Christ’s Relationship to the Law
Matthew 5:17-20
(The following text is taken from a sermon preached by Gil Rugh in 1984)

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In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus wants to make sure that there is no misunderstanding about what He is doing. In an effort to eliminate such misunderstandings, Jesus picks up an idea in Matthew 5:17 that He will develop through the Sermon. He talks about the believer’s relationship to the Law by discussing His relationship to it.

1. Christ Fulfilled the Law

Jesus knew that some would accuse Him of coming to do away with the Law; He knew they would accuse Him of proclaiming something entirely new. He anticipated their accusations that He was saying that the Law had no purpose and, therefore, He was throwing it away. In order to deal with any criticism which might be raised by the Jews that He was abrogating or destroying the Law, Jesus makes the point in Matthew 5:17, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.”

His reference to the Law and the Prophets is a reference to the entire Old Testament. Sometimes the Old Testament is divided into three parts - the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. The Law is a statement often referring to the entire Old Testament. In other references, the Law refers to the demands set down by the Law, and the Prophets refers to that which is given regarding the coming Messiah. All of the Old Testament focuses on Jesus Christ.

There are several ways in which Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament. Christ fulfilled the Law by obeying it perfectly, by carrying out every one of the righteous demands of the Law. On one occasion He asked, “Which one of you convicts Me of sin?” (John 8:46), to which no one responded affirmatively. He was the sinless Lamb of God and was without spot or blemish. Therefore, He fulfilled the Law by perfectly meeting its righteous demands.

Christ also fulfilled the Law by fulfilling all the types and prophecies of the Old Testament. All
of the illustrations in the Old Testament sacrificial system focus on and find their fulfillment in Him. All of the prophecies given regarding the coming Messiah, His kingdom and His salvation find their fulfillment in Him.

The ultimate way that Christ fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures, the one which gets the greatest emphasis in the New Testament, is that He met the righteous demands of the Law in providing salvation through His death on the cross. Thus He has fulfilled the Law and brought it to completion by paying the penalty for our sins.

2. The Jurisdiction of the Law

Paul speaks of the jurisdiction of the Law in Romans 7 and makes the point that when a person dies, the Law does not have any authority over him any longer. “Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?” (v. 1) In this passage he draws the analogy of the marriage relationship to illustrate his principle. Paul continues in verse 2, “For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband.” The law binds individuals in marriage, but if one of the partners dies, the other is free from the obligations of the law.

Paul continues his argument in verse 4: “Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ.” Through the death of Christ and by His finished work, we died to the Law. It no longer has any authority or power over us. Paul continues in the same verse to give the reason why: “That you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God.”

3. The Law Demands Perfection

There is nothing wrong with the Law; it is perfect as God gave it. That is the problem we encounter - the Law is perfect, but we are not perfect. The Law demands a perfect standard of righteousness and holiness, but we cannot keep it. Paul spoke of our weakness in Romans 8:3: “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did.” But notice what God did in the next few verses: “Sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (vs. 3,4). Christ did not come to destroy the Law but to bring it to fulfillment. God fulfills the requirements of the Law in us by offering His Son, Jesus Christ, to die in our place.

The Law demanded perfection or the payment of the penalty. The penalty for sin, the failure to meet the Law’s standard of perfection, is death. God met the standard in Christ that was demanded by His holy Law. He did not decide in love to forget the penalty. Rather, He met the demands of His righteousness by having His own Son fulfill the Law’s requirements. He paid the penalty so that when a person believes in Christ, God can declare the Law fulfilled because Christ has paid the penalty. Those who have trusted Christ are now perfected in Him, a standard that God has always demanded.
In Christ the Law is fulfilled. It is fulfilled in us as believers in Christ by virtue of our being in Christ. Christ did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it. God still demands perfection—absolute holiness and righteousness. For those who do not meet the demands, the penalty is death. But for those who believe in Jesus Christ and His death on their behalf, God cleanses them and makes them perfect in Christ.

There is nothing in Scripture to support the idea that the Law should be divided into two or more parts, such as the ceremonial Law and the moral Law. Some teach that God has done away with the ceremonial aspect of the Law but not with the moral aspect of the Law. Such a distinction is not drawn anywhere in the Scriptures. The Law is viewed as a unit or as a whole. James said that anyone who breaks one point of the Law breaks the whole Law. “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all” (James 2:10). No distinction is made between different types of the Law. The Old Testament Jews who violated a ceremonial aspect of the Law were morally guilty of sin before God. Therefore, the moral and ceremonial aspects went together.

