Christ's magnification of the law—the giving to us of it is spiritual intent. These four verses are the preamble to that. And they reveal the changes or magnifications that deal with three of the commandments—murder, adultery, and oaths, as well as some others.

Now, before we go into any of those teachings, remember that in Galatians 5:14 Paul said that the law is fulfilled in this one thing—you shall love your neighbor as yourself. He did not just throw this in here. Christ said that He came to fulfill the law. In Romans 13:8 and 10, Paul says very clearly—TWICE—love fulfills the law. Love is the fulfilling of the law. It is very interesting when we put that back in here. But then, we figure out what Christ did so that we no longer need a tutor.

Have you ever gotten out a thesaurus, and looked at the synonyms for "fulfilled," or "fulfill?" It is very interesting. I want to share some of these things with you now, with this phrase, "Love fulfills the law."

"Love completes the law." "Love fills up the law." "Love accomplishes the law." "Love achieves the aims of the law." (I like that one, probably my favorite one.) "Love performs the law." "Love observes, or keeps the law." "Love respects and follows the law." "Love satisfies the law." (My other favorite one.) "Love achieves the aims of the law," and "Love satisfies the law."

When Jesus says that not even one little tittle of the law is to be done away with—do you know what a "jot" was? It is a diacritical mark about the size of the period at the top of the letter "i". Not even the period on the top of the letter "i" is going to be lost from the law. It is all still valid.

God does not give anything that is not good and right, and worthwhile for us. And He said, "None of these things are going to be taken away until the aims of the law are achieved—fulfilled!"

When our character becomes so full of love so that we are like God, then we will have

no use for the law. That is what Christ said there. When you are so full of love that we could say that you are love, then you do not need the law. But, until that time, you need the law, because you still need those rules to guide us.

So, Jesus says here in verse 19, "Do not think you can even break one of the least of these commandments, for you may not make it. At the very least, your reward will suffer for it. You will be the least in the kingdom of heaven if you break one of these least ones."

See? He does not say, "Oh! My ways are a lot more liberal than the way that it was in the past." No, but He says, "Now you are governed by love, and that is so much harder. And if you don't even keep the least of these commandments, you may not be keeping the principle of love. And this may endanger your judgment—your reward."

Then He goes on to say, "For I say unto you. . ." This phrase, and others similar to it, means that He is making an addition to, or expanding, or magnifying, or explaining a part of the law. He is giving us something to think about to broaden our perspective on what this law really means. He said that our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees. "For I say to you, unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." That is a pretty strong statement.

"You will be no means. . ." What does Christ mean by this? First of all, Jesus admits that they had a righteousness—He uses that term. *Your* righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. But, there was something about their righteousness that was not good enough for God. God in the flesh was right there and condemned their righteousness right before their face.

I was thinking of a line from a movie called, "Animal Farm," "Some people are more equal than others." That is from a communist system. Well, in this case, there is a righteousness that is more equal than others. Not all righteousnesses are the same. There are different righteousnesses. If you want to take it to this extreme, there is a good righteousness, and a bad righteousness. There is one righteousness that leads to the abundant life, and then there is another righteousness that leads to death. Could there be a righteousness that leads to the Kingdom of God, and a righteousness that leads to the Lake of Fire?

So now, let us understand what righteousness really is. The Old Testament words, every one of them that is used for righteousness, all come from one primary root word—"fadaq." It is usually translated as "righteous," "righteousness," "just," "justice," or

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"upright." It means "conforming to a norm or standard." And it is interesting in that the Old Testament has little or no idea or concept of absolute righteousness, or sinlessness. This word only conveys just doing what the rules said. And if your relationship to the rules were fine, then you were considered upright. It does not mean that you never broke one, but generally you conform to the standard.

And of course, in a theological context, it means that your actions are in harmony with what God has revealed, and what your obligations to God are under the covenant. And so your relationship with God is just upright in general conformity with what He said.

Now the only real idea of sinlessness or absolute righteousness in the Old Testament is God Himself. Look this up later in Psalm 4:1, and Isaiah 45:21. There is no one more righteous than God. Psalm 143:2 it says, "In your sight, no one is righteous." Both sides of the same coin.

But, on the other hand, people are called righteous—Noah, Job, David, and many other saints, are called righteous. But, this does not mean that they were sinless. It just means that they generally lived in harmony with God. They had a right relationship with God.

Turn to Deuteronomy 4 and we will get a bit of flavor of this.

Deuteronomy 4:5-8 "Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?"

