

Righteousness That Exceeds the Law

Message by: Leroy Surface



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Does Jesus really expect us to do the things He taught in His "*Sermon on the Mount?*" Many believe that He did not. If that is the case, however, why did He question the people at the conclusion to His message, "*Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*" There is a valid reason when sincere people cannot obey Christ. It is because they have built upon the wrong foundation. If we understand why we "*can't obey*" we will also understand why we "*can.*" Does this sound like a riddle? No, it's all about the "*foundation*" we build upon. Those who build their Christian lives on the wrong foundation will never be able "*do the sayings of Jesus.*" Those who build upon the foundation God laid for us are not only "*able*" to do, but they actually "*do*" the things Jesus said.

In this message, Leroy Surface explores the realities of what it really means to be a child of God. We are "*born again*" with His nature, which is righteousness and love, and with His love abiding in us, we "*do the sayings of Jesus.*"

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Matthew 5:20: *“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.”*

Luke 6:46: *“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”*

Did Jesus teach the law, or did He show the “*more excellent way*” (I Corinthians 12:31)” to fulfill the law? In Matthew 5:17, just previous to our text, Jesus said, “*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill*” (Matthew 5:17). The Greek word that was translated “*fulfill*” in this verse is “*plēroō,*” which means “*to make replete*” and “*to finish (a period or task).*” We know that the sacrifices and offerings that were offered under the Law of Moses were only a shadow of the perfect sacrifice, which Abraham said God would provide for Himself (Genesis 22:8). When John the Baptist introduced Jesus with the words “*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29), he revealed that Jesus was the perfect sacrifice that would be offered to take away sin, and thus make an end of all sacrifices.

We know that Jesus “*fulfilled*” the Law of Moses. Perhaps we do not know what that means. Many teach that He fulfilled the Law of Moses by His perfect obedience to it. That, however, was the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, whom Jesus called “*hypocrites.*” Jesus’ “*righteousness*” has absolutely nothing to do with the Law of Moses. He did not come to “*obey it*” or to “*disobey it;*” He came to “*finish it,*” because when it was given, it was given for a limited time only, and that time was “*fulfilled.*”

The apostle Paul tells us that the Law of Moses “*was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made*” (Galatians 3:19). The Law of Moses was never the will of God for His people. His “*will*” is shown in Exodus 19:5-6 where God says, “*If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.*” His “*will*” was that His people would hear and obey His voice, and thus be “*led by the Spirit of God.*” When God came down on Horeb to speak to the children of Israel, they disregarded His voice, telling Moses, “*Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die*” (Exodus 20:19). When the people refused to hear His voice, God wrote His words on two tables of stone and gave them to Moses, and thus we have the “*Law of God.*”

The Law of Moses is different and separate from the Law of God. When God spoke His law (Ten Commandments) to the people, the scripture says, “*He added no more*” (Deuteronomy 5:22). The Law of Moses was “*added*” because the children of Israel transgressed against God when they refused to hear and obey His voice. Paul says it was added “*till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.*” That “*seed*” is Jesus Christ. The “*promise*” was given to Abraham in Genesis 22:16-18; “*By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.*” The children of Israel disqualified themselves as the promised seed of Abraham when they refused to hear the voice of God at Horeb, and the Law of Moses was added to discipline them until “*the seed*” would come. When the Son of God was born to Mary, the time of the Law of Moses was fulfilled because “*the seed*” had come. It would continue until Jesus Christ, “*the seed,*” would die for our sins, and there the Law of Moses would be fulfilled, finished, and abolished forever for those who trust in Christ.

“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” (Matthew 5:17-18). The Greek word that is translated “fulfilled” in this verse is “*ginomai*,” which means “to come into being,” which seems to say the exact opposite of the previous verse. Actually, there is no contradiction, because in this verse, Jesus is speaking about the Law of God. Of the two laws, Jesus would “fulfill and finish” the Law of Moses and He would “fulfill and establish” the Law of God (Romans 3:31) in the Kingdom of God.

How is it possible for us to “fulfill” the law without committing ourselves to obey the six hundred and thirteen commandments and ordinances of the Law of Moses? The apostle Paul gives us the answer; “Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, **Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law**” (Romans 13:8-10). Love is what Paul calls the “more excellent way” in I Corinthians 12:31.

The “Curses” of the Law of Moses

Galatians 3:10: *“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”*

The “*Law of Moses*” is a law with both blessings and curses, but it is itself a “*curse*” upon those who trust in it. In order to receive the blessings, the people had to keep all six hundred and thirteen commandments and ordinances perfectly, but to receive the curses, they had only to break even one of its least commandments. No one, in all the years from Moses to Christ, was ever “*blessed*” by the Law of Moses. There were those righteous men that were blessed, but their “*blessing*” was because they “*believed God*” and “*obeyed His voice*” as Abraham had before them.

