

Matthew 5:17-20 Taking God's Word Seriously

To paraphrase Jesus: *Don't mess about with the Bible. If you want to make it to the end you'll have to take God's Word seriously.*

Jesus said He was the fulfilment of the OT and that it all points to Him and finds its climax in Him. John 5:39, Luke 24:27,44.

The Old Testament is the Gospel in the bud; the New Testament is the Gospel in full flower. The Old Testament is the Gospel in the blade; the New Testament is the Gospel in full ear. JC Ryle

V18.: The OT remains in force until the end of time although we might not use it and apply it in the same way.

V19.: Anyone who doesn't take God's Word seriously will not end up in a great place with God and vice versa.

V20.: Righteousness is merit before God. Forgiveness/innocence will keep us out of hell but it will not gain us entry into heaven. We need "right standing" before God. 2 Cor.5:21 describes "double imputation. Christ is imputed with our sin and we are imputed with the righteousness of Christ. We are counted or reckoned to be righteous not on the basis of our good works but on the basis of Christ's good work. Jesus says we need a righteousness that exceeds that of the religious establishment. We can have this because theirs was an external righteousness and did not address the heart (Matt. 23:25ff) whereas for those in Christ we can have a righteousness that comes through faith and not works (Php. 3:7-9). To have this righteousness we need to be those who know spiritual poverty/bankruptcy, who mourn and grieve over sin, who hunger and thirst for the things of God.... This is the way to a righteousness that comes from faith. The sign that this faith is real is that we will want to honour God and live in a way that pleases Him, taking His Word seriously.

We can have merit before God, a right standing before Him that does not come from rule keeping but comes through faith and which is by grace. This is the righteousness that exceeds the Pharisees. Knowing this kind of righteousness means that we can rest in God not needing to continually earn merit with ourselves or others.

Points to Ponder

- 1 Take any questions, comments or observations from this sermon. Was there anything that people found particularly helpful or difficult?
- 2 In what ways do we (or might we) fail to take the Bible seriously? What parts of the Bible do we tend to want to ignore?
- 3 What hints/echoes/foretastes/glimpses/shadows of Jesus do you see in the OT?
- 4 Given verse 19 what should our attitude or "posture" be towards the Bible? How does this work when there are texts that we find really difficult or don't understand? What role does the church have in helping us take the Bible seriously and what is our own responsibility? What's the unique role played by a) the Congregation; b) the Connect group; c) the Core group; d) our own devotional times in our "Closet" in helping us to sit under God's Word? In what way does each type of group make a unique contribution?
- 5 Talk through the meaning of v20 to ensure it makes sense to everyone. What's the difference between the righteousness that the Pharisees were going after and the righteousness that we can have that will exceed theirs? How do we gain this righteousness? Where might you notice the practical outworking of this in your life? What happens if we don't properly receive and live in the light of the fact that we can have complete confidence to be in God's presence through the imputation of Christ's righteousness? How can this teaching be applied to those who seek to earn the approval of others or even the approval of themselves?
- 6 Take time to pray in and around the teaching given in this passage. Pray that each may take God's Word seriously and that we might seek to know, in our practical experience, the reality of the righteousness of Christ that means that we can know God's total acceptance and welcome.