

## The Incompatibility of Righteousness

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Brandon Phillips / General Adult

The King and His Glory / Old Testament; New Testament / Matthew 9:14–17

In Matthew 9:14-17, Jesus gives two critical reasons why righteousness from God and man's righteousness are incompatible.

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## Pre-sermon Comments

### James 1:2–4 LSB

<sup>2</sup> Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith brings about perseverance. <sup>4</sup> And let perseverance have *its* perfect work, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

## Review

### Matthew 9:9 LSB

<sup>9</sup> And as Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax office; and He said to him, “Follow Me!” And he stood up and followed Him.

- **You Will Respond with Obedience** ([Matthew 9:9b](#))
- **You Will Respond with Overflowing Joy** ([Matt 9:10](#))

### Matthew 9:10 LSB

<sup>10</sup> Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining *at the table* in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples.

- **You Will Receive Overwhelming Criticism** ([Matt 9:11-13](#))

### Matthew 9:11–13 LSB

<sup>11</sup> And when the Pharisees saw *this*, they said to His disciples, “Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?” <sup>12</sup> But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, “*It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.*” <sup>13</sup> “But go and learn what this means: ‘I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

## Sermon Text

### Matthew 9:14–17 LSB

<sup>14</sup> Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” <sup>15</sup> And Jesus said to them, “Can the attendants of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. <sup>16</sup> “But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. <sup>17</sup> “Nor do *people* put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.”

## Proposition and Outline

**In Matthew 9:14-17, Jesus provides two key reasons why righteousness from God and man’s righteousness are incompatible. You can know they are incompatible because only true righteousness:**

- **Only True Righteousness Equates with Jesus**
- **Only True Righteousness Exists in His Kingdom**

## Only True Righteousness Equates with Jesus ([Matt 9:14-15](#))

### Matthew 9:14 LSB

<sup>14</sup> Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?”

## Who are the disciples of John?

### **John 1:35–37 LSB**

<sup>35</sup> On the next day, John again was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup> and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” <sup>37</sup> And the two disciples heard him speak and followed Jesus.

### **Acts 19:1–3 LSB**

<sup>1</sup> Now it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper regions and came to Ephesus and found some disciples. <sup>2</sup> And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they *said* to him, “No, we have not even heard if the Holy Spirit is *being received*.” <sup>3</sup> And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” And they said, “Into John’s baptism.”

### **Matthew 4:12 LSB**

<sup>12</sup> Now when *Jesus* heard that John had been taken into custody, He departed into Galilee;

## Their Question

### **Matthew 9:14 LSB**

<sup>14</sup> Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?”

## OT Fasting

### **Leviticus 16:29–31 LSB**

<sup>29</sup> “And *this* shall be a perpetual statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls and not do any work, whether the native or the sojourner who sojourns among you; <sup>30</sup> for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you will be clean from all your sins before Yahweh. <sup>31</sup> “It is to be a sabbath of solemn rest for you, that you may humble your souls; it is a perpetual statute.

**Luke 18:12 LSB**

<sup>12</sup> ‘I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’

**Matthew 6:1 LSB**

<sup>1</sup> “Beware of doing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

**Matthew 6:2 LSB**

<sup>2</sup> “Therefore, when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be glorified by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

**Matthew 6:5 LSB**

<sup>5</sup> “And when you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

**Matthew 6:16 LSB**

<sup>16</sup> “Now whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites *do*, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Religious ritual and routine have always been dangers to true godliness. Many ceremonies, such as praying to saints and lighting a candle for a deceased relative are actually heretical. But even if it is not wrong in itself, when a form of praying, worshiping, or serving becomes the focus of attention, it becomes a barrier to true righteousness. It can keep an unbeliever from trusting in God and a believer from faithfully obeying Him. Even going to church, reading the Bible, saying grace at meals, and singing hymns can become lifeless routines in which true worship of God has no part. A fast is always meaningless if it is performed from habit and does not result from deep concern and mourning over some spiritual need. Going to church on Sunday is hypocritical if it is done apart from a genuine desire to worship and glorify God. Singing a hymn is only a pretense of worship if it does not come from a heart that seeks to praise the Lord. ~ John MacArthur

## A Deeper Concern?

### **Matthew 5:48 LSB**

<sup>48</sup> “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

### **2 Corinthians 5:21 LSB**

<sup>21</sup> He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

## Jesus’s Response to the Disciples

### **Matthew 9:15 LSB**

<sup>15</sup> And Jesus said to them, “Can the attendants of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

### **Acts 2:22–23 LSB**

<sup>22</sup> “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God did through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— <sup>23</sup> this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of lawless men and put *Him* to death.

