

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“In you, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me!”

The righteousness that God requires isn't seen in terms of quantity. It's seen in a different way. Jesus talks about this today when he speaks about his relationship to the law and the prophets. This is indicative of the overall truth that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus said, “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. 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. 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. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

The righteousness of God is real. God is righteous in and of himself. This is a quality he possesses in his very person. To know God as he reveals himself in the Scriptures is to know what righteousness really and who it is, God himself. It's void of sin in any way, shape, or form. It's creative in that it brings forth life. It's just and doesn't let evil go unchecked and unpunished. God is the judge who does not let the wicked man remain in his sin but demands that the last penny be paid. It's absolute and does not change. This is who God is as he alone is righteous. He is the one who says about himself, “I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

Another important aspect of God's righteousness is his work to redeem his people. The Bible talks about this often and God's righteousness is known as he delivers his people from the hands of their enemies, their sin, and death. To know God's saving work is to know his righteousness just as he is righteous. All of this goes together and comes to a full and complete way in the person of Jesus.

It's with this then, that Jesus speaks about the righteousness required to enter the kingdom of heaven. It's a righteousness that is greater than the righteousness the scribes and Pharisees try to make for themselves. They see righteousness in their terms. To be sure, they do have some basis in the laws of God in the Old Testament, but they also see this in terms of the things they have deemed to be righteous. Things like washing hands in a certain way or walking only so far on the Sabbath among a host of others. At the end of the day this righteousness isn't great because it really isn't a righteousness at all.

We do the same, though, we try to attribute things in our lives that may appear to be godly and righteous but are just ways to try and justify ourselves and put others down in the process. This occurs often when we are confronted with God's law. Notice the responses you get or maybe you make when you are confronted with your sin. A common example is when we are confronted with the 3rd Commandment. As a pastor when I tell someone he should be in church not only because God commands it and it's sinful to not go but this is where Christ is for him to deliver salvation in the means of grace, I get the same response over and over again, “I pray. I talk to God. Yes, I'm a sinner but I try to do what is right. I believe.” Without fail this is what I hear over and over again as pastors have heard for centuries. It's the same for other commandments as well. We try to take what is good and turn it into a way to try and make ourselves appear righteous. But what is it that we do when we say things like that? We have turned these things into works of law to try and justified ourselves to say we are ok and that we are not sinning and that we are still on God's good side. This is a man-made righteousness. We are trying to plead our case to convince our conscience and God that we still are a Christian even though this is not what God's word tells us.

This false understanding of righteousness also happens when we attribute something to God's law that the Lord has not done himself. To call something sinful that is not taught in the Scriptures to be sinful is an error and sin against God. Legalism is one form of this where people use manmade thoughts and ideas and try to package it up as God's law. We see this in countless ways when we have our own thoughts and opinions about something. Maybe this idea it was taught to us by our parents or things we experienced and we then assign moral judgments to them and always conveniently, it's something we don't do and something someone else does. This is why God teaches in Colossians 2, "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath."

Modern Pharisaic thought also occurs when we try to take God's objective word and standard and change it. Think about how things which are clearly against God's word have become something to be held in high regard or as living in a "right" way. The measuring stick for this new righteousness has gone from God's law to things like, preference, tolerance, desire, false notions of love, which changes every other year, or insert any number of other things. Clearly this is a far cry from a true righteousness, and this will by no means gain entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

The Ten Commandments show you God's will. Article VI of the Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration) rightly confesses, "The Law is a mirror in which God's will and what pleases Him are exactly portrayed. This mirror should be constantly held up to the believers and be diligently encouraged for them without ceasing." The Ten Commandments are good. They show what is godly, what is good. They teach you in the way you should go. They instruct you what is to be your life as a Christian in this world. They are good because God is good. God's commandments should not embarrass you, but you should rejoice in God's commandments as a true fountain and channel. You see what is good and your life is guided by them, and Psalm 1 teaches, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night."

The problem lies in man, then, not God's law, not the Ten Commandments. The problem lies in wanting to find our righteousness in the law either in our keeping it or deflecting it away so that we answer to no one not even God. You need the Ten Commandments. God gave them to you and knows you need them. God calls you to fear him when you sin against him.