When the children of Israel crossed over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, which God had promised to give to Abraham's seed, it should have been a totally joyous occasion. Instead, Moses laid out in his law exactly how the crossing into Canaan would be. We know that God brought the children of Israel into the land of Canaan with a great demonstration of His power when He stopped the waters of the Jordan River at flood stage and allowed them to cross over on dry land. Coming up out of Jordan, they came into the valley of Shechem, which lies between Mount Ebal, which Moses designated as a mountain of cursing (Deuteronomy 27:13), and Mount Gerizim, which was designated as a mountain of blessing (Deuteronomy 27:12). Strangely, it was on the mountain of cursing that Moses commanded them to build an altar and write all the words of His law upon it. The "*blessings*" of the law were to be spoken on Mount Gerizim while the curses were being spoken on Mount Ebal. The scripture does not give the record of the blessings that were spoken, but it does tell the curses that were to be spoken by the priests as they ministered at the altar on the mountain of cursing. Moses gave them this charge, which is found in Deuteronomy 27:12-26, on the last day of his life before dying on Mount Nebo.

Deuteronomy 27:12-26: *"And the Levites shall speak, and say unto all the men of Israel with a loud voice,*

Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place. And all the people shall answer and say, Amen.

Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Cursed be he that lieth with his father's wife; because he uncovereth his father's skirt. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Cursed be he that lieth with any manner of beast. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Cursed be he that lieth with his sister, the daughter of his father, or the daughter of his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Cursed be he that lieth with his mother in law. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Cursed be he that smiteth his neighbour secretly. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.”

The last curse of these twelve is the one the apostle Paul quoted to show that the Law of Moses curses everyone who is under it; *“As many as are of the works of the law are UNDER THE CURSE: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them”* (Galatians 3:10). The Law of Moses not only cursed those who committed abominations; it would also curse the righteous man or woman if they ate the wrong food or walked too far from home on the Sabbath day. It cursed a man for gathering sticks on the Sabbath, and the people, in obedience to the Law of Moses, stoned him to death (Numbers 15:32-36). In fact, it was the Law of Moses that cursed Jesus of Nazareth when He confessed to the high priest that He is *“the Christ, the Son of the Blessed”* (Mark 14:60-64). The apostle Paul wrote of this in Galatians 3:13, saying, *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree”* (Galatians). Incredibly, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was accounted to be a lawbreaker and was cursed by the Law of Moses when He died for our sins on the cross at Calvary. This was *“the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone that*

believeth” (Romans 10:4). In cursing the Son of God, the “*law*” itself was nailed to the cross with Him (Colossians 2:14).

Blessings of the Kingdom of God

Matthew 5:1-12: *“And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,*

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

Moses pronounced curses upon those who disregarded his sayings (the Law of Moses). Jesus pronounced blessings upon those who “*do*” His sayings. Those who entered the land of Canaan did so hearing the curses of the Law of Moses pronounced upon them. Those who receive Christ and by faith enter the Kingdom of God do so with blessings pronounced upon them. These “*blessings*” are commonly called “*beatitudes* (happy are ye),” showing that the covenant of grace in the Kingdom of God is exceedingly better than the covenant of law that cursed the people for over fourteen centuries. Jesus pronounced blessings upon people who are often

despised and rejected in the systems of this present world. For example, the first blessing Jesus pronounced was upon *“the poor in spirit.”* This does not speak of those who are depressed or those who enjoy a *“pity party;”* instead, the Greek word that is translated *“poor”* in this blessing actually means *“beggar.”* Certainly there is no blessing in being a beggar in this present world. A *“beggar”* in this world may be a disabled person with no family to care for them. When that is the case we are commanded to show mercy to them; to feed them, cloth them, and to give them bed and shelter, and to do so with much love. On the other hand a *“beggar”* may one that is simply lazy and would rather beg than work with his hands. These can often become very aggressive in their begging; almost demanding the things they want from others. Of these, the apostle Paul says, *“when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat”* (II Thessalonians 3:10).

Jesus says those who are *“beggars in spirit”* are blessed. These are those who recognize their need for the things of God. They are *“seekers of God”* who seek Him in truth. They are not forsaken, they are *“blessed”* in the things of God, but in the light of the *“unsearchable riches of Christ* (Ephesians 3:8) they see their lack. The sentiment of those who are *“poor in spirit”* is expressed in the beautiful words of an old gospel chorus we sing;

*More of you, more of you. I've had all, but what I need,
Just more of you.
Of things I've had my fill. And yet, I hunger still,
Empty and bare. Lord hear my prayer,
For more of You.*

Oh what a blessing it is to be a *“beggar”* in the kingdom of God.

The Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees

Matthew 5:20: *“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.”*

The average Christian holds many misconceptions about the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day. We know

that Jesus rebuked them severely in the twenty third chapter of Matthew, repeatedly calling them “*hypocrites.*” He accused them of pretense, deception, and extortion, among other things. The only reason He could do this, however, is because He knew what was in their hearts (John 2:23-25). Outwardly, they were the most perfect among the people in the Jews religion. According to the righteousness in the Law of Moses, they were “*blameless*” (Philippians 3:6). Jesus said of them in John 15:22, “*If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but **now they have no cloke for their sin.***” None of their contemporaries could condemn them as sinners because they were not able to see what was in their hearts as Jesus did. Jesus so fully exposed the content of their hearts that they could no longer hide their sin, which was manifested in their hatred of Him. Jesus continued in verses 23-25; “*He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but **now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.** But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.*”

Matthew 23:25-26: “*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but **within they are full of extortion and excess.** Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.*”

