

THE KIND OF RIGHTEOUSNESS GOD HAS IN MIND ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

1. "It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15) is not merely Jesus' reason for being baptized by John the Baptist, but His reason for living as He did and His model for us.
2. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Law of Moses is not despised, but fulfilled; not denied, but surpassed. Since Christ has come to fulfill God's promises and standards, He Himself takes over the function of the Law, and becomes the Law. The Law is already the realization of the Kingdom of God among men in the person of Jesus Himself, a law that cannot be codified, but must be totally accepted. It is no longer sufficient to perform certain actions. What counts is the spiritual attitude with which they are performed and the intentions that motivated them. In fact, much of Jesus' teaching can be found in the Old Testament in one form or another. What is radically new about His view of righteousness is its new motivation: "for my sake" (cf. 7:21-27), i.e. because the demands made are authoritative and final because of Jesus' authority. Everything depends upon accepting Jesus as the Christ, and having His power to live the kind of life described herein. Otherwise, everything falls back into a legalistic, hence, impossible, concept of righteousness. The standard is no longer a codified one, but God's own character, the goal for which He furnishes the Spirit to help us surpass the evil that dominates us (5:48). Only this kind of righteousness will surpass that of the sterile religionists and bring glory to God (5:10, 20). But it is a way to travel, an attitude to pursue, rather than a virtue intrinsic to discipleship. It is a search (6:33). Man is blessed in the measure he desires it (5:6).
3. The Lord's Prayer (6:9, 10) asks that God manifest His holiness, rule and will on earth, all in perfect harmony with the expectations created by the Old Testament doctrine of the Messianic age. The kind of righteousness Jesus has in mind, then, is that attitude which sanctifies God, seeks first His Kingdom and His righteousness and does His will (6:33).
4. There is no necessary separation between the concerns of the Kingdom of God and those of life lived on this earth, no false dichotomy between spirit and matter. While much Jewish apocalyptic had pictured a materialistic Kingdom, Jesus pictures it as something to be spiritually understood and appreciated. While other Jews prepared for a purely spiritual Kingdom with no

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earthly reality, Jesus recognized the human situation that is to continue until the end of the world, a situation in which God's people will need food, clothing and shelter, just like all men anywhere (6:24-34). The difference, however, is in what each chooses as his personal preoccupation: desire to please the Heavenly Father, or worry about personal needs.

5. The patterns of piety under the Old Testament system are definitely old, out-moded, worn, however useful in their time, but definitely to be substituted with new forms, new content (9:14-17). The wedding-joy of the Messianic Kingdom must not be marred by the severe piety that rightly characterized pre-messianic times. Jesus is not merely reforming Judaism with its legal system, but making a qualitative leap into a new relationship with God.
6. Righteousness, i.e. right thinking and doing, then, according to Jesus, means coming to Him, believing in Him, studying in His school, receiving peace of soul from Him alone (11:28-30). The life-style pictured for the disciple cannot be divorced from the Christology of Matthew, because the invitations to enter into the Kingdom of God are intimately associated with invitations to embrace the person of Jesus Christ the King.
7. This submission to God's will as it is revealed in Jesus means denying oneself for His sake and willingly accepting any suffering encountered in the line of duty for which all must answer to Jesus (16:24-28).
8. Righteousness, in Jesus' eyes, does not seek control over others nor promotes self-importance (18:1-35). Rather, real righteousness is humble, concerned about others' weaknesses and welfare and problems, dedicated to restoring harmony among men, and aware of its own need of God's mercy. (Cf. also 19:13-15.)
9. Righteousness, as Jesus defines it, does not seek easy escape from marital responsibility (19:3-9).
10. Righteousness not only does not hinder those weaker than oneself, but seeks to become like them in humility (19:13-15).
11. Perfection is a question of removing everything that would hinder perfect service to God and others (19:16-30). Strikingly, this answer is given to answer the request: "What good deed must I do to have eternal life?"
12. Righteousness does not depend upon one's own merits or efforts, but upon the free choice and generosity of God (20:1-16).
13. Righteousness does not express itself in self-seeking preeminence

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and priority over others, but in self-giving service for others (20:20-28).

14. Real righteousness does not consist in professing allegiance to God yet without producing the results that this allegiance should produce (21:18-22, 28—22:14).
15. All of religion and ethics may be expressed in the two great commandments (22:34-40).
16. True religion consists in doing and teaching what God has ordered, regardless of the hypocrisy obvious in the life of those who occupy the teaching position (23:2, 3).
17. Righteousness consists in humble recognition of our equality under Christ our only superior (23:8-12). True greatness is measured by service.
18. The "weightier matters of the law (are) justice, mercy and faith," although the positive ordinances are not to be neglected either (23:23).
19. The kind of righteousness Jesus has in mind is not a settled question, in the sense that any disciple can think himself to possess it perfectly. Rather, it is a life to be lived every day in the shadow of the real possibility of losing it (24:12, 13). It is a life lived under the daily tension of constant preparedness for whatever events signal the end for each one (24:42—25:13). It involved a proper utilization of the Lord's goods left in our custody (25:14-30). Every earthly decision involves our taking a position in the presence of God and Christ the Judge (25:31-46). The Christian ethic is not simply contemplative, but is highly practical, and by which all will be judged: did your trust of the Messiah make you generously helpful with your fellowman?