

A Different Righteousness: Matthew 5:17-26

Questions

Two questions

How are we to live as believers in Jesus? What standards does He set for us?

How does Jesus expectation of the behaviour of His followers relate to the standards set in the Old Testament, to the law of the Old Testament that the Jewish people, those Jesus was ministering to, were expected to live by?

Now if you are a believer you will be interested in the first question because to be a believer is to live according to the teaching of Jesus

And if you are not yet a believer you can still be curious about how Jesus expects believers to live. It may even be one of those things you are keen to know as you weigh up yourself whether you are interested in the Christian faith. For many of us the test of the truth of something is how it is expressed in the way we live.

But few of us, at least not at first, are particularly concerned about the second question – how the standards Jesus expects from His followers relates to the standards set by the law of the Old Testament.

But for Jesus' first hearers, and for Jesus' first followers – that was the key question, and it is the question Jesus sets out to answer in vv. 17-20 before He gives six examples in the rest of chapter 5 of what that means for the standards He sets for His followers, the behaviour He expects from them. He says to those listening

Matthew 5:¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Why did Jesus' relation to the law become an issue?

Now, Why was Jesus anticipating that His relation to the law and the prophets would become an issue? Why would some even think that Jesus had come to abolish the law and the prophets?

Notice it is the law and the prophets, not just the law here.

The law, the first five books of our Bible, and the prophets can stand for the whole Jewish bible, our Old Testament – and they mattered to the Jewish people.

That were the word of God of their God to them.

They were also the key to the Jews' identity as the people of God – the record of God revealing Himself to their forefathers, rescuing them from Egypt, bringing them into covenant relationship with Himself

And they were the source of their continuing distinct identity among the nations as they lived by its laws and regulations.

The law and the prophets were fundamental to Jewish identity and life, and so the relation of Jesus' teaching to them was a natural question.

And Jesus' preaching up to this point raised issues about where He stood in relation to the law and prophets.

Jesus remember was preaching that the Kingdom of heaven, the reign of God, was near and his hearers needed to repent and believe that gospel if they were to be ready for that kingdom

That is, Jesus was defining membership of the people of God, those who would live at peace under the reign of God, not in terms of law keeping, but in terms of people's response to Himself

That was big, especially where the authorised religious teachers – the scribes, and the most popular and influential Jewish group – the Pharisees, defined membership of the people of God in terms of law keeping, strict observance of all the regulations of the law.

So for His Jewish hearers the question of continuity or otherwise of Jesus' teaching and ministry with the existing word of God, was a natural one whose answer would determine in their eyes Jesus' authority and legitimacy.

And it was one raised with urgency by the difference between the gospel Jesus preached and the teaching of the most influential Jewish groups with their focus on law keeping

Jesus' response

Not to abolish, but to fulfill

So Jesus anticipates their questions and objections, and tells His hearers what the relation of His ministry and teaching is to their Bible,

Matthew 5:¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

Abolish has the sense of do away with, annul, - end the authority and role of. The issue is Jesus' attitude towards the authority of the law and prophets

Jesus says He has not come to set them aside, but to fulfill, them

Fulfill suggests that both the law and the prophets are pointing forward to something, create an expectation of what God would do in the future, reveal the plan and purpose God had committed Himself to bring about.

And here Jesus says He is the one who brings what they have pointed towards, fulfills that expectation, realises God's plan and purpose

Jesus' fulfillment of the prophets is often easier to see, especially in Matthew where he tells us repeatedly something took place to fulfill what was spoken of by the prophet, either a specific prophecy or a type or pattern of God' action.

We've heard at Jesus' birth Matthew say

Matthew 1:22, 2:15, 17, 4:14 [8:17, 12:17], 21:4-5, 26:54, 56

Matthew 1:²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"*

And again at the beginning of His ministry

Matthew 4:¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

¹⁵ *“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—*

But how does Jesus fulfil the law? What does the law point forward to?

The law, those first five books of the Bible, create an expectation of what the LORD will do in the future by making clear the Lord’s determination to have a people of His own, who relate to Him according to His word, and who can live in His presence

A people who will love Him with all their heart, mind, soul and strength, as the LORD calls for repeatedly in Deuteronomy.

Deut. 6:4-5, Deut. 10:12-22

Deuteronomy 10: ¹² “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?