The common thought today is that a hypocrite is a person who preaches one thing and lives another, but this is not always the case. Jesus called the scribes and Pharisees “*hypocrites*” even though they kept the Law of Moses blamelessly. The word “*hypocrites*” is derived from the Greek word “*hupokrites,*” which is defined as “*an actor under an assumed character.*” They were not what they appeared to be. Jesus said that they appeared to be righteous to men, but inwardly they were full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Matthew 23:27-28: “*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so **ye also outwardly appear***

righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”

The hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees was that they played the part of righteous and holy men to near perfection even though they were neither righteous nor holy. No one could accuse them of immorality, lying or stealing. They were commandment keepers to the extreme. Jesus’ condemnation of them was not for things they committed, but for things they omitted, such as “*love, justice, mercy, and faith*” (Matthew 23:23, Luke 11:42). It seemed a good thing that in their outward actions they appeared righteous to men, but their hearts were filled with uncommitted sins. They were as one who washed the outside of a vessel and called it clean when they knew that the inside of the vessel was filthy. Jesus said they were like tombs that had been made so beautiful to look upon that you might forget that they are filled with dead men’s bones.

Righteousness that Exceeds the Law

The “*righteousness*” of the scribes and Pharisees was their perfect obedience to the “*Law of Moses.*” In His “*Sermon of the Mount,*” Jesus defined exactly what “*exceeding righteousness*” is. He begins with several comparisons between the commandments of the Law of Moses and His commandments.

Matthew 5:21-22: “*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.*”

The “*Law of Moses*” was given to judge the outward actions of man. Jesus gave His commandments to judge the inward thoughts and imaginations of man. In His reckoning, “*anger without a cause*” is the root cause of murder, and is equal to murder. Under the Law of Moses, a man may learn to control the outward manifestations of anger, but he cannot control the anger that works in his heart. It is those secret things of the heart that are condemned by Jesus in His sermon on the mount.

Matthew 5:27-28: “*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.”

According to Jesus, sin does not have to be “committed” in the outward act in order to be sin. Sin in the heart is damning to man even if he never commits the outward act. In these two examples it is easy to see that the “commandments of Jesus” are infinitely harder than the commandments of Moses, and are of such a nature that no one can obey them unless they have first received the “new heart” and “new spirit” which God promised to His people in Ezekiel 36:26. This is exactly why Jesus told Nicodemus, who was a devout teacher of the Law of Moses, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God...he cannot enter the kingdom of God...marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again” (John 3:3-7). The “new heart” and the “new spirit” come only with the “new birth.”

The “Great Commandments” of Moses

Matthew 22:35-40: *“Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, **which is the great commandment in the law?** Jesus said unto him, **Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.** This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, **Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.** **ON THESE TWO COMMANDMENTS HANG ALL THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS.**”*

There are six hundred and thirteen commandments and ordinances in the Law of Moses, and two of them are called “the great commandments.” Jesus said, “On these two commandments hang all the law and prophets.” In other words, if a person kept six hundred and eleven commandments to perfection, as many among the scribes and Pharisees actually did, but failed to “love God with all their heart, soul, and mind,” and to “love their neighbor as themselves,” they were still condemned by the Law of Moses. If, on the other hand, a person loves God with all their heart, soul, and mind, and their neighbor as themselves, all the other commandments fall into place as a natural result of the love of God in that person. Listen to what the apostle Paul says in Romans 13:8-10; “Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for **he**

that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

Many of the scribes and Pharisees kept all the deeds of the law to perfection, but they were still condemned because they could not love. The apostle Paul spoke of his righteousness under the Law of Moses when wrote these words to the Philippians, “*If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, BLAMELESS*” (Philippians 3:4-6). Saul of Tarsus would have said that he loved God with all his heart, soul, and mind, and that he loved his neighbor as himself, but the truth is, he did not love because he was incapable of the love of God. He was “*blameless*” according to the Law of Moses even as he “*breathed out threatenings and slaughter* (Acts 9:1)” against the Christians and “*made havoc* (Acts 8:3)” of the church in Jerusalem. He believed that he was doing the will of God even if Christians died at his hands (John 16:2) during the persecution. At the same time, he was highly honored and praised in the Jews religion for his great zeal and righteousness.

In the third chapter of Romans, the apostle Paul gives another view, a more realistic view, of what it is really like for those who believe they are righteous because they obey the commandments and ordinances of a law of religion.

Romans 3:11-19: “*There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before*

their eyes. Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law."

While reading this passage of scripture, it is easy to miss the fact that Paul is describing those who continue to trust in the law even though Christ has come and died for the sin of the world. They have refused the Son of God just as their forefathers refused God at Mount Horeb almost fifteen hundred years before. There were many godly and righteous men and women under the law during the time they waited and longed for the appearing of their redeemer. These accepted Jesus, believing that He is "*the Christ, the Son of God,*" when they heard Him and saw His wonder works. When Paul says "*There is none righteous, no not one*" (Romans 3:10), he refers to those who have rejected Jesus Christ, yet believe they are righteous through keeping the law. Amazingly, in verses eleven through nineteen, he gives a portrait of what he had become during the time he persecuted the Church and "*breathed out threatenings and slaughter*" against the Christians. His "*portrait*" includes all those scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus called "*hypocrites*" even though they were perfect in their obedience to the Law of Moses. It is no great wonder that the apostle Paul is the first to tell us in the next verse, "*Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight...*" (Romans 3:20).