God says, "I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." The law has a promise attached to it. God promises punishment for those who sin against him, and you have sinned against him in your heart, your mind, your actions, and your life.

So where does all this leave you? Well, in the law, you stand condemned. You need a righteousness that comes from outside yourself. You need Christ, who fulfilled the law and the prophets and counts it to you. The righteousness that God requires for you to enter the kingdom of heaven is yours by grace alone through faith in Christ alone. God counts your faith, not just some generic faith which says, I believe whatever in the world that even means, but that real living faith in Christ which he has given to you, as righteous in his sight. All that is the righteousness of Jesus is yours. His fulfilling of the law and the prophets is counted for you. His perfect obedience is counted for you. Jesus actively lived in perfect accord with the Ten Commandments. He did not sin against God in one single way. Now that righteousness is yours. His life, death, and resurrection are yours. That's the wonderful thing that far exceeds and is far greater than the manmade righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

You now live a righteous new life in Christ. This is yours, given, in your baptism and is lived out as you confess and turn from your sin and cling to Christ as the atonement for your sin. Cling to this word of forgiveness and seek to live in accord with God's word. The reading from Romans says, "What shall we say then? Are we to

continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

Living as a Christian who has the righteousness of Christ is a real new life that is lasting. In a day and age where virtues are thrown out the window this is important. God’s commandments are eternal. The Ten Commandments will never change. Your life as a Christian is lived by faith. In Christ, you no longer stand under the law’s condemnation rather you stand forgiven. As a new creation in Christ, you desire what God teaches and guides you in his law because it is God pleasing and reveal something about the nature of God too. You have a new relationship to God’s law as a Christian because you possess the righteousness of Christ. Your identity is not found in the law or obedience to the law rather it’s in Jesus and your righteousness is the righteousness of faith. Your new life in Christ, which flows from faith. You crucify your old man daily which God has drowned in the waters of baptism. God says, “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.”

Your new life lived in accord with God’s law isn’t the basis for your standing before God but nonetheless it is a new active life that has been given to you, and you live willingly according to your new man renewed by the Holy Spirit. See God’s commandments then as your guide which shows the path the Lord has given you to walk and which you seek. Psalm 19 says, “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”

This new life is a life of freedom which is holy and righteous before God on account of Christ despite what the world thinks and even if it should mock and ridicule you for it. God has made promises to you. He says, “Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

On this day, see the importance of the Ten Commandments in your life as they reveal your sin and guide you as a Christian in how you should walk in this world as a baptized child of God. Find your consolation in your Lord Jesus who is your righteousness. Trust in him who has redeemed you by his blood. Jesus alone is good and has fulfilled all righteousness by his life, death, and resurrection. Behold your Lord who is your righteousness and live. His righteousness far exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees because his righteousness is a real lasting righteousness, and he gives this righteousness to you. It’s counted to you by grace through faith.

Your Lord has indeed accomplished your salvation. His active obedience fulfilling God’s law was for your benefit. He fulfilled all the Law and the Prophets, and he was the perfect sacrifice for you sin and the sin of the whole world. Now all his righteousness is yours through faith in him. He has had mercy upon you and your sin is forgiven. He has given you a new life in the waters of your baptism. God’s word is clear on this; you have in those saving waters what Christ has accomplished.

Rejoice this day that you belong to Christ and delight in what he teaches you. Don’t be ashamed of God’s word. Don’t be ashamed of the Ten Commandments. Don’t be ashamed of your baptism and the new life you have

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been given in those waters. Rejoice, instead, and be free to really live in this life as one who has been called out of the darkness and into the marvelous light of Christ. Walk through this life as one who knows your inheritance is God's eternal Kingdom which has no end. Hear this word, treasure this word, live this word, and rejoice in this word.

Jesus said, "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." Indeed, he has and he has done it for you. You don't have a righteousness on your own. Instead you have a far greater righteousness that is found and finished in Jesus. It has been fulfilled and your salvation has been accomplished. Thanks be to him who has done this. He and his work are your righteousness before God which gives you a place in the kingdom of heaven. This is the greatest righteousness of all, the righteousness of Christ and it is yours. It really is for God gives it to you. It's yours by grace alone through faith in Christ alone. This righteousness is yours now and forever.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.