That determination is seen from the beginning in the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in Genesis, and it is seen in the promises of restoration after judgment the LORD makes in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, promises with which the law ends. For example

Lev. 26:40-45, Deuteronomy 30:1-10, Deuteronomy 32:36

Deuteronomy 30: “And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, ² and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, ³ then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. ⁴ If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. ⁵ And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. ⁶ And the LORD your God will

circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

This determination of the LORD is then made explicit in the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Consider one we know

Jeremiah 31:33-34, Ezekiel 36:24-28

Ezekiel 36:²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. ²⁸ You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

So what does the Law point forward to?

The whole law, from the time of the promises to Abraham [Gen. 12, 15, 17] looks towards God's people living at peace with God in God's presence, at peace with God because they have been rescued from their enemies and their sin is forgiven and they do the will of God from their heart.

That is what the law, the TORAH, was always looking towards, even as it regulated the life of a rebellious people.

It is what the TORAH continued to point towards through the Jews chequered history of rebellion and judgment, dispossession and return

Jesus is saying something bigger in v. 17 than that He will fulfill the law by obeying it perfectly Himself

Something bigger even than that Jesus will fulfill the law by showing us the true meaning of its laws and regulations, what they were always intending.

Jesus is saying that it is His mission, He has come, to fulfill the law by bringing into being what the law and prophets always looked for – the creation of a people for God who would do His will from the heart, who would be a truly holy people, set apart for their God by being like their God in what they are committed to, loving what HE loves, hating what He hates.

How this will come about Jesus does not say here, although it has already been indicated in the gospel story by His baptism and temptation, and in John's prophecy of baptism in the Spirit.

But the rest of the gospel with its focus on His obedient death as a ransom for many and His rising with all authority will show us clearly how He will bring this about, as does the inspired apostolic teaching on the meaning and achievement of His death, that speak a lot about the relation of what Jesus has done to the law [e.g. Romans and Galatians]

So v. 17 is a big statement, encompassing all that Jesus will do and teach.

The Continuing Role of the Law

And here Jesus tells us what His fulfilling the law means for the continuing role of the law amongst His people, and for how they are to live.

Firstly He says the law, the written law, has abiding relevance

The abiding relevance of the law

¹⁸ *For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*

– an iota and a dot refer to the smallest letter and the smallest mark, one that distinguished one Hebrew letter from another very similar one, of the written law.

And Jesus says 'Amen', translated 'truly' here.

He is stressing the faithfulness, the reliability, the certainty of what He is saying.

Listen to me, He says, the written law in its entirety, down to the smallest mark, is as permanent as the heaven and earth. It will continue to be relevant and valid while this age endures.

And then he adds another 'until' clause – until all is accomplished. This is not another time note. It is a statement of purpose, reinforcing why it has abiding authority. It continues until all that it has spoken of comes to pass. That does not just happen with the death and rising of Jesus. It will happen when people from every nation and tongue are gathered around the throne praising God forever, when all Israel is saved to live in God's presence in the new heaven and earth. Until then the law remains.

And The consequence amongst His followers of this abiding relevance because Jesus has come to fulfill the law and the prophets is that

The consequence of that

¹⁹ *Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

The commandments Jesus is speaking of are the commandments of the law that He fulfills – the Old testament commandments. To relax them is to set them aside. Jesus is speaking of someone who allows what the law forbids. But to set aside one commandment is to set aside the authority of God's law. Such a one will be called least in the Kingdom.

By contrast the one called great, speaking of God's assessment, is the one who acknowledges the authority of God's law as fulfilled by Jesus in his or her own life – they do them, and then teach others to do the same.

That doing and teaching will be different now that Jesus has fulfilled the law.

Jesus Himself will demonstrate that in the verses that follow.

And the rest of Scripture shows that.

We would not call the author of Hebrews who teaches us not to go back to a literal obedience to the commandments about sacrifice as one of the least in the kingdom of heaven.

Nor would we reckon Paul who teaches us that we don't need to obey the Mosaic law's food and calendar regulations to be least in the Kingdom

In fact both the author of Hebrews and Paul uphold the authority of the law by showing its fulfilment in Jesus and teaching us to embrace the law as God's word, to obey its teaching, by embracing its fulfillment - Jesus, by putting our trust in Jesus and obeying His teaching.