I brought this up to show you that God is what made the law righteous, and therefore the lives of the Israelites could be conformed to this standard, and they could become righteous. And under the Old Covenant, it is simply fulfilling your obligations under that covenant.

Now, the same idea survives in the New Testament. The Greek word used for righteous all again come from one root word, "dikaios." Basically, this has also the very same

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meanings found in the Hebrew. "Dikaios" means, "Meeting obligations to others, both man and God." A dictionary of Bible words says, "The Old Testament sense is in fact the basic one in most uses found in the gospel." So, Jesus is using the word, whether speaking Hebrew or Aramaic, and said, "Your 'fadaq' must exceed the 'fadaq' of the scribes and the Pharisees." And it was translated into the Greek as, "Your 'dikaios' must exceed the 'dikaios' of the scribes and the Pharisees."

Meeting your obligations to God, and conforming to His will, and living up to His standards, must be more than what these scribes and Pharisees were doing.

Believe it or not, our English word righteousness has pretty much the same meaning. It means, "acting in accordance with divine law; conforming to a standard, or a norm." In this case, we have made it a religious word, meaning, "conforming to divine law."

It is derived from two words, "right," and "wide." Wisdom is something you do. Wisdom is an application of what you know or understand. So, what it is saying there is that it is a wide use of what is right—doing what is love, what is righteous—very easy to understand. The wide application of what is right, correct, proper, appropriate, lawful, and good—doing right, righteousness, right doing. It is very simple. That is what it was in the Bible in both testaments—conforming to a set of standards.

Now let us think this through. It is good and right to meet one's obligations to God and to man. Everybody will agree to this. I do not know of anyone who would disagree that we have obligations, and if we have obligations, then we should meet them. It is very simple. God wants us to do this.

But, how we meet our obligations can make all the difference in the world. It is this "how" that Jesus was getting at. He said it could make the difference between the Kingdom of God, and the Lake of Fire. "By no means will you enter the kingdom of heaven if your righteousness was only as good as the scribes and Pharisees." There is a better "how" than that.

Well, what Jesus said must have astounded those people who were listening to Him. You must understand and remember who the Pharisees were. They were meticulous in how they conformed to "their" obligations—how they met their obligations. They were committed to a life of strict obedience of the law.

I really think that we cannot grasp just how meticulous they were. I mean, they would not even carry a needle on the Sabbath for fear that God consider that to be working, because a needle could pull thread, and a threaded needle could sew or mend clothes,

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so if you have one of them on your person on the Sabbath day, you might be working as a tailor. That is how ridiculous, but how meticulous and fastidious they were about adhering to the law.

There must have been people listening to this thinking to themselves, "How can we be righteous, then? If we must do it better than they do it, it is surely impossible."

Jesus' response to this question is found in the remainder of this chapter. He speaks of murder, adultery, and oaths, particularly—commandments number 6, 7, and 9. And then He culminates this with an admonition, not only to love our neighbors, but also our enemies. Go through and read each one of those things, and you will find it is talking about attitude—motive, thoughts, desires—not just the act.

The Pharisees concentrated strictly upon the act of sin itself. They did not care a thing for what their attitude was just so long as they did not do the act. They could have the worst attitude in the world, and still pay their tithes meticulously on the herbs like mint, anise, and cumin.

They hated God. I am saying that this is how they could have done it. They can hate God with all their heart, hate their brothers, but still tithe meticulously, and feel that God owed them because they strictly adhered to the law.

Let me show you where Christ is headed with this. This next passage is what Christ was getting to.

Matthew 5:48 "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

He was not stopping at merely conforming to the law. He was saying that we have got to go way past conforming to the law in its strict adherence to what the words are; we have got to become as perfect as the Father is. That is our goal. That is the righteousness that exceeds the scribes and Pharisees. The aim is to be just like God.

Chapter six is concerned with the things that we can do to please God. When you pray, do it this way. . . . When you do good, do it this way. . . . So, you are not being showered with good words by men, but instead God is saying, "Look, there is My Son in whom I am well pleased, because He did this act of kindness selflessly, he doesn't ask for any reward, he doesn't ask to be seen by men, He's got a great attitude. He just wants to help. He is living by love."

What Jesus is showing us here is how God orders His own life. And if we order our life as God orders His life, then we will begin living our lives like God lives—righteously. Everything under the umbrella of love.

Do you know that this is found in the Old Testament? Jesus was not making all of this up on the spur of the moment. Look at Ezekiel 33. We read this last time.