The "Great Commandment" of Jesus

Matthew 5:43-45: "*Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.*"

As the children of God, it is obvious that we are to "*love God with all our heart, soul, and mind,*" and "*love our neighbor as our self,*" exactly as Moses said. Every student of the word understands that Jesus tells us to "*love one another, as I have loved you*" (John 15:12). He says, "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*" (John 13:35). There is, however, the "*great commandment*" of the kingdom of God, which has been absolutely overlooked by most. It is a

commandment that every other saying of Jesus “hangs upon.” The greatest of all commandments is to “love your enemies.” If Jesus said in John 13:35, “...all men shall know that ye are **my disciples**, if ye have love one to another,” we know that He also said, “**Love your enemies...that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.**” More than our “love for God” or our “love for the brethren,” it is that we “love our enemies” that proves the love of Christ is in us. It shouts to the world around us that we are the children of God. “Upon this commandment” hangs the righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. If we do not love our enemies, there is no proof that we love Christ. “**And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments**” (I John 2:3).

The commandments that Jesus gave in His “Sermon on the Mount” were absolutely impossible for the people who heard Him to obey, and He, better than they, understood that. Why then did He conclude His message with the question, “*Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things I say?*” (Luke 6:46). The answer to that question is what this message is about.

Ye Must be “Born Again”

The Christian walk is a supernatural walk, which is utterly beyond the reach of those who have not been “born again” of the Spirit of God. The third chapter of John tells of Nicodemus, a “ruler of the Jews” who secretly came to Jesus one night. Nicodemus was one of the seventy elders of Israel, a member of the Sanhedrin Court, and a “master of Israel,” that is, one of the highest among the teachers of the Law of Moses. He was a good man, one who was righteous according to all the righteousness of the law, which he would have kept “blamelessly” (Luke 1:6, Philippians 3:6). If anyone could be saved through obeying commandments, surely Nicodemus would have been, but it was to Nicodemus that Jesus said, “*Ye must be born again*” (John 3:7), because he, like every other person on earth, was a “fallen man” under the dominion of sin that was in his nature. The Law of Moses, which Nicodemus was a great teacher of, was not given to make the people righteous; instead, it was given to control the actions of the people and keep them from committing sin through “the fear of death” (Hebrews

2:14-15). “*He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses*” (Hebrews 10:28).

John 3:3: “*Except a man be born again, he cannot SEE the kingdom of God.*”

John 3:5: “*Except a man be born of water (natural birth) and of the Spirit (spiritual birth), he cannot ENTER INTO the kingdom of God.*”

It is obvious that a person cannot live in one nation and obey the laws of another. It should be just as obvious that a person who is dominated by sin and controlled by law cannot live in the kingdom of God. They cannot “*see the kingdom of God*” nor can they “*enter into the kingdom of God.*” Certainly, they cannot “*do the sayings of Jesus*” which is “*the rule*” of the kingdom of God.

Doing the Sayings of Jesus

Luke 6:46: “*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*”

There are at least two schools of thought on Jesus’ “*Sermon on the Mount,*” the “*legalist*” and the “*lascivious.*” The “*lascivious*” are those who believe that grace covers our sin and God sees us only in the righteousness of Christ, “*even though we are still sinners, and sin every day.*” These are those whom Jude warned us of, saying they have “*turned the grace of God into lasciviousness*” (Jude 1:4). The lascivious person believes that Jesus never intended for the children of God to obey the Sermon on the Mount. They teach that Jesus only strengthened the Law of Moses, which He later abolished on the cross, in order to take all hope of salvation from those who believe they are righteous through keeping the law. That is not a bad thought, but if it were true, then why did He conclude His “*Sermon on the Mount*” with the question, “*Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*”

The “*legalist,*” on the other hand, knows that Jesus absolutely expected the children of God to do His sayings, and believes that we must “*strive every day*” to do them. They consider that all His sayings are “*hard sayings,*” and the hardest of them all is that we

“love our enemies.” They teach that it is *“hard”* to *“turn the other cheek”* when someone slaps you, and harder still when someone sues you at law for your coat to *“give them your cloak also”* (Matthew 5:39-40). To them, however, the *“hardest”* of all the commandments is to *“love your enemy.”* They say, *“It will be the hardest thing you have ever done in your life, but you have got to do it,”* so they *“grit their teeth”* and *“hug the neck”* of someone they despise.