## Discussion Questions

Pastor Brandon said God’s Word “anchors us in the stormy sea.” How has Scripture been an anchor for you in recent trials?

When Jesus called Matthew, he immediately obeyed. What does Matthew’s example teach us about responding to Christ’s call in our own lives?

Matthew’s joy led him to invite others to meet Jesus. How does joy in Christ naturally lead to evangelism? How have you seen this in your life?

The Pharisees criticized Jesus for eating with “sinners.” How should we prepare ourselves to face criticism when we follow Jesus in ways that challenge cultural or religious expectations?

What differences did Pastor Brandon highlight between Pharisaic righteousness and the righteousness of Jesus? Which of these contrasts stood out most to you, and why?

The disciples of John asked a sincere question about fasting. How do we discern the difference between a sincere question and a disguised accusation?

Religious practices like prayer, fasting, and church attendance can either be expressions of true worship or lifeless rituals. How can we guard against turning good disciplines into empty routines?

Jesus compared His presence to a wedding feast with the Bridegroom. What does this imagery teach us about the joy of being with Christ?

Jesus said His disciples would fast after He was taken away. What role should fasting play for believers today, and how should our motives differ from the Pharisees’?

Pastor Brandon said only true righteousness equates with Jesus and His Kingdom. How does this truth challenge the way we think about “being a good Christian”?

What are some examples of “man-made righteousness” in our culture or churches today that we need to guard against?

How does [2 Corinthians 5:21](#) (Christ becoming sin for us so that we might become righteous in Him) give you assurance and freedom in your walk with God?

# Only True Righteousness Exists in His Kingdom ([Matt 9:16-17](#))

## True Righteousness Cannot Attach to Pharisaical Righteousness

### **Matthew 9:16 LSB**

<sup>16</sup> “But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results.

Human beings would like to think that they can attain God’s standard of righteousness merely by adding to their own, but since the two kinds of righteousness are different in nature, this is impossible. ~ **James Montgomery Boice**

## Our Old Lives Cannot Contain True Righteousness

### **Matthew 9:17 LSB**

<sup>17</sup> “Nor do *people* put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.”

The only suitable container for new wine is a fresh wineskin. In the same way, the only life that can contain true righteousness is the new life given by God when a person repents of his sin and trusts in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. ~ John MacArthur

### **2 Corinthians 5:17 LSB**

<sup>17</sup> Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Conceit of our own righteousness sticks to us as the skin to the flesh. Sooner may the leopard lose his spots than the proud man his self-righteousness. ~ **Charles Spurgeon**

### **Matthew 5:17 LSB**

<sup>17</sup> “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

## Conclusion:

My only hope is that I shall be clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. ~  
**David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Welsh Preacher and Writer)**

### **Matthew 16:24–25 LSB**

<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. <sup>25</sup> “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

### **James 1:2–4 LSB**

<sup>2</sup> Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith brings about perseverance. <sup>4</sup> And let perseverance have *its* perfect work, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

### **1 Peter 3:15 LSB**

<sup>15</sup> but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and fear,

## Discussion Questions

Jesus compared Pharisaical righteousness to patching an old garment with unshrunk cloth. What does this teach us about trying to “add” Jesus to a self-righteous or tradition-based system?

In what ways do people today try to combine legalistic or cultural traditions with the gospel? Have you ever been tempted to do this yourself?

Pastor Brandon emphasized that Jesus didn’t come to reform Pharisaical religion but to replace it. How does this change the way we think about



following Jesus—especially when it means leaving behind comfortable habits or traditions?

Why is new life in Christ the only “container” suitable for true righteousness? How does this image of new wineskins help you understand salvation and transformation?

What are some examples of trying to “pour new wine into old wineskins” in the Christian life (e.g., clinging to old patterns, legalism, or sin while claiming new life in Christ)?

How does John MacArthur’s statement that “the only life that can contain true righteousness is the new life given by God” encourage or challenge you personally?

