

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

to all saints and to all just persons, for they are the treasure of the holy churches, here and in eternal life. And all who by penance have put away from them the colour of the Red Sea, that is, a sinful life, are like the chrysolite."

It is much to be hoped that M. Maeterlinck may continue his study of the mystics. His volume on Novalis, announced last year but still delayed, is awaited with the utmost interest. From certain hints in the Introduction, we are led to hope that at some future time he may give us a monograph on Swedenborg, whose personality is as little known to modern readers as his grave in the Scandinavian church near the Ratcliffe Highway.

Of one mystic, at least, we have a life-like portrait. The peasants of the Flemish valleys told how when a brother of Grönendal went into the forest, he saw a tree bright with fire. Coming closer, he found his prior on his knees at the foot of it, the light surrounding him as with a glory. A few vague legends are all that history has left us of Ruysbroeck L'Admirable, but M. Maeterlinck has rekindled the flame.

JANE T. STODDART.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

THE most explicit and elaborate description of the Righteousness which Christ requires in His subjects is given in the Sermon on the Mount. It would seem to have been the main object of this sermon to disentangle true Righteousness from all misconceptions of it, and sharply to contrast it with current imitations.

The *occasion* of this great utterance is hinted at in the words of chap. v. 17: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfil." Our Lord had more than once to remove misconceptions, either actually existing or anticipated,

regarding His object. And apparently He had seen, previous to this address, symptoms of misconception regarding His attitude towards the Jewish law and towards those who considered themselves the guardians of the law. It was quite inevitable that such misconceptions should arise. The Pharisaic type of conformity to law was accepted without challenge as the ideal of righteousness; but one of the very first impressions created by Jesus was the impression that He was the enemy of such righteousness. Inevitably therefore Jesus was considered, by superficial observers, to be the enemy of the law.

A teacher who compels the public to look at unfamiliar truths is sure to be branded as a teacher of error, because it is not at first apparent how the unfamiliar coincides with and confirms familiar truth. A reformer who introduces a new style of goodness will be misinterpreted just in proportion to the advance he makes upon former ideas about goodness. Thus it befell our Lord. Renouncing, as He explicitly, emphatically, and with the utmost warmth renounced, the goodness of the Pharisees, the cry was at once raised against Him that He was destroying the law, and was Himself a libertine and a companion of loose people. And perceiving that even in honest and unprejudiced minds, this impression was gaining ground, He feels Himself called upon publicly to repudiate the attitude towards the law which was ascribed to Him, and to explain elaborately what the righteousness which He required and exhibited really was, and how it was related to the law. And it is as one who speaks to the uppermost thought in the mind of His hearers that He says: Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfil.

The word *πληρῶσαι* or *πληροῦν* means to fill up. It is used of filling to the brim a vessel empty or half-full. And hence it means to complete, to perfect. There are two

senses in which a law may be completed, or fulfilled. It may be fulfilled by being obeyed. Thus Paul, in Romans xiii. 8, says, "He that loveth his neighbour νόμον πεπλήρωκε." A law may also be fulfilled or perfected by being issued in a more complete and adequate form. In which of these senses does our Lord use the word πληρῶσαι?

Hardly in the former sense of doing all that the law commands, because He immediately goes on to illustrate His meaning and His attitude to the law by citing a number of instances in which the precepts of the old law are to be replaced by precepts of His own. Besides, had practical keeping of the law been meant by πληρῶσαι, then its proper opposite would have been not καταλύσαι but, as Wendt points out, παραβαίνειν. The word καταλύσαι means a good deal more than practical disobedience of a law; it means to deprive it of authority and destroy it as a law. And the proper opposite of this is not the practical observance of a law, but something more, the issuing of it with authority.

Luther then was on the right track when he said that πληρῶσαι here means, "to show the real kernel and true significance of the law, that men might learn what it is, and what it requires." Or rather it may be said that it means the issuing of the law in its ideal form. It is thus that our Lord fulfils the law: He keeps and He teaches it in a form that no longer needs amendment, revisal, improvement, as the Old Testament law did, but in a form that cannot be improved, that is perfect, *full*.

That this was our Lord's meaning is apparent from the abundant instances He proceeds to cite, in which the old law was to be henceforth known in a higher and more perfect form. Some of these instances are most instructive. In v. 38, *e.g.*, we read, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,"—the very formula of retaliation,—“but I say unto you that ye resist

not evil." It is impossible in this case to see anything else than a bold and authoritative repeal of the old law. But how are we to reconcile such an abrogation with the strong statement of v. 18, "Verily, I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled"? The solution lies in our Lord's idea of fulfilment. According to His idea the law was fulfilled by passing into a higher and better law.

This circumstance, that an instance of abrogation or repeal is given in illustration of the fulfilment our Lord had in view, should have warned interpreters that the strong words of v. 18 are not to be applied to the letter of the Old Testament. They do not mean that nothing in the Old Testament becomes obsolete, but only that every injunction, institution, ordinance of the Old Testament will be absorbed by Christianity. There was much abrogation in form, but all such abrogation gave the true development to what was abrogated. It was the abrogation of the seed in favour of the plant.