But the authority of the law as the Word of God must never be undermined amongst Jesus' people, and what it teaches is to be done – done as Jesus teaches us to do it, as He interprets and applies it and as His Spirit writes it on our hearts

At a time when some are reluctant to study the OT we must recognise that where OT is not read and taught – defective Christianity

Where it is dismissed – inevitable distortion and misunderstanding of the Christian faith

And we should expect our pastors to do and teach it, which is why we make our ministers learn Hebrew

But the shocking consequence of Jesus fulfilling the law, of His insistence on its abiding relevance and continuing authority amongst His followers is that

The shocking consequence

²⁰ *For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

That may not be shocking for us, but it was very challenging to the first hearers

Righteousness for the Jews was the conformity of your life to the standards of the relationship God had established with His people in the covenant.

Righteousness was whether or not you measured up to what God said in the Law he expects of His people

Now the scribes were the recognised experts in the law, the ones who taught Israel how to live out obedience to the law in everyday life. They were scrupulous in their observance of the regulations of the law.

The Pharisees were a lay movement that tried to keep the requirements of the Torah by thinking about what each law required and developing a tradition of application, an oral tradition that explained exactly how you could keep every law.

As far as the people were concerned the scribes and the pharisees were the most righteous of people, and that was their own estimation of themselves as well

The Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees [Matt. 23, 15:1-20, 12:7]

But what does the gospel show us of their righteousness?

Shows us they were serious about obeying the regulations of the law – even setting aside a tenth of their herbs – dill, mint and cumin – to keep the law on tithing

Tells us their righteousness was very visible, an obedience practiced openly, whether it was ritual washing to ensure they were ‘clean’ or praying in the street – in fact they were keen for others to see it [23:2]

A righteousness driven by fear, fear of breaking a commandment, so much so that they developed a whole lot of extra rules to protect them from inadvertently breaking the commandments, that made obedience manageable

But it also shows us that for all their zeal they used God’s word to defy God, their traditions and rules to disobey God’s word.

Jesus accused them of making God’s word, His command to honour our parents, void by their traditions in Matt. 15:6

Of neglecting the weightier matters of the law – [Matthew 12:7, 23:23] the open ended demand of the law for justice, mercy and faithfulness

And loving people’s praise above God’s

In their righteousness there was at heart no love of God [John 5:41-44]

And when God came amongst them, they wanted to kill Him to protect their position

Their righteousness could never fit them to live in God’s kingdom, under His reign. IN fact it excluded them.

A different righteousness

So when Jesus says His followers’ righteousness must exceed, be greater than, their righteousness

He is not talking quantity – more obedience to more regulations, using even more accurate scales to work out the tenth of your herbs, but quality.

He is calling for a completely different righteousness, if they are to enter the Kingdom of heaven, live under God’s life giving reign for ever

Think now that you are one of Jesus’ first hearers

Up to now you have thought that the scribes and the pharisees are the models of righteousness, people who have monopolised the righteousness space

And you have been pretty impressed by their thoroughness, their zeal to keep God's law

You would have two questions

If the righteousness I need doesn't look like what they do, what does this exceeding righteousness look like? Show it to us, show us the difference?

And then, because you want to enter the Kingdom of heaven – how do I get this exceeding righteousness I need to enter the Kingdom of heaven?

Jesus answers the first question – what does this exceeding righteousness look like? in verses 21-48 giving them six examples of what that righteousness looks like, examples of righteousness in real life, examples that will contrast the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, their obedience to the law of God, with what God expects

And in answering that question he will make the answer to the second question – how can I get this righteousness, clearer and more urgent.

So what does that righteousness look like?

The First Example vv. 21-26

Here is the first example

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

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who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

The righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees hears the fifth commandment and says

'I haven't murdered anyone today. I am a good person, I have done what God expected of me, I don't have to worry about the judgment the law pronounces on murder, which is death

But Jesus says God's law always looked for more,

Notice the authority with which Jesus speaks

He quotes the fifth commandment, spoken by God at Sinai, and then gives its authoritative interpretation on his own authority - 'But I say to you'...

Jesus says that the law that forbids murder also forbids the attitude that gives rise to murder – anger against another, and all its expressions

Jesus mentions two – calling someone *raca*, emptyheaded, an everyday term that was mildly abusive, and 'fool'.

The way we speak to others indicates our attitude towards them and Jesus says that harbouring and expressing an attitude that wants to harm, hurt, demean, degrade another is very serious, making you liable to the same kind of punishment – judgment, the council, the hell of fire, Gehenna, as murder.

He is not making murder and verbal abuse equivalent.