Pastor Brandon reminded us that the old wineskins don’t represent God’s Law, but rabbinical traditions that contradicted God’s Word. Why is it important to distinguish between God’s Law (fulfilled in Christ) and man-made traditions?

Pastor Brandon concluded that true believers show obedience, joy, perseverance, and detachment from their old lives. Which of these four do you find most difficult right now, and why?

Jesus said in [Matthew 16:24–25](#) that following Him means denying ourselves and taking up our cross. What does that look like in your daily life?

How does [James 1:2–4](#) reshape your perspective on trials you are currently facing?

In what ways can we encourage one another as a group to live with joy and perseverance in true righteousness rather than slipping back into lifeless or legalistic patterns?

## The Gospel

### **God**

## **Created and owns everything**

[Gen 1:1](#)—*In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth*

[Psalms 24:1](#)—*The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it.*

## **Is Perfectly Holy**

[1 John 1:5](#)—*This is the message we heard from Him and announce to you that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.*

[Matt 5:48](#)—*Therefore you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

## **Requires perfect obedience to His Law**

[James 2:10](#)—*for whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.*

## **Man**

### **Has broken God's law**

[Rom 3:10,23](#)—*there is none righteous, not even one...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*

### **Will pay the eternal penalty for his sin**

[Rom. 6:23](#)—*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*

### **Cannot save himself by his good works**

[Titus 3:5](#)—*He saved us not based on works which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.*

## **Christ**

### **Came to earth both as God and sinless man**

[Col 2:9](#)—For in Him the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form

### **Demonstrated God's love by dying on the cross to pay sin's penalty**

[Rom 5:8](#)—But God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us

[2 Cor 5:21](#)—He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

### **Rose from the grave and is alive today**

[1 Cor 15:4](#)—And that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

### **Sinners**

### **Must repent of all that dishonors God**

[Isa 55:7](#)—Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

[Luke 9:23](#)—if anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

### **Must believe in Christ as Lord and Savior**

[Rom 10:9](#)—that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.

### **Will you repent and believe in Christ?**

[Acts 17:30](#)—therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance God is declaring to men that all everywhere should repent.

Don't hesitate to contact Pastor Brandon or Pastor Keith if you have any questions about this sermon or if you would like to know how to follow Christ.

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## Further Quotes

Unfallen Adam was righteous, but it was his own righteousness as a created being, it was the righteousness of a man. Adam never had the righteousness of Jesus Christ upon him. What he lost was his own righteousness. But you and I are not merely given back a human righteousness, the righteousness that Adam had before he fell—we are given the righteousness of Jesus Christ. ~

**David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Welsh Preacher and Writer)**

Rather, “the righteousness of God” involves a *declaration* of righteousness before God. It is a forensic term signifying that people who are still sinners stand as not guilty before God because of the gift of God’s righteousness. ~

**Thomas Schreiner**

God looks at men and women in their sins, and applying to them the righteousness of Christ, declares them to be just. That is *imputed* righteousness. But in sanctification, we are discussing *imparted* righteousness. Not the righteousness that is put to my account, but the righteousness that is created within me and produced within me. Now that is a great distinction. ~

**David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Welsh Preacher and Writer)**

The law was given, in order to convert a great into a little man—to show that you have no power of your own for righteousness; and might thus, poor, needy, and destitute, flee to grace. ~ **Saint Augustine of Hippo**

Beware of self-righteousness. The black devil of licentiousness destroys his hundreds, but the white devil of self-righteousness destroys his thousands. ~

**Charles Spurgeon**

Specifically we should notice that he is not suggesting that people can make a strong effort and achieve the righteousness of which he is writing: it is a given righteousness, not an achieved righteousness. The blessed do not achieve it

but *hunger and thirst* for it. They *will be filled*, which surely means that God will fill them (cf. 6:33, “his righteousness”) ~ **Leon Lamb Morris**

Nothing can damn a man but his own righteousness; nothing can save him but the righteousness of Christ. ~ **Charles Spurgeon**

The welfare of the church is inseparably connected with the righteousness of God. ~ **John Calvin (French Reformer)**

*Righteousness* is a rich and full concept, but whichever way we understand it, it is a righteousness that people cannot produce of themselves. ~ **Leon Lamb Morris**