Ezekiel 33:10-11 "Therefore you, O son of man, say to the house of Israel: 'Thus you say, "If our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live?"' [If we are so sinful, how do you want us to live?] Say to them [this is God's reply]: 'As I live [AS I LIVE] says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways [and live as I do]! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'

"Why are you killing yourself?" If we were to turn back to Deuteronomy 30, God says the same thing. "I have set before you this day, one way or the other—choose either life or death—but choose life!" This has been His constant theme.

Now that we know this, did we ever see this? Of course we do, in the pages of the book, here, turn to Acts 10. What Peter does here in this little sermon he preaches to Cornelius' household, points us in the direction in how to do this. Jesus, Himself, showed us how to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

Acts 10:38 [H]ow God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

God's character and power was in Him, and what did He do? He did good, and relieved burdens, setting people free, helping in times of need. He gave, when most of us had no more to give. This is the major difference between the true Christian and the Pharisees.

Jesus, the model Christian, was just as law-keeping as they were, but He added good deeds, pure motive, concern, kind thoughts, earnest desire, and a loving attitude in His righteousness. He exceeded the law. He fulfilled the law. He achieved the aim of the law. He satisfied the law—by doing good, and being good. And being good means that His entire life was focused in not only conforming, but going beyond conformity to help—outgoing concern.

When we are doing these things, it is almost impossible to sin. The times to sin are almost entirely cut out and filled up by goodness. When you had time in times past to do sin, if we are living beyond the law, we are busy doing good—sin never enters the equation. And do you know what? Law never enters the equation, because we are under grace living in the spirit. We have gone beyond law, and now we are fulfilling the law. We are being loving, good, kind, bringing joy to others, being longsuffering, being faithful—we are doing all those things of the fruits of the Spirit. So the law never enters the picture.

We have gone beyond the guidance of the law, and now we are living entirely in a world made up of love. I know that sounds kind of sappy, but I will leave for another sermon what love really is. And, you will probably learn more about that this afternoon.

But, that is where the true righteousness of a true Christian exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. On the other hand, the Pharisees were rigid and entirely selfish. How many times did Jesus give us examples of the Pharisees doing something just to gain merit before God? Or doing a good deed only to be seen by other people? Or, doing something to line their own pockets, or the pockets of the treasury when they were taking money from their own parents in order to make the "church" look good. Talk about a bad attitude. They would not even honor their own parents. They would break the 5th commandment in order to make themselves look good, something like getting the plaque up on the wall for all to see how much he had contributed to the church.

Now, I think that we have a good idea on how to keep the law. We can read Scripture and see the rules laid out. But, how are we doing in applying the principles? Have we stopped to question our motivations? Have we given ourselves an attitude check? Are our desires selfish? Do you want to *get* salvation? Or are we trying sincerely to help others, not only in their physical needs, but in their spiritual ones too? Are we acting out of love for God, and others? Or are we looking out for old number one?

This is where your righteousness exceeds the scribes and Pharisees. What is your attitude? What is your motive? How are you thinking? What are you trying to get?

As we saw in last week's sermon, we have to begin this process by reviewing our own repentance. And if there are areas in which we need to repent again, then engage the battle. Look at yourselves and see where we have slipped, and make that turn off the wide way, back on to the narrow way. Repentance, and having a constant repentant attitude is paramount to living righteously.

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If your attitude is wrong when you repent, you are not going to be able to live righteously. It will be impossible. But once we have this Mind in us, as was in Christ Jesus our Lord, (remember that humble and willing Servant, ready to give and help in time of need—Philippians 2:5) then we can begin to consider our walk with God—our going on to perfection—our righteousness.

Let us end today where we ended last week in Romans 6.

Romans 6:17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.

You were set free from sin, you were redeemed. And now you are obeying from the heart—not just obeying the letter, strictly conforming—but now we are obeying from the heart. We have an attitude of obedience, and we have been set free, now, to do that.

Romans 6:18-19 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. [You have gone from one slavery to another.] I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness [sanctification].

See? This is the process we are going through. And what he says here is that just as you committed yourself wholeheartedly in times past to breaking God's law (in ignorance), now present yourself wholeheartedly, just as enthusiastically, just as zealously, just as committed to doing God's way.

See? We went "whole-hog" into doing sin. So now, Paul is saying, "Let us go 'whole-hog' in doing righteousness," and being holy to the point to where we are someday completely sanctified.

Romans 6:20-22 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. [We had no idea that we were slaves to sin.] What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

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So this means that now our whole life—everything—must be committed solely, entirely, and unreservedly to living God's way of life.

Let us fully commit ourselves to this, to the pursuing righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, the righteousness that goes beyond mere conformity to the law, living under the principles of God's character. And by doing this with God's help we will lay hold on everlasting life.