But He is saying that the righteousness God looks for is radical, it goes to the attitudes of our hearts, and an external obedience to the letter of the command falls far short of that righteousness, leaves you exposed to eternal judgment

Let that sink in and unsettle you

Especially where you think that keeping the letter, not murdering, not being violent, gives you licence to express your anger and hatred of another in other ways.

And we can do that can't we.

Think ourselves good because we didn't do everything we might have done.

We only verbally abused them, but we didn't thump them

We just cut them off, we didn't pursue them

Just became cold towards them, never talked to them again – but didn't threaten

That is not righteousness, but judgement-deserving failure of righteousness

The Priority of Reconciliation

Jesus then tells two little stories in vv. 23-26 to teach that the righteousness God looks for has a completely different attitude to those with whom we may be in disagreement and conflict with

He Calls for behaviour that will prevent anger, prevent harm – the completely different attitude that prioritises maintaining good relationships through the pursuit of reconciliation

²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

The point of this story seems clear enough – being reconciled to your brother or sister with whom you have fallen out – it does not say whose fault it is - should come before religious activity.

But Jesus is saying more than that – he is saying that maintaining right relationships where bitterness and anger cannot fester requires urgent, costly and decisive action.

Jesus is speaking to people in Galilee, and they all knew that the only altar that existed where you could offer gifts was in Jerusalem, a week's journey away. Knowing this, think about what Jesus is saying again.

He is saying reconciliation is so important that having arrived in Jerusalem, about to realise the purpose of your journey, and there you remember there is an outstanding, unresolved grievance – you leave what you are doing straight away and make a week long journey to sort things out, to restore your relationship.

Challenge you? Do you give reconciliation that priority?

It challenges me.

Because I find myself getting carried along with routine busyness – that it is easier to just keep doing what I was doing, to put off having that awkward conversation,

Leave the issue unresolved

Tells a second story

²⁵ *Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.* ²⁶ *Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.*

Jesus is not giving legal advice

He is reinforcing his point. Don't allow bad relationships to stay unresolved. Act urgently – even on the way to court

Here he is encouraging us to swallow our pride, pride that might want to see ourselves vindicated in court, that might refuse to recognise how we have wronged another. And he is encouraging us to value reconciliation above money, for the specific case has to do with contested debt.

Rather than being proud, rather than fighting for every penny, the righteous person acts to reconcile, to 'make friends' with the person accusing you or you are in dispute with, urgently

The righteous have an attitude that prioritises making peace over vindication or money, that pursues it urgently

And there is a warning that a refusal to reconcile carries consequences.

That is reinforced in v.26, another solemn Amen statement, which is a warning of divine judgement.

It is saying don't expect reconciliation with God where you don't value and practice reconciling with others. You will be left with what you seem to want – strict, full punishment – no release until you pay the last penny. It was actually a quadrans, 1 sixty fourth of a denarius – which would be equivalent to about \$3.12

Could you imagine being left in goal for \$3.12?

Could you imagine refusing to make peace with someone until you had got the last \$3.12 you thought you were owed?

The Righteousness that exceeds

What have we learnt already, from this first example, of the righteousness that exceeds the scribes and Pharisees?

Good, but challenging

Good, because anger is still a problem

Here is an ethic that has zero tolerance for destructive anger in any of its expressions

That will allow no excuses

An ethic that prioritises reconciliation, creates an environment that does not let things sit and fester, does not allow quarrels and disappointments to be left like an untreated infection with *Mycobacterium ulcerans* to become a Bairnsdale [Buruli] ulcer, destructive and life threatening

But challenging

For this Righteousness extends to, or begins, with our thoughts and attitudes. It is not a matter of external obedience to the letter of the law.

That is true here. Jesus is not giving us a new law to be observed literally

It would miss the point entirely to think that you could be righteous by avoiding calling people fool, but instead calling them dopey

[Or by observing that because Jesus doesn't tell you what to do when you have traipsed back to Galilee to reconcile and the other person shows not interest, and so thinking you have to develop a whole set of regulations of what to do if – if they won't reconcile the first time you should try the second,

If they refuse the second you can go back and offer your gift with a good conscience]

He is talking about our hearts, having hearts that desire to heal not harm

That respect others as made in God's image, others with whom we should seek to live in peace, removing all causes of bitterness and anger, that look to promote their safety.