Since we are all naturally prone to hypocrisy, any empty semblance of righteousness is quite enough to satisfy us instead of righteousness itself. ~ **John Calvin (French Reformer)**

Only a perfect righteousness can stand in the judgement, and the Christian can have such righteousness only outside himself and in the perfection of Christ. ~ **John Calvin (French Reformer)**

The man who clings to his own righteousness is like a man who grasps a millstone to prevent himself from sinking in the flood. Your righteousness will damn you if you trust in it as surely as will your sins, for it is a false, proud lie. ~ **Charles Spurgeon**

The first foundation of righteousness undoubtedly is the worship of God. ~ **John Calvin (French Reformer)**

However, the root meaning here is determined by the seven occurrences of “righteousness” in the Sermon on the Mount that indicate it means a *subjective righteousness*, an inner righteousness that works itself out in one’s living in conformity to God’s will—righteous living. Thus, those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness” long to live righteously, and for righteousness to prevail in the world. It is a passionate desire, which begins with one’s own life, that all things should be lived in line with God’s will. ~ **R. Kent Hughes**

It is God's righteousness that disciples must seek. ~ **Leon Lamb Morris**

God begins his good work in us, therefore, by arousing love and desire and zeal for righteousness in our hearts; or, to speak more correctly, by bending, forming, and directing, our hearts to righteousness. He completes his work, moreover, by confirming us to perseverance. ~ **John Calvin (French Reformer)**

Holiness is the standard, and righteousness is its active fulfillment. Or you might say His holiness is His complete separation from all that is sinful, and His righteousness is the manifestation of that holiness. ~ **John F. MacArthur**

You may work your fingers to the bone, but you can never weave a righteousness that shall cover your nakedness before God. ~ **Charles Spurgeon**

The discourse now goes on to warn against a wrong kind of "righteousness" (6:1), which is undertaken not to conform to the will of God and to imitate his perfection, but to gain human approval. ~ **R. T. France**

The righteousness of God is not acquired by acts frequently repeated, as Aristotle taught, but is imparted by faith. ~ **Martin Luther (Founder of the German Reformation)**

Open sin kills its thousands of souls.

Self-righteousness kills its tens of thousands. ~ **J. C. Ryle**

It seems legitimate to affirm, therefore, that 'the righteousness of God' is God's righteous initiative in putting sinners right with himself, by bestowing on them a righteousness which is not their own but his. 'The righteousness of God' is God's just justification of the unjust, his righteous way of pronouncing the unrighteous righteous, in which he both demonstrates his righteousness and gives righteousness to us. He has done it through Christ, the righteous one, who died for the unrighteous, as Paul will explain later. And he does it by faith when we put our trust in him, and cry to him for mercy. ~ **John Robert Walmsley Stott (English Preacher)**

Kingdom points to rule, and the expression is to be understood in terms of doing the will of God now as well as looking for the coming of his final kingdom. The important thing for the disciple is to be constantly seeking to do the things that God wills, that is, to be submissive to the King. In this context seeking God's *righteousness* (not our righteousness) will mean seeking that righteousness which God only can give (there is no thought that the believer by his own efforts can attain a righteousness that may fitly be called "God's") ~

**Leon Lamb Morris**

When we say that God *imputes* Christ's righteousness to us it means that God *thinks of* Christ's righteousness as belonging to us, or regards it *as belonging to* us. ~ **Wayne Grudem**

If there be ground for you to trust in your own righteousness, then, all that Christ did to purchase salvation, and all that God did to prepare the way for it is in vain. ~ **Jonathan Edwards (American Evangelical Preacher)**

Self-righteousness is as much an insult to God as blasphemy. ~ **Charles Spurgeon**

God's wrath is his righteousness reacting against unrighteousness. ~ **J. I. Packer**

Christian righteousness is not an external manifestation only, but one of the secret things of the heart. ~ **John Robert Walmsley Stott (English Preacher)**

I have always felt that [Matthew 5:20](#) was the key to this important sermon: "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 main theme is true righteousness. The religious leaders had an artificial, external righteousness based on Law. But the righteousness Jesus described is a true and vital righteousness that begins internally, in the heart. The Pharisees were concerned about the minute details of conduct, but they neglected the major matter of *character*. Conduct flows out of character. ~

**Warren W. Wiersbe**