It is commonly taught that *“doing the sayings of Jesus”* is the foundation that a person must build their lives upon. Those who are of such a mindset will always struggle as they seek to attain unto righteous and holiness through human abilities. Some among them may seem to attain to great heights in their pursuit of perfection through carnal means, but I assure you that those who follow after them will enter into a life of condemnation as they continually struggle to *“come up to the standard”* that has been set before them. Many who have truly been *“born again”* have been drawn into the endless pursuit of perfection, and most often find themselves in the vicious cycle of trying and failing, because they have never known *“the truth”* that Jesus said will *“make them free”* (John 8:32). When I was a very young child (preschool) during the years of World War II, I heard the stories about *“Captain Marvel,”* who was really a young boy named *“Billy Batson”* who would be transformed into a superhero when he said the magic word, *“shazam.”* I liked to pretend that I was Captain Marvel. I would tie a towel around my neck like a cape, and leap head first off of our front porch, trying to fly. Of course I would *“belly flop”* in the grass, but I would always get up and try again. There were a few times that I would tell my mom, *“I almost flew that time.”* The imaginations we had as a very small child are harmless if, as Paul says in I Corinthians 13:11, *“When I became a man, I put away childish things.”* It is very sad, however, when people try so hard to do the sayings of Jesus, but live in continual condemnation because of their repeated failures. If they do not *“know the truth”* that Jesus said would *“make them free,”* they might as well try to fly through their own power. They will never succeed.

What Comes First?

There is an old saying that you can “*get the cart before the horse.*” The mental image of that saying is to see a foolish man who would put his cart in front of his horse and try to teach the horse to push the cart. That is exactly what they do who teach that the foundation of Christian life is to “*do the sayings of Jesus.*” Please let me explain. When Jesus asked the people at the conclusion of His sermon, “*Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things I say*” (Luke 6:46), He gave the answer in the next three verses.

Luke 6:47-48: “*Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock.*”

Luke 8:49: “*But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.*”

The secret to “*doing the sayings of Jesus*” is in the foundation. “*Doing*” is not the foundation, but it is the one who builds upon the foundation who “*does the sayings of Jesus.*” There was not a single person among those who heard Jesus preach His Sermon on the Mount that could obey His sayings, because “*the foundation*” for that house had not yet been laid. It is equally true today, almost two thousand years after the foundation has been laid, that those whose house is not built on the “*foundation that was laid*” cannot do the sayings of Jesus. The prophet Isaiah was the first among the prophets to speak of a foundation that God would lay for His house, which would be “*the Church of Jesus Christ,*” a “*new creation in Christ.*” He said, “*Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste*” (Isaiah 28:16).

The apostle Peter quotes Isaiah and reveals exactly what that “*foundation*” is; “*Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that BELIEVETH ON HIM shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe HE IS PRECIOUS: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed*” (I Peter 2:5-8).

Notice that Peter speaks of the foundation stone as “*him*” and “*he*.” The “*Rock*” the church is built upon is Christ and the revelation that “*Jesus is the Christ.*” Jesus said, “*Upon this rock I will build my church*” (Matthew 16:15-18). The “*foundation*” that God has laid on the rock is “*Christ-crucified.*” The scribes, the Pharisees, and the chief priests are the “*builders*” in the religion of the Jews, and Jesus is “*the stone which the builders disallowed,*” when they refused Him as their messiah and condemned Him to death as a blasphemer. God raised Him from the dead, and made Him to be “*the head of the corner,*” that is, “*the chief corner stone*” to those who believe, but a “*stone of stumbling and a rock of offence*” to those who refuse to believe. It is God who laid the foundation stone when Jesus suffered and died on the cross. It is the apostle Paul, however, who received the revelation of the gospel of Christ, which tells us what all this means.

The Gospel Foundation

I Corinthians 3:10-11: “*According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*”

The apostle Paul gives a “*guarantee*” of the origin of the gospel he preaches; “*But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus*

Christ” (Galatians 1:11-12. He did not receive the gospel from Peter or any other of the apostles. In fact, the only time he saw Peter during the first seventeen years of his ministry was a short time three years after He received the revelation of the gospel (Galatians 1:18). In Galatians 1:15-17, he tells us of the time and manner in which he received his revelation; *“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son IN me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.”*

The first *“revelation of Jesus”* that Paul received was the day he was converted to believe that *“Jesus is the Christ.”* He was on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians when he was confronted by Jesus, who blinded him with a great light, struck him to the ground, and spoke to him out of heaven, saying, *“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”* (Acts 9:1-6). Saul of Tarsus was shocked to discover that Jesus, whom he hated and persecuted, is *“the Christ,”* whom he, as a Jew, loved and longed to see. He was filled with the Holy Ghost three days later, but it was about a year later that he received the *“revelation of Jesus Christ,”* which is not a revelation *“about”* Jesus, but the revelation *“of”* Jesus. Paul explained it this way; *“It pleased God...to reveal His Son in me.”*

I Corinthians 1:23-24: *“But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”*

I Corinthians 2:2: *“For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”*

I Corinthians 1:17-18: *“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”*

Paul understood that *“Christ crucified”* and *“the preaching of the cross”* is *“the gospel of Christ”* and *“the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth”* (Romans 1:16). What is the

“power” of the cross of Christ? It is revealed in the “*gospel foundation*,” which was laid by Paul, and which He reveals in the sixth chapter of Romans.