The Law was one Law, binding in its entirety. Thus when the Law was fulfilled, it was fulfilled in its entirety. God anticipated the fulfilling of the Law with the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah. Hebrews 8 is given to a discussion of the coming of this New Covenant. “When He said, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear” (v. 13). When God referred to a New Covenant, He was saying that the Old Covenant, the Law, would be superseded. Hebrews 10:3 speaks of the sacrifices made over and over under the Law: “But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year.”

The sacrificial system in the Old Testament said over and over, with every sacrifice, You are a sinner. The penalty for sin is death. You are a sinner. The penalty for sin is death. The sacrifices of the animals never took away sins. Verse 4 states emphatically, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” The Old Testament served as a reminder of sin and its penalty, but its sacrifices could never take away sin. God provided His Son to be the sacrifice which took away sin once for all.

Christ became a man and took bodily form to do the will of God and pay the penalty for sin. Verse 10 says, “By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Verse 12 adds, “But He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.” Verse 14 concludes, “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.” This passage indicates the finality of Christ’s offering. That is why there is no continuing sacrifice for sin today. The righteous demands of the Law have been met. The penalty has been paid. We are not to be resacrificing Christ in order to pay for our sins. Those who do so fail to understand the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Do not miss the finality of the statement in verse 14: “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.” Christ has not partially perfected some so that now by
believing in Christ and having a continual sacrifice of Christ we can have forgiveness. Neither are we forgiven by the sacrifice of Christ plus doing good works. We have either been perfected or we have not. Jesus Christ has either offered the sacrifice that is adequate or He has not. There is no middle ground. That is why we cannot accept the doctrine of purgatory.

Jesus Christ has either paid the penalty for our sins or He has not. If He paid the penalty for some of my sins, then He might as well have paid the penalty for none of them because if He only paid the penalty for part of them, the penalty for the rest is death. Remember, the penalty for sin is death. If any of them have not been paid for yet, I am still guilty and condemned before God. Forgiveness of sins cannot be accomplished by a combination of what Christ has done and what I do to complete it. He has fulfilled the righteous demands of the Law. In Christ I am forgiven and cleansed completely and totally or not at all! In Matthew 5:17, Jesus declares that the righteous demands of the Law have been completely fulfilled in Him.

The Jews to whom Jesus is speaking surely do not understand all that is entailed here. Christ has been living a perfect life before God and these people can see that aspect of it. They can see the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament in Him, but the ultimate aspect of bringing the Law to its completion will be realized in His death and subsequent resurrection.

The purpose of the Law is stated in Galatians 3 where it is indicated that the Law is to reveal our sinfulness and to serve as a tutor or schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. Paul says in Galatians 3 that now that Christ has come, we are no longer under the schoolmaster. Now that Christ has come and the Law has been brought to its completion, the Law has been fulfilled in Christ. “Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:24-26).

4. God’s Unchanging Word

Now Christ moves on to another significant statement in Matthew 5:18: “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.” Not only has Christ not come to destroy, He has come to fulfill. It is impossible for anything in God’s Word to ever not be fulfilled. In this verse Jesus Christ gives a strong statement on the immutability of God. Anything that God has ever said must be done as He has promised. Not the smallest letter or the smallest stroke can ever pass away. The King James Version refers to the jot and the tittle, two small markings on letters in the Hebrew language. Perhaps the closest we could come to this statement in the English language would be, Not one dot over an ‘i’, not one cross of a ‘t’ shall go unfulfilled. There is nothing small, insignificant or irrelevant when God has said it. This is an important statement on the doctrine of Scripture. Jesus said in John 10:35 that “the Scripture cannot be broken”. Thus the Scripture is something which is secure and settled. It has to be accomplished just as God has said.

Everything that God says must be done just as God says it. There is finality to His statement. Jesus says in Matthew 24:35, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass
away.” This heaven and this earth will be replaced by the new heaven and the new earth, but the Word of God will not be replaced. It will all be fulfilled just as He has said.

Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible, is given over in its entirety to a discussion of the Word of God and its importance, effect and impact in life. Verse 89 notes the finality of God’s Word. “Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven.” Note the finality of that statement. In heaven in God’s presence, His Word is settled and firm. It is unchanging and immutable. That is an important concept to realize. People go through different phases and fads. Men take the Word of God and try to twist it, change it and corrupt it, but God stands behind it just as He gave it. Because of the current feminist movement, corruptions have been made in the Scriptures to change the gender of God. Such an approach totally ignores the fact that God has given His Word and He says it will stand firm in heaven. How ridiculous that men down here say, Well, I don’t like it like this. The philosophy of the world has changed. The Bible does not represent how we think today, so let’s change it. The Word of God is unchanging; it is settled and firm. Man may try to change it on earth, but God says it is settled in heaven.

The prophet Isaiah also spoke of the unchangeableness of God’s Word. “A voice says, ‘Call out.’ Then he answered, ‘What shall I call out?’ All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever” (Isa. 40:6-8). People are like the grass and like the flowers of the field. Grass and flowers come and go, but God’s Word stands forever. That ought to be tremendously encouraging to those of us who believe the Word of God. Men come with their great philosophies and great ideas trying to undermine the Word of God. But they just come and go. We can read the ideas of great philosophers and other great men in their writings after they have died. But what happened to them? They went the way of all men. They came and they went. We can read ideas of men who were considered to be the brilliant minds of a few centuries ago, and now we laugh at how ridiculous their ideas were. We even come up with ridiculous ideas to replace them. Yet the Word of God is unchanging. It is the same and stands forever, because God has said it and He is eternally the same.

5. Implications of the Eternality of the Word of God

The eternality of the Word of God has implications in all we do. Isaiah also wrote, “And when they say to you, ‘Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?” (Isa. 8:19). God says it is ridiculous to consult the dead on behalf of the living. People should consult God instead.

There are people running around today writing books and being interviewed on television who supposedly died and came back to life. Why in the world do some people feel that they have to talk to someone who was dead in order to find out about life after death? Should we not consult God? God has already told us about life after death. He has already told us that the instant an unbeliever dies, he is in a state of torment that will go on for eternity. He has already told us
that when a believer in Jesus Christ dies, he is instantly in God’s presence in glory. Why should we want to walk around and talk to wizards who peep and mutter, as the King James Version says?

You have probably seen someone interviewed on a television program: So you died. What was it like afterwards? And then their reply: Well, I saw this great light, and I was going down this tunnel and oh, it was so wonderful! That is nothing but wizards that peep and mutter. It makes no sense. Should people not consult their God?

God has told us in His Word everything we need to know about heaven and hell. It is the same as it was two thousand years ago. Why does anyone think that someone who has supposedly died and come back to life can tell us anything about heaven that we do not already know? Can he tell us more than God has told us? Ridiculous!

Isaiah continued with this discussion in verse 20: “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.” Isaiah is saying that if someone does not speak according to the Scriptures, it is because he has no light, he is in spiritual darkness and blindness. The Word of God is the standard. If individuals fail to speak according to the Word of God, it is because they have no light and do not know God. That is an absolute and final standard by which we can measure everything.

6. The Word of God is the Absolute Standard

Some people feel that I think that I am right about everything. I am right when I agree with the Word of God, and I am wrong when I disagree with the Word of God. The Word is the absolute standard. Things are not right because I say they are right. They are not right because this church believes they are right. Things are right because God says they are right. This church is right when it is in accord with the Word of God, and it is wrong when it is out of agreement with the Word of God. The Word of God is the standard.

Sometimes people get upset and wonder why I speak about other religions or other groups. They accuse me of rendering a judgment upon them. Periodically I get phone calls - some good and some bad. Monday is not my best day of the week, but I got a call last Monday which was quite interesting. I knew at the outset that I was in trouble when the person on the other end of the line said, Is this Rugh? My first inclination was to say, No, wait a minute. I will get him for you. But I had to tell him the truth.