So this righteousness is not even satisfied by mastering anger management – controlling anger that is still there, but learning to genuinely love those who make you angry

The standard of this righteousness, as Jesus will say at the end of these examples, is to be like our God

Matthew 5:⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

So this is a righteousness that requires a righteous heart, loving what God loves, hating what God hates, being the people God is determined to have as His own

Further, This is a righteousness that seeks to shape its behaviour by the principle behind the law, recognising that the command 'thou shalt not murder' was given for the protection and enhancement of the life of others, to allow them to enjoy God's gifts. It is asking what God wants me to do, not what God forbids

And so it is a righteousness that can't be satisfied by what you don't do, but by what you do do. It creates a positive goal – not merely avoidance of anger, but active pursuit of good relationship

And because of this it is an open ended and its achievement is not measurable. You can always know you haven't murdered someone, but with this righteousness there is always the question of what more could I do to promote peace, to protect and enhance the lives of others.

How do we get this righteousness

Seeing what is involved in the righteousness that exceeds the scribes and the pharisees, in the righteousness you must have to enter the kingdom of heaven makes the question of how we get this righteousness even more urgent, more pressing

For the poor in Spirit

For Jesus' pictures of this righteousness shows us we are not righteous in ourselves

Who doesn't get angry? When provoked?

Who hasn't spoken to others in anger?

Who has always prioritised reconciliation, made it something to be sought urgently, been willing to take the initiative to heal wrongs?

Who has a heart that always seeks God's will, seeks to promote the life and flourishing of others?

And these kinds of questions will only multiply as we go through the other examples

We cannot get this righteousness by more of the same, by trying to outpharisee the pharisees in our observance

It is a heart issue, and that can't be solved by rule keeping – as their response to Jesus shows.

Jesus' examples of the righteousness that exceeds the scribes and pharisees are meant first to humble us, to show to us our poverty of spirit, our neediness, our lack of this righteousness we need

By relying on the one who fulfills the law [Romans 8:3-8, 3:21-31, Galatians 3:10-14, Hebrews 10:1-18, Acts 2:32-36]

To throw us back on relying, not on ourselves, but on the one who says He gives the Kingdom to those who are poor in spirit

To rely on the one who says He has come to fulfill the law and the prophets, to create for God that people God's law always looked for

A people who would love Him with all their hearts, who would be careful to observe all His decrees.

How does Jesus do that?

By fulfilling the law in every way

By His own obedience, by His teaching, by His death for sin

He Fulfills the law by vindicating its judgement of death on law breakers in showing the depth of our rebellion against God

Romans 8: ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Fulfills the law by enduring in His own death its just punishment on sinners – so that by faith we can be righteous in Him

Galatians 3: ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Fulfills the law by bringing into being the new covenant – where God’s law is now written on His people’s hearts, where we get new hearts that want to love God

Fulfills the law by pouring out His Spirit that empowers His people to live God’s way

Jesus through His death for sin and rising fulfills the law and the prophets and becomes the source of this righteousness for all who will repent and believe His gospel

Trusting Jesus and embracing righteousness

And that means we will let Jesus teach us what the law now requires, has always required, of God’s people.

Trusting Jesus we won’t minimize the righteousness God calls for from His people

We don’t need to

We don’t trust in our own righteousness, but His, so we can let our failings, our falling short, be exposed –

And at the same time we won’t be crushed by our failures, but let them turn us again to our Saviour in whom we have forgiveness

It means we can open ourselves up to the open ended demands of true righteousness with gratitude

For by the work of God’s Spirit we now want to do God’s will, we want to grow in godliness

We will want to be people freed from anger to be peacemakers, who can get rid of all

Ephesians 4: ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. 5 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

And giving ourselves to the work of the Spirit we will grow in that godliness – become what we are meant to be

Salt and light in our world

Believer

Be grateful Jesus fulfills the law and the prophets

And give yourself to the life of righteousness the law calls for by doing all that Jesus teaches His followers to do.

Never minimise what HE expects, never excuse your falling short, never try and make it more manageable so you can boast of your own goodness

Open yourself up to it to be daily humbled

So you will constantly rely on Him – for righteousness and the power of a righteous life

If you are not a believer yet

I hope you see the goodness of what Jesus teaches, of how He expects His followers to live. That will only become clearer as we look at more of this sermon in the next couple of weeks

But don't think you can live this life on your own – as soon as you think that, you will be minimizing what Jesus expects, and defending your falling short

Start talking of the unreasonableness of Jesus' demands, the impracticality of living His way

Rather be humbled, recognise your poverty of spirit, and turn to Him, who fulfills the law and the prophets for you