The “Revelation” of the “Foundation”

Romans 6:1-2: “*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*”

Every unbeliever is “*dead in sin.*” Paul says that we who trust in Christ are “*dead to sin*” and can no longer “*live in sin.*” The hypothetical question that is asked in this verse, “*Shall we continue in sin,*” can only be asked by one who does not understand the truth of the gospel of Christ. The “*second death*” of an unbeliever is the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14-15), but the second death of a believer is when we die “*in union with Christ*” in His death for us. Paul speaks of this in Colossians 1:21-22; “*And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouceable in his sight.*” The words “*through death*” speak not only of His death for us, but our death “*with Him.*” In Hebrews 2:14 the apostle tells us that Christ came into the world to die for us, “*that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.*” The death of Jesus for us destroyed both “*the power of death*” and “*the devil.*” Certainly we see that Satan is alive and well on planet earth, but he is absolutely destroyed to those who have “*passed from death to life in Christ*” through “*death with Christ.*” He cannot touch those who “*abide in Christ*” (I John 3:5-6).

Romans 6:3: “*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?*”

According to the apostle Paul the “*first principles*” of the doctrine of Christ is “*repentance from dead works and faith toward God*” (Hebrews 6:1). Writing to the Hebrews (the Jews), Paul sought to turn them away from the “*deeds of the law*” that cannot justify those who do them. Writing to the Corinthians (Gentiles), he turned them away from trusting in water baptism, for it is also a

“dead work.” He said to the Corinthians, ***“I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other”*** (I Corinthians 1:14-16). Why, if water baptism is a necessary work for salvation, did Paul, the man who understood the gospel of Christ better than any; why did he *“thank God”* that he had baptized only two men and one household at Corinth? He gave the answer in the next verse; *“For (because) Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect”* (I Corinthians 1:14-17). Those who trust in baptismal regeneration will never understand the truth that Jesus said *“will make you free”* from sin (John 8:32-36).

It is *“baptism into His death”* that brings a person into Christ. This is not a baptism that is administered by man, but by God. We are made one with Christ in His death on the cross, where He died for us and we died with Him. *“Death with Christ”* is received by faith, which simply means to believe the true report that says we are *“crucified with Him”* (Romans 6:6, Galatians 2:20). It is not a *“self inflicted death.”* There are those who teach that God has forgiven you, but you must crucify yourself in order to receive life. There are others who teach that God has given us life, and we must now seek to die. Both of these are mistaken. The truth that makes us free from sin without religious works or human efforts is that God has given us *“death with Christ”* in order that we may *“live in Christ.”* It is *“through death”* with Christ that we are delivered *“from death”* in Adam.

Romans 6:4-5: *“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:”*

Christ died for us, was *“buried”* in a borrowed tomb, and resurrected by God on the third day. We, who by faith have been *“baptized into His death”* are also *“buried”* and *“resurrected”* in union with Him. Our *“death with Christ”* was *“for our sins”* and

we, according to Romans 6:2, are “*dead to sin.*” When this is the case, we also have been raised in “*newness of life*” in “*the likeness of His resurrection.*” The apostle Peter tells us that God has “*begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*” (I Peter 1:3).

Knowing the Truth

John 8:31-32: “*Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*”

The eighth chapter of John is a discourse between Jesus and the unbelieving Jews. He told them something in John 8:21 that must have seemed incredible to them; “*I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come.*” For us who believe, how is it possible for one to “*seek Him*” and yet “*die in sin?*” It is not possible for anyone to “*die in sin*” who know that Jesus is “*the Christ*” who came into the world to “*take away our sin*” (I John 3:5), if they “*trust in Him.*” Jesus explained his saying to the unbelieving Jews in the next verses; “*Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I AM HE, ye shall die in your sins*” John 8:23-24).

Those Jews who disputed with Jesus understood very well what He was telling them, but they refused to believe what He said. They were seeking for their messiah (the Christ), whom the prophet Daniel had said would come. They believed that when He came, He would “*make an end of sins*” and “*bring in everlasting righteousness,*” exactly as the prophecy had said (Daniel 9:24-27). The time for their messiah’s appearing, according to the prophecy, had come and gone two years before, and they were seeking Him, but they refused to believe that **Jesus is He**. Jesus clearly told them, “*I am from above...I am not of this world.*” In these words, He was telling them, “*I am He...if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.*” What seemed to be an “*incredible*” statement at the time has been fulfilled to perfection in this last generation. The Jews, after almost two thousand years, are still seeking for Christ, but they do not believe that Jesus is the

Christ. Devout Jews go daily to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, weeping and praying for Christ to come. They know that “*when He comes, He will make an end of sins and bring in everlasting righteousness.*” They have lived with the constant threat of annihilation for generations, and it will continue until the time they believe that Jesus is “*He,*” that “*Jesus is the Christ.*” The prophet Zechariah tells us of a day that is coming soon, when one third of the Jews in Jerusalem will believe that Jesus is their Messiah, but it will be in the time of their greatest tribulation.

Zechariah 12:10: “*And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.*”

Zechariah 13:8-9: “*And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.*”

Zechariah 14:3-4: “*Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives...*”

Things We Must Know

There were those among the Jews who professed to believe in Jesus. It was to these that Jesus said, “*...continue in my word, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*” There is only one simple truth that makes the one who believes it free. “*Jesus is the Christ who came into the world to make an end of sins and bring in everlasting righteousness.*” Those who “*know the truth*” know that Christ did exactly what He came into the world to do when He died on the cross for us. Those who “*know the truth*” and “*trust in Him*” have been made free, and they are “*free indeed*” (John 8:36).