He started right in, Why are you trying to destroy all the churches in Lincoln? That was a good question, but before I could answer that one, he blurted out, Have you been injected with the blood of the Devil? Well, that one did not bother me, because I know the Devil is a spirit being and he does not have any blood anyway! You see, it helps to know the Bible! I did not have to get a blood test. Well, that was the end of the conversation because he hung up, much to the relief of both of us. I was getting ready for a peanut butter and banana sandwich, and I did not want to talk.
The point I am getting at is that if you talk about other teachings or religions, some people think you are setting yourself up as the standard of right and wrong. But that is not the case. The standard is the Word of God. You are right if you measure up according to His Word. That should not be so difficult to determine.

We recently showed a film about the beliefs of the Mormon church. Some people were upset by that. They wondered why we were attacking the Mormons. We were not attacking the Mormons; we were educating believers. Is the Mormon church wrong because it does not agree with this church? NO! The Mormon church is wrong because it does not agree with what the Bible reveals. If they do not speak according to the Bible, it is because they have no light. If I preach contrary to the Word of God, it is wrong. That is why you ought to have your Bible open when you study. How are you going to know when I go ‘off the deep end’ if you do not have your Bible? The Bible must be the standard.

Suppose that during the next week I started thinking about teaching about hell. But in the process I started thinking that teaching about hell just upsets people. Perhaps I would conclude that we have enough people seeing psychologists today and enough who are depressed and taking pills. Furthermore, suppose I concluded that the whole idea of hell ignores the fact that God is a loving God and told you, we do not have to worry anymore about hell. Just do the best you can and you will get to heaven.

You would say, he’s wrong! And I reply, No, you do not understand, I am Gil Rugh. It does not matter who you are, you answer. You are wrong! Obviously such teaching contradicts the Bible, and the Bible is the standard. If I cease to preach and teach according to the Bible, then I am wrong because God is always right, and His Word is settled forever in heaven.

7. Warnings Against False Teachers

The Apostle Paul gave some strong warnings in Romans 16: “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting” (vs. 17,18). Paul makes it very clear that we are to speak about other religious groups who teach differently. We are not to do so because we think we are right and they are wrong. It is because God’s Word is right, and it tells us that we are to be aware of and mark out those who teach differently.

You are to know that the Mormons teach contrary to the Word of God. You ought to know that they have doctrines of demons when they teach that Jesus Christ was Adam reincarnated and when they say that God is no more deity than I am, He is just further along the progression system. That is blasphemy! And some people want us to focus on the fact that they emphasize the family and have good television commercials! They look upon them as nice, moral people. But to do so is to lose sight of reality. We are supposed to mark those who are teaching contrary to the teachings of the Word of God and have nothing to do with them. We are to watch out for them because they deceive the unsuspecting. But some people prefer to put bags over their
heads; they do not want to know that there are disagreements.

The Word of God is still true. It still stands firm and settled. If I do not know the differences between groups, how am I going to be aware of the heretics and avoid them?

Why do some people get so upset and churn on the inside when they hear a false doctrine pointed out? People say to me, *Gil, why do you have to mention them by name?* Why does it bother people so much to be told that certain doctrines are in conflict with the Word of God? If I am telling you something that is not true, you ought to point it out to me biblically.

Another false doctrine is found in the mass of the Roman Catholic church. It is unbiblical because of Hebrews 10:14: “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.” It is unscriptural to talk about a repeated sacrifice of Christ. That is either biblical or it is not. Why should you churn on the inside if someone points it out to you? I am not anti-Catholic, but I am against those doctrines that are against the Word of God. The point is the same whether the disagreement is with Catholics, Protestants or Jews. Why should people be bothered when they are told that certain teachings conflict with the Word of God?

8. Hold Fast to the Word of God

Paul gives further instructions regarding these issues in 2 Thessalonians 2:15: “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.” Some people believe the traditions of their church, but those traditions may be in conflict with the Word of God. Paul is not saying we should believe those traditions. The traditions he is referring to are those taught by the apostles which we now have recorded as the New Testament. Those are the ones we are to hold fast, whether they were taught verbally or whether they were written by Paul in a letter. This letter which Paul wrote to the Thessalonians is a tradition passed on by him. It is the inspired Word of God. You do not need to hold fast to the traditions of a church. You need to hold fast to the teachings of the Word of God.

Notice Paul’s instructions in 2 Thessalonians 3:14: “And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame.” You are to be aware of those who are in conflict with the Word of God so you can avoid them. That means we must be educated from the Word of God. His Word is the standard.

