

How Can People Become Righteous?
International Bible Lesson
Matthew 5:17-26
Sunday, November 6, 2011
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“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20—NRSV).

“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20—ESV).

“For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20—KJV).

Jesus declared that the righteousness of His followers needed to exceed the righteousness of those who follow mere human standards of morality. When some of the scribes and Pharisees attacked Jesus for not teaching and following their traditions, He replied that for the sake of their human traditions they broke the commandments of God. When they rejected the commandments of God, He said they made void the word of God (see Matthew 15:1-14). Some of the religious leaders of Jesus' day represent those who prefer their ways to God's ways as taught in the Bible.

Jesus promised that whoever does the commandments of God and teaches them to others will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:19).

Furthermore, He insisted, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). However, believers need more than obedience to God’s commandments for their righteousness to exceed the righteousness of those who prefer the world’s ways to obeying the laws of God. Loving and obeying God remains crucial, but everyone has sinned against God; therefore, people need the forgiveness of God that Jesus freely offers to all who repent of their sins and trust in Him. In addition to forgiveness, people need the cleansing from all unrighteousness that Jesus offers (1 John 1:9). In addition to forgiveness and cleansing, Jesus’ followers also need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, filled with all the fullness of God, and filled with the knowledge of God’s will (Acts 13:52; Ephesians 3:19; Colossians 1:9). Jesus offers every believer everything they need to live rightly and enter the kingdom of heaven.

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Thinking Further

1. How might you use Jesus' teaching in these verses to help someone who thinks that if they are a Christian then they do not need to obey the law of God?

2. Why might you say it is important or unimportant to teach Christians about the moral law and the ceremonial law?

3. How might someone exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? Do Christians need to do this?

4. Why do you think the Bible condemns murder? What is the Biblical penalty for having committed murder? Why do you think killing someone for having committed murder is right or wrong?

5. What might you say to someone who never tries to make right any of their wrongs or make amends to anyone because they believe that since God forgives them they do not need to try to make amends or right their wrongs?

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