Romans 6:6: *“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”*

When the apostle says *“knowing this,”* he introduces the *“knowledge”* of that which Jesus said would make the believer free from sin. This single verse, better than any other, lays the gospel foundation that must be built upon. Only those who *“know the truth”* that is revealed in these verses from the sixth chapter of Romans will ever be free from sin to *“do the sayings of Jesus.”* We *“know”* that Jesus is the Christ. We know that Daniel 9:24-27 foretells the coming of Christ into the world and why He would come. Isaiah 53:1-12 tells us how He would accomplish, through His sufferings and death, what He came into the world to do. Isaiah 60:1-22 describes the *“glory”* of the *“new creation”* that would come into being because of the *“sufferings of Christ”* (I Peter 1:10-11). It is in Paul’s writings, however, that we clearly see what actually took place when Jesus died for us and was raised again the third day.

“...our old man is crucified with him...” This is a fact of the gospel that Paul said we must *“know.”* The gospel of Christ is as much about our *“death with Christ”* as it is about His death for us. When we say, as Paul says in Romans 5:8, *“Christ died for us,”* we must not leave why He died for us open to speculation. Many have *“filled in the blanks”* with their imaginations; they *“imagine”* that He died to *“take the penalty for our sins,”* and as a result, sin no longer has a penalty. No! He died on the cross to *“take away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29), and He did it through ***“our death with Him.”*** Peter speaks of Jesus, *“who His own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness”* (I Peter 2:24). The words *“that we”* in this verse actually mean *“in order that we”* in the Greek text. Jesus Christ died for our sins *“in order that we”* would be *“dead to sins”* and *“live unto righteousness.”*

Our “Old Man”

In Revelation 20:6 the apostle John writes, *“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power.”* According to the scripture in Revelation 20:14,

the “*lake of fire*” is “*the second death.*” If there is a “*second death,*” there must have been a “*first death,*” and that is the “*death*” that all of mankind died when the first man, Adam, disobeyed God. The apostle Paul confirms this as the “*first death*” in I Corinthians 15:21-22; “*For since **by man came death,** by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as **in Adam all die,** even so in Christ shall all be **made alive.**” The “*old man*” is the man with the nature of fallen Adam. The “*new man*” is the man with the nature of Jesus Christ. All of us were born into this world as an “*old man,*” meaning that we were born in sin with the fallen nature of Adam. We become a “*new man*” when we trust in Jesus Christ. The “*old man*” and the “*new man*” are not “*co-habitants,*” however; they do not live in the same body. That is the reason Christ died for us. Our “*old man*” had to die before the “*new man*” could live in us.*

We cannot comprehend what Adam was before he died a spiritual death in the Garden of Eden. We understand by the scriptures that he was just a little lower than God and much higher than the angels. He was created in the image and likeness of God, crowned with the glory and honor of God, breathed the breath of God, and was the one who was in charge of everything God had created. All of this was lost when he disobeyed God and died spiritually. He lost the image and likeness of God; the Spirit (breath) of God departed from him; he lost his covering of glory and honor with God, and he no longer had dominion over the works of God’s hands. Adam not only died to God, but he was made alive to sin when the nature of the serpent took the place of the Spirit God in his human nature. The apostle Paul tells us, “*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*” (Romans 5:12). Notice that death entered into the world “*by (through) sin,*” that is, through Adam’s transgression. Two verses later, Paul tells us that it is “*death*” that reigns over the people; “*Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression*” (Romans 5:14). The reign of death speaks of much more than the natural death that every living person will experience. Instead, what man calls “*life*” is what God calls “*death*” in those who have not received life in

Jesus Christ. The only way out of the “*first death*” is “*through death.*” Untold multitudes will be cast into the “*second death*” (the lake of fire; Revelation 20:14), from which there is no return. Those who believe the truth and trust in Christ are delivered out of the first death and escape the second death through “*death and resurrection with* (in union with) *Christ.*”

The Foundation to Build Upon

In John 11:25-26, Jesus gave a wonderful promise to everyone who will believe; “*I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, THOUGH HE WERE DEAD, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*” Every person that is born into this world is “*dead*” until they receive “*life*” in Christ Jesus. The reality is, however, that He does not “*give life to the dead;*” instead we who believe “*pass from death to life* (I John 3:14)” through “*death with Christ.*” Jesus said, “*...though he were dead* (in the first death with Adam), *yet shall he live* (in Christ). *And whosoever liveth* (in Christ) *and believeth in me shall never die* (the second death in the lake of fire).”

Romans 6:10: “*For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.*”

This verse establishes an obvious truth about Jesus. He died; He died unto sin; and He died but once. He lives, and He lives “*unto God.*” Paul has already established, in this sixth chapter of Romans, our identity and union with Christ in His death and burial. We are “*baptized into His death*” (verse three). We are “*crucified with Him*” (verse six). We are “*buried with Him*” (verse four). Through our death and burial with Christ, we are “*freed from sin*” (verse seven). Paul tells us that if these things are true in us (we accept them by faith in Christ), we know that we also live in union with Him. These things are the basis for our great confession in the next verse.