Paul gives further instruction regarding the Word of God as the standard in 2 Timothy 3:16,17: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” As believers, we must be saturated with the Scriptures. Sometimes it is the responsibility of the Scriptures to teach, sometimes to reprove, sometimes to correct and sometimes to train in righteousness. But the Word is given by God so that it is the final and absolute standard and authority. In the midst of a changing world and a changing society, we have an unchanging Word of God. We do not have to wonder what is true.
9. Translation and Interpretation

Sometimes questions come up about the accuracy of the translation of the Scriptures. Recently I was in a discussion with some unbelievers who were raising this issue. They say you have to be careful because your translation is probably determining your position. But I do not know anyone who knows much about the Scriptures at all who is arguing that point. Not even unbelievers are arguing that our translations are inaccurate. I do not know anybody who knows anything about Greek or Hebrew who is going to argue that the King James Version, the New American Standard Bible, the Revised Standard Version or some of the basic translations we have are inaccurate. Such a charge is merely a smoke screen for the unknowing or uneducated to throw around.

Interpretation is another question that often comes up. Well, someone chirps, that is the interpretation of your church. That is another argument that does not hold any weight with anybody who really reads the Bible. Some people use that argument saying, You interpret it one way, and we interpret it another. That argument simply means their church tells them something different, but they have never read it for themselves.

The easiest way to remedy that is to carry a New Testament with you. When someone raises that argument, take it out and read a passage. Tell them you would like to see if the two of you can interpret it. I usually go to a passage like “All have sinned” (Rom. 3:23). Then I begin with a few questions. What would you say “all” means? That one is not too tough! What does “have sinned” mean? Most people even have a concept of sin. It is a failure to be what God says we should be. That really is not too difficult to interpret.

Then I like to move along to another verse: “For the wages [penalty] of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). Everybody knows what a penalty is. What is death? Some people have a problem with that, but it is not too hard to explain. Death means someone does not breathe anymore. That really is not too difficult, is it? Then you can go further and show the person what the Bible says about physical death, spiritual death and eternal death. That is not so difficult to do. Then you can show them that God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16). You can also show them that there is salvation in no other person than Jesus Christ because there is no other name given among men whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Interpretation is not the problem. In fact, it is a pretty simple matter. The problem is the unwillingness of the person to accept what it says. You would expect that God, as an intelligent being, would know how to communicate to mankind in an understandable way. What kind of god would it be who decided he would try to communicate with men, then after all was said and done, you could interpret what he said four hundred different ways? You would have to conclude that such a god did not do a very good job of communicating.

Some people try to keep others in ignorance by telling them that they cannot understand the Bible without a trained person interpreting it for them. Such an approach keeps others from checking
their interpretation. If I were to tell you that you should not read the Bible yourself because you
do not know how to interpret it, I would only tell you that to keep you from checking on my
interpretation. The Bible is not hard to interpret. It is either impossible or it is easy: Without
the ministry of the Spirit of God, it is impossible. With the Spirit of God, it is easy.

On one occasion I had a problem of interpretation with a theologian at one of the schools in our
city which I will not mention, but the school is named after John Wesley! This theologian
invited me to speak to his class. In the midst of the class he raised the issue of interpretation.
Well, I said, let’s look at the Bible and see if we can interpret something. It should not be too
difficult to interpret. And I went to, All have sinned.

How would you interpret that? I asked. Oh, probably thirty-five different ways, he responded.
In that situation there was no place to go, because the issue with him was not interpretation. The
real issue was his unwillingness to accept what it says. If someone is unwilling to accept what
the Word says, he can try to make it say anything he wants it to say. But the fact is that if you
are going to accept language at face value, then the Bible is not hard to understand.
Interpretation is not the issue with the Word of God.

God has given a standard that anyone who is a believer in Jesus Christ can understand and apply.
We are expected to measure everyone - Protestant, Catholic, Jew or any cult - in light of the
Word of God. Does what they say fit the Word of God? If not, they are wrong. That holds
true for me, and it holds true for this church. The same thing holds true for everyone else.

10. God’s Evaluation is Based on the Word of God

As Jesus continues the Sermon on the Mount, He declares that one’s attitude toward the Word of
God determines his evaluation by God. It is just that simple. “Whoever then annuls one of
the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom
of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of
heaven” (Matt. 5:19). Those who ignore the Word of God will be nobodies as far as God’s
kingdom is concerned. Those who are great and esteemed will receive that recognition because
they have been faithful to the Word of God.