What is true of our Lord's fulfilment of the Law is true also of His fulfilment of the Prophets. In Him and His kingdom they found their satisfaction even although in some respects He so far transcended their anticipations as to eclipse and seem to annul their literal expressions.

The "fulfilment" then which is chiefly in view in this Sermon on the Mount is the exhibition of the true contents of the Law and the Prophets, and the reversal or supplementing of some of the Law's injunctions by new and higher commandments. Our Lord viewed His kingdom as the consummation to which Law and Prophets led up and towards which they had striven. The sum and substance of this kingdom was righteousness (vi. 33). The Law and the Prophets had pointed towards a righteousness they could never reach. Our Lord fulfils them by interpreting their deepest meaning and by defining and fulfilling their

aspiration, introducing in His own person and teaching a perfect righteousness.

The importance which our Lord attached to a clear understanding of the attitude He held towards the law is marked by the abundant detail with which He illustrates it. The subject has been much on His mind, so that when once He begins to speak of it, illustration is plentiful. He recognises, what all teachers have to bear in mind, that the bare enunciation or proof of a principle carries little weight to the ordinary mind; if it is to tell, it must be exhibited in particular, concrete instances. Our Lord therefore carries His principle all round the practical life of man and points out how in every part of conduct He heightens obligation. But this is all summed up under two more general characteristics which are to mark all righteousness of His kingdom.

I. The first of these characteristics is that so far from being lax it was to exceed the righteousness of the most exemplary of their contemporaries, the scribes and Pharisees. Notice the prominence given in *v.* 20 to the word *περισσεύσῃ*. Not the least of the commandments is to be forgotten in Christ's kingdom. On the contrary "except your righteousness *exceed* that of those whom you regard as irreproachable, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." He adduces the scribes and Pharisees not as instances of easy-going moralists whose righteousness might very easily be surpassed, but as the most nearly perfect law-keepers they knew. Pharisees, such as Paul, could honestly say that so far as regarded the requirements of the law, they were blameless. It is a mistake to suppose that they were mere formalists. They were moral men, immensely zealous for their religion and sparing no pains to advance it. What then was lacking in them? Their righteousness was lacking in two respects. It lacked *inwardness* and it lacked *spontaneity*. They did the external action which the law

required, but this action of theirs had no deep root in a corresponding state of heart. And what they did, they did by compulsion, because the law enjoined it, not because their own nature spontaneously produced it. These two characteristics of Pharisaic righteousness are very distinctly aimed at in this sermon.

1st. The externality of Pharisaic righteousness is in Christ's kingdom to be exchanged for inwardness. "It was said by them of old time Thou shalt not kill; but I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother," etc. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart"—not that sin in thought is as mischievous as sin in thought consummated by sin in action, nor that the sudden and quickly repressed desire of a passionate nature is as guilty as deliberate sin: but that morality or righteousness is not a quality subsisting in the outward action, but in the man who does the action. Unless the action can be traced uninterruptedly back to the cleansed and sound will of the man who does it, no ethical value attaches to it. There is no morality but that which is inward. If the Pharisee commits no outward act of licentiousness, but has eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin, he can take no credit to himself in his outward abstinence.

To illustrate this our Lord makes use, in the closing part of His sermon, of two simple but memorable illustrations. You may, He says, put a sheep's fleece on a wolf, but you don't thereby change him into a sheep. The appearance is all right, but the nature is unchanged. The wolf is a wolf still. Or you may stick bunches of grapes on a thorn bush, or cover a thistle with figs, and so delude the ignorant, but the deception can only be for a time, and the thorn remains a thorn. So the Pharisee may have the right outward ap-

pearance. He may stud his life over with righteous actions, and so far as men can see may be unchallengeably moral; but, after all, this may only be the fleece laid on, not produced from the animal's nature, the fruit artificially adhering where it never grew. The Pharisee commits the fatal mistake of supposing that you make the tree good by making the fruit good, or that it matters very little what the tree is if the fruit is good. But the unalterable fact is that only when the tree is good can the fruit be good. The righteousness which is to pass in Christ's kingdom must be real; it must not be laid on from the outside, or go no deeper than man can see, but must spring from the inmost desires and will of the man. It is the man himself who must be righteous.

2nd. The righteousness of the kingdom of God is to exceed that of the Pharisees in *spontaneity*. What the Pharisee did, he did on compulsion. He recognised that the law made certain demands, and these demands he complied with that he might win the favour of God, or the applause of men. Our Lord lays His finger on this damning blot in chap. vi. 2, "When thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, *as the hypocrites do.*" "When thou prayest, thou shalt not be *as the hypocrites*, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, that they may be seen of men." And v. 16, "When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast." Delitzsch, in one of his little tracts, draws a picture of a Jerusalem Pharisee *contriving* that he should be *surprised* by the hour of prayer in the open street, and straightway girding on his ponderous phylacteries, and making his prostrations. The simple words of Christ, "They have their reward," sound like a doom pronounced. The whole result of their action is past. They enjoy the stupid respect of the guileless vulgar, and earn the *reputation* of sanctity by sacrificing the possession of it. Righteousness of any kind which is wrought for a selfish object is not righteousness. What is done through

fear, or compulsion, or with a selfish end in view, rises no higher than its source.