Romans 6:11: “*Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*”

The word “*likewise*” ties us to the facts that were stated about Jesus in the previous verse. Jesus died! We died “*with Him.*” He

died unto sin! We are dead to sin. He died but once, and His death is sufficient for all who will believe. Jesus lives! We live *“in union with Him.”* He lives unto God. This is the pattern of our salvation through death and resurrection *“in union with”* Jesus Christ. In His resurrection, a *“new man”* was born, and we are *“alive unto God through (the Greek word is ‘in’) Jesus Christ our Lord.”* Our union with Christ is both *in His death* and *in His life*.

What Do You Believe?

Do you believe that you are a sinner and that you will always be a sinner? If so, then you are *“abiding in death”* (I John 3:14). Do you believe that you are not a sinner because you have been diligent to obey the Ten Commandments? If so, then you also are *“abiding in death.”* The gospel of Christ is not about us; it is about *“who He is”* and *“why He came into the world.”* Those who know the truth and simply *“trust in Him”* are built upon the foundation. We do not *“lay the foundation,”* and we do not *“build the house.”* Paul said, *“Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ”* (I Corinthians 3:11). David tells us, *“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it”* (Psalms 127:1). Our *“work”* is to *“believe”* that Jesus is *“the Christ the Son of the living God”* (Matthew 16:16), and to *“love one another, as He gave us commandment”* (I John 3:23).

Exceeding Love; Exceeding Righteousness

Philippians 3:5-6: *“Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”*

In these two verses, the apostle Paul relates the things he believed were to his advantage in Judaism. He mentions his bloodline (stock of Israel), his lineage (tribe of Benjamin), his descent from Abraham (Hebrew of the Hebrews), and his denomination (Pharisee). Beyond these natural things that he trusted in were the things which he did. Concerning zeal, he *“persecuted the church”* and received much honor among his brothers for doing so. Concerning righteousness, he was *“blameless,”* according to the

commandments and ordinances of the law, even though he persecuted Christians and “*made havoc of the church*” (Acts 8:3).

Philippians 3:7-9: “*But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ...and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*”

Something happened to Saul of Tarsus (Paul) that caused him to see that his righteousness under the law was of absolutely no value to him. He had always been able to boast in his “*perfect obedience*” to the commandments and ordinances of the Law of Moses. There was absolutely nothing in the law that he left undone. Years later, after he was converted to Jesus, he told the Galatians, “*ye have heard of my conversation (behavior) in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.*” His “*profit*” in his religion was not “*in spite of*” his hatred for Jesus and the church; he profited above others “*because*” he persecuted the church. His righteousness under the law permitted him to “*love*” his neighbor and “*hate*” his enemy.” Certainly, that kind of “*righteousness*” is in vain.

There came a day in the persecution of the Christians that Saul of Tarsus saw something that absolutely destroyed his confidence in his righteousness. A young Christian named Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin court to be tried on charges of heresy. He faithfully and boldly gave his defense, and actually charged the court with the murder of Jesus Christ (Acts 7:21). The members of the court were enraged. “*When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth*” (Act 7:54). This most powerful and dignified court, made up of those the most learned men of Israel; men who reveled in their perfect righteousness under the law, was reduced to the level of animals, “*gnashing with their teeth.*” The Holy Ghost came upon Stephen, and when he looked up, he saw Jesus “*standing at the Father's right hand.*” When he told what he saw, the Sanhedrin “*stopped*

their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul” (Acts 7:57-58). The scripture tells us the “young man Saul” was “consenting unto his (Stephen’s) death” (Acts 8:1). It is in this immediate timeframe that Saul of Tarsus saw in Stephen a “righteousness” that far exceeded the righteousness he had under the law.

Stephen’s boldness surprised the court. His testimony angered them. His charges enraged them. His vision of Jesus took them beyond control. *“This man must die!”* was the cry of every devout Jew in the place. The witnesses cast the first stones, and the multitude followed. It is in the last breath of Stephen that Saul of Tarsus saw something that made him to know that his righteousness in the law was worthless, no more than *“dung”* (Philippians 3:8). He heard Stephen as he used his last breath to breathe a prayer, *“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”* Young Saul of Tarsus had just approved the murder of a young man who loved his enemies, and forgave them for killing him. He had never seen a man in the Jews religion that could *“love their enemies.”* The saving effect of seeing the love Christ in Stephen was not immediate. From that day, Saul of Tarsus dedicated his life to destroying his enemies. He lost all his righteousness which was by the law, and became as a vicious animal, seeking to destroy those he perceived to be his enemies. He breathed out threatenings and slaughter against them. His hatred drove him beyond all reason. He determined to utterly destroy everything that reminded him of Jesus. He made havoc of the church in Jerusalem. He sought and received authority to arrest the Jews in Damascus who believed in Jesus. During all this time, his heart was *“pricked,”* with the memory of dying Stephen, who *“breathed out love and forgiveness”* for those who stoned him. Saul of Tarsus was reduced from a man who was confident in his perfect righteousness under the law, to a man that ultimately cried, *“O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death”* (Romans 7:24). That must have been the same day that he met Jesus, of whom Paul was later to say, *“He loved me, and gave himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20).

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