Jesus continues in verse 20: “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that
of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus takes those
religious people among whom He is living and uses them as an example. He does the very thing
that causes the blood of many people to boil. Jesus refers to the scribes and Pharisees, the most
zealous and religious people of their day. He uses them as an example and says that if you do
not have righteousness better than theirs, you will never see the kingdom of heaven. What a
blow! That would be like me standing up and saying, If you do not have righteousness better
than the average Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian or whatever, you are going to hell.
That is exactly what Jesus does. And it comes across just that offensively.

I can almost hear the response to Jesus’ words: These are the most righteous people I can think
of. Are you telling me that if I do not do better than them, I am going to hell? That is exactly
what Jesus is telling them. Their righteousness was of their own making. They were obeying their system. They had the commandments that had been set down, and they were doing their best to obey them. Christ told them, *That is not good enough!* We must understand that for ourselves.

There are many sincere Protestant, Catholic and Jewish people who need to understand and realize that all of the zeal, enthusiasm and commitment they have will not get them to heaven. They must have a better righteousness than that.

**We must be careful that we do not start playing the game.** *We do not want to be offensive or unkind; we do not want to be thought to be uncouth.* So we want to be careful when we speak about others. But the most tragic thing I could do would be to fail to make clear what the issues really are. Jesus said, *But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in*” (Matt. 23:13). The issue in this passage is that false religion, false leaders and false teachers keep people from salvation. People are trusting their baptism or their church to get them to heaven. Religious leaders tell people that trusting them or their church or their baptism is enough and this keeps people from heaven.

Jesus continues in verse 15, *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte [convert].”* They are very zealous people. They go wherever they can to win converts. They maintain high standards and morals. But notice what Jesus says about them: *“And when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves”* (v. 15). That is a strong statement! He was on his way to hell before, but now he is twice as much on his way to hell.

**Why is that true?** Did you ever try to witness to someone in a cult or someone totally committed to a false religious system? Wouldn’t you rather be witnessing to someone without any exposure to religion at all? In a false system, they are so locked in and committed to the false teaching that they are doubly hard to reach. They are twice as much the children of hell. Shouldn’t we point out false teachers? Jesus points out the scribes and Pharisees. But should we be careful not to offend anyone? Should I say nothing about them lest people think I am unkind?

The Word of God is the standard. This is not a game! Eternity is the issue. These individuals are either teaching the truth or they are not. If they are not, they ought to be exposed.

**Some think it is all right to just let them go.** *It is all right. At least they are good, moral, family people.* Yes, and in one hundred million years, they will be in hell together. God’s Word is the standard. They must know the truth.

**11. The Basis of Justification**

Paul wrote to the Galatian believers about justification. He said, *“nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we*
have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal. 2:16). Justification comes from faith in Christ. “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me” (v. 20). That is the issue at stake. You must have a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of a religious leader. You must have the righteousness of Christ Himself.

You cannot get this righteousness by attending church or by being baptized. You cannot get this righteousness by anything you can do. You must have a perfect righteousness that can only come from God by believing in His Son, Jesus Christ. That is why He came to earth and died. That is the message we have to proclaim. There is salvation in no other, for there is no other name given among men whereby we must be saved. Anyone teaching anything else is a hypocrite and a liar and on his way to hell. God’s Word stands forever, it is settled in heaven.

Those who fail to speak according to the Scriptures do so because they have no light. But here we are two thousand years after the Scriptures have been given with full assurance that what God says is true. His Word has not changed one bit. He stands behind His Word.

You can be fully assured that if you will believe in Jesus Christ personally as the One who loves you and died for you, God will cleanse you from your sins, bring you into a personal relationship with Himself and prepare you for His presence in heaven. Theology may have changed a lot over the years, but God has not changed at all. Man may have taught different things over the years, but God has always been teaching the same thing. How wonderful to have that security and assurance. That is why we believers ought to be bold everywhere we go no matter who we confront. We have the authoritative Word of God to share. Should we be intimidated by men’s ideas and philosophies? Should we think we do not know as much as they? It does not really matter whether we know as much or not. As long as we know what God has said, that is all the world needs to know regarding preparation for life in eternity.