No better commentary on our Lord's exposure of ostentatious, hypocritical and legal righteousness can be found than the following passage from M. Aurelius' Meditations: "One man when he has done a service to another is ready to set it down to his account as a favour conferred. Another, while he may not go so far as that, still thinks of the man as his debtor, and is conscious of what he has done. A third does not, if we may so speak, even know what he has done and betrays no consciousness of his kindness, but is like a vine which has produced grapes and seeks for nothing beyond after it has produced the fruit proper to it. As a horse when he has run, a dog when he has caught the game, a bee when it has made its honey, so a man, when he has done a good act, does not call out for others to come and see but goes on to another act, as a vine goes on to produce again grapes in the season. What more do you want when you have done a man a service? Are you not content that you have done something conformable to your nature and do you seek reward for it, as if the eye should demand a recompense for seeing, or the feet for walking?"

This passage from the great Stoic opens up the significance of our Lord's comparison of a good man to a good tree. The good man will bring forth righteousness spontaneously, uniformly, as a good tree produces its proper fruit. He will do righteous actions not because he is told to do so, not because he is paid for doing so, but because it is his nature so to do. Transplant an apple-tree and set it where you will, it still bears apples, not oranges; and each man has his own proper fruit, good or bad, which he will inevitably bear, place him in what circumstances you please. Christ in His kingdom designs to have good men: not men who *at first* can do all duty and all righteousness without persuasion or putting constraint upon themselves—for, after all, this life is a place of training—but men whose hearts are

right, whose leanings and likings are really towards righteousness, and who do good because they like it, or are resolved to like it, and of whom there is good hope that one day they will do it as spontaneously, naturally, irrepressibly and without thought of reward, as a good tree produces its fruit.

II. The righteousness of Christ's kingdom was also to exceed the righteousness currently required among men: "If ye love them who love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?" [*τί περισσὸν ποιεῖτε*;] An excess, a something more, a *τί περισσὸν* is required in Christ's kingdom. Publicans do not think of claiming reward for loving their families, for liberally aiding schemes they approve or persons they love, for filling their place in life honourably, helpfully, manfully—what *more* do Christians? They are not to be content with rivalling natural and everyday virtues. This challenge has been put to Christians in our own day with singular force. A class of writers, chiefly American, has graphically, and perhaps with some exaggeration, depicted the virtues that survive even in the roughest outcasts of society. These writers aim at showing that a germ of good, an unselfishness capable of dying for others, often survives a life of vice. This is a challenge to Christianity, and a challenge Christians should welcome.

The goodness of nature is very real, and not easy to outdo. In the same company you will sometimes meet two men, one of whom is a Christian, the other professedly not a Christian. And yet of those two, you would choose the non-Christian, not only for the companionship of the hour, but for the wear and stress of life, for all that demands inviolable integrity and honour, friendly consideration, self-forgetting love. With more things to grieve and embitter him, he will show an even spirit; a fairness and candour, a public-spiritedness, an unassuming modesty which fairly

put to shame the unrulèd spirit of the Christian. Such fine displays of temper, of fortitude and bravery, of natural affection, of contempt for wealth, of love of truth and fair play does one see in men who would not relish being called Christian, that we shrink from being brought into competition with them. This, however, is the calling of the follower of Christ. The righteousness He demands is a righteousness with more of principle in it, and therefore with more of constancy and completeness than any natural virtue.

But also to those who show us these splendid specimens of natural goodness, our Lord speaks, and He tells them that they must not be satisfied with it. The virtue of natural disposition is not enough. There must be a principle in virtue which applies to the whole of man and to the whole of life; which creates virtues where before there were none, which touches human nature at its root and radically purifies and ennobles it.

MARCUS DODS.

THE FAITH OF GOD.

Ἐχετε πίστιν Θεοῦ (Mark xi. 22). Πίστει νοοῦμεν καθηρῖσθαι τοὺς αἰῶνας ῥήματι Θεοῦ, εἰς τὸ μὴ ἐκ φαινομένων τὰ βλεπόμενα γεγονέναι (Hebrews xi. 3).

THERE is some difficulty in connecting the second of these passages with its context, if it means, as it is usually understood to mean, that we realise by an exercise of our faith that God made the world. Before considering whether this is the correct rendering of the passage, let us look back to the prophet whom the writer to the Hebrews has just quoted at the close of the preceding chapter. The burden of Habakkuk was: "How long shall I cry unto Thee, and Thou wilt not hear?" (i. 2). He was feeling impatient, like other reformers, "for some great cure," which would work immediately and obviously; he was tempted to marvel that God could look on at evil and hold His peace (i. 13); but on taking a wider outlook upon God's way of working in this world, the prophet found that "The vision is yet for the appointed time, and it hasteth towards the end and shall not lie: