

**His Kingdom
His Law &
His Righteousness**



TITLE & AUTHOR

His Kingdom, His Law & His Righteousness
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Introduction

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” Joshua 1:8

Yeshua is the Hebrew name for the Lord. It means “*Yahweh [the Lord] is Salvation.*”¹ The English spelling of *Yeshua* is “Joshua.” However, when translated from Hebrew into the Greek language, the name *Yeshua* becomes *Iēsous*. The English spelling for *Iēsous* is “Jesus.” Basically, what this means is *Joshua* and *Jesus* are the same name. One is translated from Hebrew into English, the other from Greek into English. The character of Joshua is an Old Testament type and shadow representing Jesus in the New Testament. Through the Book of Joshua, God intends that we should receive revelation, not of a human leader, but revelation of the Lord Jesus Himself. While Joshua was God’s provision to lead His people into physical salvation – a deliverance, a setting free² - from Egypt into the promised land, Jesus was God’s ultimate provision for spiritual salvation – a deliverance, a setting free - from the kingdom of this world into the kingdom of God.

¹ Strong’s # 3444

² (Greek) *soteria*, Strong’s # 4991

Likewise, the passage in Joshua regarding “The Book of the Law” is an Old Testament type and shadow which relates to the New Testament passage in the Gospels - the “Sermon on the Mount”, and the New Covenant “Law of Christ” - regarding the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness.

The Law of God

It is important to note: **In the New Covenant, the law of God is “the law of Christ”³ – specifically, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”.**⁴ When Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in the gospels of Matthew⁵ and Luke⁶, He was speaking to the Jews who were still under the Old Covenant. He was “the Prophet”⁷ announcing a New Covenant⁸ to the Jews. I believe it accurate to understand Jesus’ presentation of the law of God - His law, “the Law of Christ” - in the synoptic gospels, as a **“bridge” between the Old Covenant Law of Moses and the New Covenant “Law of Christ”**. And as the writer to the Hebrews teaches, the Old Law “according to the letter” *became obsolete*⁹ upon Christ’s resurrection and out-pouring of the Spirit, to be

³ 1 Corinthians 9:21 & Galatians 6:2

⁴ Romans 8:2

⁵ “The Sermon on the Mount”, Matthew 5-7

⁶ “The Sermon on the Plain”, Luke 6:17–49.

⁷ Deuteronomy 18:15

⁸ Which had also been prophesied by Jeremiah (31:31-33) and Ezekiel (36:26-27).

⁹ Hebrews 8:12

replaced with the “law of Christ” “according to the Spirit”¹⁰ – specifically, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”. In other words, the law written in the Sermon on the Mount as well as all other commandments in the New Testament - are to be observed, but not “according to the letter” – that is, by keeping “the works of the law” through self-effort, but rather **“according to the Spirit” – through the power of the indwelling Spirit of Christ.**

I have written extensively on these things in the following articles: [“What is the New Covenant All About?”](#), [“The Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus”](#), [“The Realm of Christ”](#), as well as [“A New & Living Way”](#).

“Seeking First”

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” Joshua 1:8

“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” Matthew 6:33

These two passages are essentially saying the same thing: **To Seek first the Kingdom of God and His**

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 3:6

Righteousness is to *speak* about God's laws, *meditate* on them, and *observe* them. When we do this, we will experience the blessings of the kingdom life as the apostle Paul defines it: "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit". (Romans 14:17)



“The Book of the Law”

“The Book of the Law” is that which is found in the Book of Deuteronomy. The word *Deuteronomy* comes from two Greek words, *deutero*, meaning “second”, and *nomos*, meaning “law”: the “second law”, that is, *a copy of the law, a repetition of the law*, namely to the second generation of the Hebrews, given upon their entrance into the promised land.¹¹

What was that “law”? In the case of the Old Covenant, it was basically the contents of the Book of Deuteronomy, but particularly what we call the “Ten Commandments”.¹² However, the essence of that law is

¹¹ For the Jew, the Book of the Law would be understood as the Torah, the Pentateuch, the five books attributed to Moses (Genesis – Deuteronomy). These are summarized in “the second giving of the law” in Deuteronomy.

¹² Deuteronomy 5:1-22 (viz. 6 – 21)

given in Deuteronomy 10:12: “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but **to fear the Lord** your God, **to walk in all His ways** and **to love Him, to serve the Lord** your God **with all your heart** and with **all your soul....”**

There are three things we need to clearly understand about God and Law. Firstly, we need to see God’s original *intention* for giving His Law. In a sense, that is the goal of this entire message. But I’ll start here by pointing out that, while the Mosaic Law eventually became a negative source of national pride¹³ and legalism for the Jews, that was not the spirit with which they originally received God’s law. For God, and originally for the Hebrews, the law was not merely a set of rules and regulations. The difference is this: A legalistic understanding of “law” carries with it the sense of performance and punishment. However, the Israelites were instructed in this way: “And these words which I command you today shall be **in your heart**. You shall teach them diligently **to your children**, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)¹⁴ Likewise, there was a “parental” aspect associated with God giving the Law¹⁵: Its essential

¹³ Cf. Romans 1:17-24; Ephesians 2:14-17; Philippians 3:2-6

¹⁴ These verses relate to the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel.”, Deuteronomy 6:4-5

¹⁵ Gesenius’ Lexicon defines torah instruction “as that of parents.” This idea, along with others, is discussed in a very worthwhile article published by *Bridges for Peace* entitled “For the Love of Torah” which can be accessed and downloaded at: <http://www.bridgesforpeace.com/teaching-letter/article/for-the-love-of-torah/#>

dynamics were not performance and punishment; but rather *nurturing* and *blessing*. As our Heavenly Father, it is not His intention to “provoke His children to wrath” with His law, “but (to) bring (us) up¹⁶ in nurture¹⁷ and admonition of the Lord.”¹⁸

The Hebrew word *torah*, most often translated “law”, essentially means “teaching” or “instruction”. The root word for the noun, *torah*, is the verb form, *yarah*, which means “to point out” or “to show.” Thus, **God’s *torah* points the way to life¹⁹ – the abundance of life that Jesus came to give.** (Cf. John 10:10) For Christians, the New Testament is also God’s “instruction” that “points the way” to “newness of life”. (Romans 6:4)

The second thing we need to see clearly is that, although we have been considering here Old Testament or Old Covenant law, it would be wrong to think that there is no law in the New Testament or New Covenant. God always had law; and God always will have law. God’s kingdom always has and always will operate according to His law. We are going to see that **the Righteousness of God is fundamentally His Kingdom Law.** God has never been without His righteousness, and never will be without His

¹⁶ Ephesians 6:4

¹⁷ (Greek): *paideia*: education and training, Strong’s # 3809

¹⁸ (Greek): *nouthesia*: a bringing to mind or remembrance

¹⁹ Psalm 119:50 & 93

righteousness. Bear in mind that we have been instructed to “seek His righteousness”. (Matthew 6:33)

All the people in the Old Testament lived under God’s law – from Adam and Eve to Moses and Joshua, from the Judges and the Prophets, through all the kings in the Old Testament. And while it is true that we who are of the New Testament or New Covenant may not be under the Mosaic Law, it does not mean that we are not under the Law of God. Paul, the apostle of the gospel of grace, wrote: “To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law (i.e. the Mosaic Law), as under the Law though not being myself under the Law (i.e. the Mosaic Law), so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though **not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ...**” (1 Corinthians 9:20-21) The apostle of grace saw himself as under the Law of God, in the New Covenant – specifically, “the Law of Christ”. Paul, as well as all the other apostles, understood the clear connection between God, His Christ, His Kingdom, and His Righteousness. Their understanding was based on Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of

heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:17-20

The Law & The Land are Connected

The third thing we need to see clearly is that **the Book of the Law was given to Israel for when they would live in the land**. Moses made that point clear to Israel. He repeatedly said: “Surely, I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to them **in the land** which you go to possess. (Deuteronomy 4:5) And “ ... the Lord commanded me ... to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might observe them **in the land** which you cross over to possess.” (Deuteronomy 4:14) Again, “Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them **in the land** which you are crossing over to possess.” (Deuteronomy 6:1) And again, “These *are* the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe **in the land** which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live **on the earth**.” (Deuteronomy 12:1)

The land and the law are connected. The land is an Old Testament type and shadow representing the Kingdom of God. **God’s kingdom operates according to His law.** By giving them the Book of the Law as they

were about to enter the land, God was communicating to His people that **life in the Kingdom operates according to His Law.**

“Seek First the Kingdom of God”

I have said that the land was an Old Testament type and shadow representing the Kingdom of God. For Israel, the “law of the land” would be “the Book of the Law”. Life in the land would be the kingdom lifestyle.

Jesus referred to the Kingdom of God in this way: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10) Based on this, **we can essentially define the Kingdom of God as the rule of God in the midst of His people.** In the Old Covenant, the law of God governed the external lives of His people. In the New Covenant, it governs their internal lives as well. In the New Covenant, His rule is not externally imposed, but rather, **internally – by the Spirit, from within people’s hearts.** This was prophesied through Jeremiah: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: **I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts;** and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” (Jeremiah 31:31-33) ²⁰ The apostle Paul confirms that this is, in fact, the case with those who have

²⁰ Also, Hebrews 8:7-13. Cf. Ezekiel 36:26-27.

entered into the New Covenant when he writes: "... clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but **on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.**"

(2 Corinthians 3:3)

God's intention was that the Israelites should have a new and different life in the promised land from the life they had in Egypt. He led them into and through the Jordan River, which was an Old Testament type and shadow representing baptism into Christ Jesus. And, if they would then live according to the Book of the Law, they would experience a type of **"newness of life"** in the promised land that would be altogether different from the life of bondage they experienced in Egypt.

In the same way, God intends that those who have become His people through baptism into Christ Jesus would walk in a **"newness of life"**. I take this phrase from a passage in Paul's writings: "... as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death. Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in **newness of life.**" (Romans 6:3-4) This baptism into Christ Jesus - that is, our identification with His death, burial and resurrection - is the New Covenant reality of what was represented in the crossing of the Jordan River. What follows is **"newness of life"** in Christ Jesus - **living according to the Law of Christ**, namely, the kingdom

lifestyle - experiencing “**righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit**”.²¹

The Sermon on the Mount

In their epistles, the apostles describe what it means to “walk in newness of life”: It means to live according to “the law of Christ” - to live the kingdom lifestyle, “seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”. If you read the epistles of James, Peter, John, and Paul with a “wide lens” so to speak, you will see that their exhortations to the Church on how to live out the Christian life are all based upon Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.²² It was through the Sermon on the Mount in which the King of the Kingdom laid out the law of the kingdom with a fair measure of detail in Matthew 5 – 7. Thirty-four verses of this sermon in Matthew’s gospel are also found as a sermon in Luke’s gospel.²³ The other parts of this sermon in Mathew’s gospel are also found in other places in Luke’s gospel.²⁴ Obviously, it would require many articles to fully exegete the Sermon on the Mount. But here I’ll offer just a very brief overview:

²¹ Romans 14:17

²² Examples from Paul’s epistles: Cf. Ephesians 4:17-24) Ephesians 4:25-6:9 and Colossians 3:12-25

²³ Luke 6:17-49

²⁴ Luke 11:2-4, 12:22-34

As an introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew writes: “And **seeing the multitudes**, He went up on a mountain, and when he was seated, His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them....” (Matthew 5:1-2) It was when Jesus saw **the multitudes** that He went up on the mountain and began teaching His disciples. Why were **multitudes** following Jesus? The previous chapter in Matthew’s gospel tells us that Jesus had initiated a movement: He traveled about teaching and preaching the good news that change was coming - a new order of things – something called “**the Kingdom of God**”.²⁵ Matthew wrote that “His fame went throughout all the region”, and that “great **multitudes** followed Him”.²⁶

“And seeing the multitudes, He went up *on a mountain*....” What is the spiritual significance of **the mountain**? On **the mountain**, God gave the law which was to govern life in the kingdom for Israel under the Old Covenant.²⁷ That is exactly what Jesus is doing here in the Sermon on the Mount: He is giving the law which is to rule life in Kingdom of God for the Church under the New Covenant.

We do not have to wait for eternity to see this Kingdom. Jesus said, “The Kingdom of Heaven is in your

²⁵ Matthew’s term “kingdom of heaven” is synonymous with the term, “kingdom of God”.

²⁶ Cf. Matthew 4:17-25

²⁷ Exodus 19

midst.”²⁸ He said, if you are “born of the Spirit”, you can “see” and “enter into” this Kingdom now.²⁹ **The Kingdom is every place where people submit their hearts and lives to the rule of God** - “on earth as it is in heaven”.³⁰ The Church of Jesus Christ is *in the world* but **of the Kingdom of Heaven.**

In the passage commonly called the “Beatitudes”³¹, Jesus is revealing the **Person** of the King, the **nature** of His Kingdom, and the **character** of those who live the kingdom lifestyle and prove to be “salt and light” on the earth.

Following the Beatitudes, Jesus then goes on to detail much of the **law** of the Kingdom by laying out various *bylaws* regarding how life is to be lived in the Kingdom of God.³² For example, 5 times in Matthew 5 (calling to mind the 5 books of the Mosaic Law) Jesus says: “You have heard it said ... but I say to you...” In so doing He confirms the law of God that had been given on the tablets of stone but **extends the law to be written on human hearts.**³³ This is what the apostle Paul referred to as “**the law of Christ**”³⁴ - **the law which rules life in the Kingdom of God.**

²⁸ Matthew 3:2, 4:17, 10:7, 12:28.

²⁹ John 3:3-5

³⁰ Matthew 6:10

³¹ Matthew 5:3-12

³² Matthew 5:13-7:29

³³ Jeremiah 31:31-33 (Also Hebrews 8:7-13); 2 Corinthians 3:3

³⁴ I Corinthians 9:21, Galatians 6:2

At the end of his gospel, Matthew records Jesus commissioning His disciples to make more disciples by **teaching** them to observe all that He commanded.³⁵

Then, in The Acts of the Apostles, it tells us that, after the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Day of Pentecost, those in the early church were “continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ **teaching**”.³⁶ That which the disciples (who had become apostles) were **teaching** the people in the early church was taken from this very body of material - **the Sermon on the Mount**. In fact, the Sermon on the Mount was used as a **catechism** in the early church. This material is what was taught to the catechumens *before* becoming members of the church.³⁷ This material is the basis of that which gave the early church such a provocative witness and winsome lifestyle. So, **that** is what Jesus taught His disciples; and **that** is what the apostles taught the early church.

The Sermon on the Mount is powerfully radical if understood and taken seriously.³⁸ In this context of presenting this view of the Sermon on the Mount, I must make an effort to be clear - and faithful to the

³⁵ Matthew 28:18-20

³⁶ Acts 2:42

³⁷ Joachim Jermias: *The Sermon On The Mount*: Fortress Press: 1963

³⁸ The Anabaptist movement is an example from church history of Christians who take the Sermon on the Mount as normative for Christian discipleship.

gospel – by saying that in accord with Scripture, we must understand that “... a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” (Galatians 2:16)

Therefore, we should not look at the Sermon on the Mount as “the letter of the law”, but rather “according to the Spirit”. To be specific: “... the righteous requirement of **the law might be fulfilled in us** who do not walk according to the flesh but **according to the Spirit**” (Romans 8:4) – according to “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”. (Romans 8:2) The key to the mystery of the Christian life is: “Christ in you, the hope of glory”. (Colossians 1:27)³⁹

Bert Friesen of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada writes: *“Those who accept the authority of the Bible and who seek to be followers of Jesus must confront the question of its (The Sermon on the Mount) application to the Christian life. Jesus makes radical demands but also provides the means to meet those demands. The effort to do Jesus’ demands is both part of the saved state and the process of salvation. Grace and forgiveness are part of the message of the Sermon. Hope sustains both the individual and the community of believers to continue the effort, because hope assures that one day the kingdom of God will be fully realized The Kingdom, in this view, is both an ideal as well as a method by which the*

³⁹ Again, I have written extensively on these things in: [“What is the New Covenant All About?”](#), [“The Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus”](#), [“The Realm of Christ”](#), as well as [“A New & Living Way”](#).

ideal can be realized through Christ and his Spirit. It is now an imminent reality and will become fully real in the age to come when all will submit to the rule of Christ. ⁴⁰

Friesen then quotes someone named H.H. Charles:
*“There is, then, in the Sermon on the Mount both grace and duty. To emphasize the latter without regard to the former as the presupposition of the whole of the Christian life is to substitute a legalistic humanism for the gospel. . . . Salvation comes to us as a gift, not as a reward. But the grace that saves also summons us to the way of discipleship. . . . It will always be imperfect, but it can and must be genuine and serious.”*⁴¹ The same view is presented by Joachim Jeremias in his lecture on the Sermon on the Mount.⁴²

⁴⁰ *Approaches to the Interpretation and Application of the Sermon on the Mount*, Bert Friesen, *Direction Journal*, 1981.

⁴¹ H. H. Charles, “Sermon on the Mount,” *The Gospel of Matthew. Adult Bible Study Guide*, by LaVernae J. Dick, ed. Laurence Martin (Scottsdale: Congregational Literature Division of the Mennonite Publishing House, 1980), December 1980, January, February 1981, pp. 80-81.

⁴² Joachim Jeremias, *The Sermon On The Mount. The Ethel M. Wood Lecture* delivered before the University of London on 7 March 1961. London: The Athlone Press, 1961. ISBN: 0485143127

“Seek first ... His righteousness”

Righteousness characterizes the Kingdom of God. Both a psalmist and the writer of the Book of Hebrews state: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of **righteousness** is the scepter of Your kingdom.”⁴³ A scepter is a ruling staff. So, in essence, the writers are saying: “*The ruling staff of Your kingdom is righteousness.*” In other words, **God rules His kingdom with righteousness.**

What exactly is “righteousness”? Indeed, the concept of “righteousness” has many extended implications and applications. “Righteousness” is something which originates in God, and I think the further we extend the implications and applications, the more likely we are to adopt a merely human understanding and interpretation of “righteousness”. This is what went wrong with “the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees”.⁴⁴ So, we are after the root meaning – the essence - of “righteousness”. The Hebrew word in the psalm and the Greek word in the epistle are translated exactly the same: The Hebrew word translated “righteousness” is *mishor*⁴⁵, meaning straight, level or true. The Greek word translated “righteousness” is *euthutes*⁴⁶, meaning straight, level or true. The words refer to something that **exists**, and only by implication,

⁴³ Psalm 45:6 & Hebrews 1:8

⁴⁴ Matthew 5:20

⁴⁵ Strong’s # H4334

⁴⁶ Strong’s # G2118

something that is *done*. In other words, “righteousness” is that which is straight, level, and true *by its very nature*. By implication, righteous deeds naturally flow from that which is righteous *by nature*. Only God – no, not one human being⁴⁷ - is righteous *by nature*. The apostle Paul informs us that, like God Himself, “the law is holy, righteous and good”. (Romans 7:12) **The law of God reveals the nature of God.** The law of God has more to do with who God is *by His very nature*, rather than a set of rules and regulations to govern human behavior.

It is true that, by implication, righteousness also has to do with deeds or behavior. But the more I have learned about this concept of righteousness in the Scriptures, the more I have become convinced that, from God’s perspective, it is essentially *a legal category*. **The law of God is righteous. Righteousness is the law of God.** And in giving humanity His law, I believe God is more concerned with **revealing Himself and His Kingdom** to humanity than imposing rules and regulations to govern the behavior of humanity.

I’d like to give you an example of what I mean by that – an example of what I have come to understand and experience from the word of God and Spirit of God about “the righteousness of God” which Paul writes about in his epistle:

⁴⁷ Cf. Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19

“... the righteousness of God (which) has been revealed independently and altogether apart from (keeping) the (Mosaic) Law, although actually it is attested by the Law and the Prophets, namely, the righteousness of (from) God which comes by believing with personal trust and confident reliance on Jesus Christ (the Messiah). [And it is meant] for all who believe.”⁴⁸ Romans 3:21-22 (*Amplified Bible*) **This is a righteousness which comes from the nature of God, not from my deeds or behavior.**

Here is the example:

The apostle John wrote: “If we [freely] admit that we have sinned *and* confess our sins, He is faithful and just (**true to His own nature** and promises) and will forgive our sins [dismiss our lawlessness] and [continuously] cleanse us from all unrighteousness [everything not in conformity to His will in purpose, thought, and action].” 1 John 1:9 (*Amplified Bible*)

I have come to learn and to be thoroughly convinced that when John says that God is “faithful and just”, or as other translations say, “faithful and righteous”,⁴⁹ he means, not that God is faithful to me – faithful to forgive me; but rather **faithful to Jesus Christ** – faithful to honor Christ’s atoning blood sacrifice on the cross. And the reason why God is so faithful in this way is **because of His own righteousness** – because of the His own law regarding atonement. It is in accordance with

⁴⁸ Romans 3:21-22 (*Amplified Bible*)

⁴⁹ *New American Standard Bible, Holman Christian Standard Bible*, (Greek): *dikaios* Strong’s # G1342.

His *nature* to be so equitable; but it is also *a legal issue* for Him, as it were – **He faithfully honors**, not my sorrow, not my prayer, not my repentance, but **His own law**.

Now, I stated that in giving humanity His law, God is more concerned with revealing Himself and His Kingdom to humanity than imposing rules and regulations to govern the behavior of humanity. But I am obligated to add that, because of our fallenness, *we do need to have our behavior governed*. In fact, the Scriptures tell us that because of the fallenness of humanity, the conscience is weak and defiled⁵⁰ - seared,⁵¹ so we need the law of God to show us what is right and what is wrong – what is the image of God in which we were created, and what it is that we have become through our Fall. This is exactly what the apostle Paul wants to communicate when he makes statements like these:

- “through the law comes the knowledge of sin”.⁵²
- “... no person will be justified (made righteous...) in His sight by observing the works prescribed by the Law. For [the real function of] the Law is to make men recognize and be conscious of sin [not mere perception, but an acquaintance with sin which works toward repentance, faith, and holy character].... ”⁵³

⁵⁰ 1 Corinthians 8:7; Titus 1:15

⁵¹ 1 Timothy 4:2

⁵² Romans 3:20 NKJV

⁵³ Romans 3:20 (*Amplified Bible*)

- “... if it had not been for the Law, I should not have recognized sin or have known its meaning.... [would have had no consciousness of sin or sense of guilt]....”⁵⁴
- “But sin, finding opportunity in the commandment [to express itself], got a hold on me and aroused and stimulated all kinds of forbidden desires For without the Law sin is dead [the sense of it is inactive and a lifeless thing].⁵⁵
- “Once I was alive, but quite apart from and unconscious of the Law. But when the commandment came, sin lived again, and I died (was sentenced by the Law to death).”⁵⁶
- “And the very legal ordinance which was designed and intended to bring life actually proved [to mean to me] death.”⁵⁷
- “For sin, seizing the opportunity and getting a hold on me [by taking its incentive] from the commandment, beguiled and entrapped and cheated me, and using it [as a weapon], killed me.”⁵⁸
- “The Law therefore is holy, and [each] commandment is holy and righteous and good.”⁵⁹
- “It was sin, working death in me by using this good thing [as a weapon], in order that through the commandment sin might be shown up clearly to be sin, that the extreme malignity and immeasurable sinfulness of sin might plainly appear.”⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Romans 7:7 (*Amplified Bible*)

⁵⁵ Romans 7:8 (*Amplified Bible*)

⁵⁶ Romans 7:9 (*Amplified Bible*)

⁵⁷ Romans 7:10 (*Amplified Bible*)

⁵⁸ Romans 7:11 (*Amplified Bible*)

⁵⁹ Romans 7:12 (*Amplified Bible*)

⁶⁰ Romans 7:13 (*Amplified Bible*)

Have you ever wondered why God put the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden and told Adam and Eve not to eat of it, knowing that they would, and after they did, He would say, “Now they know good and evil.”? This is a major stumbling block for the non-believer. Have you ever wondered why God did that? **Because “through the law comes the knowledge of sin”; and humanity needed to know what Satan had refused to acknowledge - that God is God, and we are not.**

Like its father Satan, fallen humanity does not want to acknowledge the law of God and sin. This innate spirit of rebellion is captured in a short phrase in Psalm 2:3 **“Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.”** George Horne comments on this verse: *“We may see the ground of opposition; namely, the unwillingness of rebellious nature to submit to the obligations of Divine laws, which cross the interests, and lay a restraint on the desires of men. Corrupt affections are the most inveterate enemies of Christ, and their language is, “We will not have this man to reign over us.” (Luke 19:14) Doctrines would be readily believed, if they involved in them no precepts; and the Church may be tolerated in the world, if she will only give up her discipline.”*⁶¹

Now, going back to the psalm and the passage in the Letter to the Hebrews: It also says that **Jesus “loved**

⁶¹ Bishop George Horne: *Commentary on the Psalms* (1771)

righteousness".⁶² In the gospels, we see Jesus referring to "righteousness" 22 times. In the Sermon on the Mount alone, Jesus mentions "righteousness" 4 times, 3 times in connection with the Kingdom of Heaven⁶³, saying we should "**hunger and thirst for righteousness**" and we should "**seek first God's kingdom and righteousness**". Jesus loved *righteousness*. Jesus loved *God's nature*. Jesus loved *God's Law*. Solomon, in his wisdom, said: "The commandment is a lamp, and the law a light."⁶⁴ David often spoke of *righteousness*, because David also loved *God's law*. In his longest psalm, which is in praise of *the law of God*, David exclaims three times, "Oh, how I love Your law!"⁶⁵

As I said, righteousness **characterizes** the Kingdom of God. "The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Romans 14:17) It is not even accurate to say that righteousness is a pre-requisite for blessings in the Kingdom, as if one does that which is righteous, only then will blessings come your way. It is more than a pre-requisite. With the Holy Spirit being the source of kingdom life, **righteousness is like the well-spring** through which that life flows. Isaiah captures the reality when he says: "The **work of righteousness** will be peace, and **the effect of righteousness** will be quietness and assurance forever." (Isaiah 32:17) In

⁶² Psalm 45:7 & Hebrews 1:9

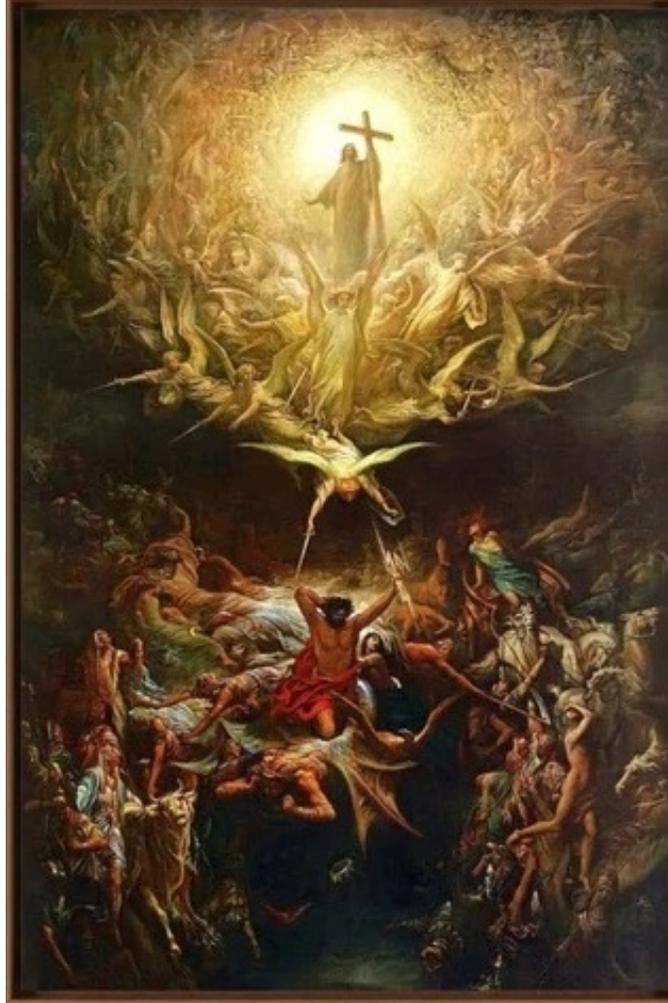
⁶³ Matthew 5:5, 10, 20; 6:33

⁶⁴ Proverbs 6:23 (cf. Psalm 119:105)

⁶⁵ Psalm 119:97, 113, 163

fact Isaiah's prophecy of the Kingdom of God paints a picture of the promises promised for **the land** – albeit a land in which dwell the Canaanites - albeit a dark and hostile world in which the Church finds itself.⁶⁶ Isaiah's prophecy of a Reign of Righteousness paints a picture of **the Kingdom lifestyle** detailed in the Lord's Sermon on the Mount and the epistles of the apostles – as a result of our “Seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” – “all these things shall be added”:
“Behold, a king will reign in righteousness ... until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is counted as a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.”
Isaiah 32:1, 15-18

⁶⁶ Cf. Isaiah 32:19



His Kingdom & His Righteousness

Many who are sincerely motivated to work for the betterment of the human condition and alleviate human suffering cite Jesus' words, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness...", saying that the kingdom of God is a kingdom in which exists justice, equal opportunity, human rights, freedom from poverty, etc.

But, what *on this earth* – not in the “new heavens and new earth”⁶⁷ - but what *on this earth* is this kingdom? This is what Jesus said about His kingdom:

²⁰ “Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; ²¹ nor will they say, [a] ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is [b] within you.” ²² Then He said to the disciples, “The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see *it*. ²³ And they will say to you, [c] ‘Look here!’ or ‘Look there!’ Do not go after *them* or follow *them*. ²⁴ For as the lightning that flashes out of one *part* under heaven shines to the other *part* under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day.” Luke 17:20-24

Basically, Jesus said to the Pharisees that His kingdom is invisible, at least on this present earth – “no signs to be observed”. It is not limited to a physical location – “not here, and not there”. Yet He also indicated to the Pharisees the kingdom is here and visible because He was there and visible. Unfortunately, they *did not* recognize Him as the Christ of the kingdom. But He also said to His disciples, who *did* recognize Him as the Christ of the kingdom, that when the time came that He was no longer on the earth, they again wouldn’t be able to visibly see the kingdom – implying they would have to look “within” their hearts. Interestingly, Greek scholars are divided down the middle with regards to

⁶⁷ Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13

whether the statement should be translated “*The kingdom of God is in your midst.*”⁶⁸ Or “*The kingdom of God is within you.*”⁶⁹ However, this particular passage should be understood (taking scripture as a whole) that *both* aspects are true of the kingdom of God.

Jesus said the kingdom had come because He was in their midst, yet, except for the Romans, everyone else lived in a world full of injustice and human suffering. If “righteousness” is a just and moral human society, it was not seen on the earth even when Christ Jesus was here. *In this age*, He said that “His kingdom is not of this world”, “not from here”, “not of this realm”⁷⁰ - **it is a spiritual kingdom existing in the hearts of His true disciples** – not necessarily in all of human society throughout this present earth. We will see that in the “new heaven and new earth”.⁷¹

But again, what does the Lord mean by “His righteousness”? The Biblical understanding of “righteousness” is rooted in terms of covenants, that is, *what God does* – not what humans do - in fulfillment of the terms of the covenant that He establishes with His people.⁷² This is summed up in the declaration: “The Lord our righteousness.”⁷³ The heart of New Testament

⁶⁸ F.B. Meyer and Robert Trench, *New American Standard Version*

⁶⁹ F.F. Bruce and A.T. Robertson, *New International Version*

⁷⁰ John 18:36

⁷¹ Isaiah 65:17, 66:22; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1-5, 22:1-5

⁷² 2 Chronicles 12:6; Psalm 7:9; Jeremiah 9:24; Daniel 9:14

⁷³ Jeremiah 23:6

teaching about righteousness is the New Covenant concept of “the righteousness of **God**”.⁷⁴ These are the things Paul taught: “The righteousness of **God** is the righteousness which comes through faith in Jesus Christ.”⁷⁵ “Faith is credited as righteousness.”⁷⁶ And, “the righteous shall live by faith.”⁷⁷

The “righteousness of **God**” – “the righteousness that comes from **God**”⁷⁸ is **being in right-relationship with God through faith in the Jesus Christ** – that is, faith in His Incarnation and Atonement on the Cross.⁷⁹ A “righteousness” that doesn’t acknowledge sin, and the need for Atonement of Sin is not “His righteousness”.⁸⁰ **We cannot have peace with God without coming into**

⁷⁴ Matthew 6:33; Acts 17:31; Romans 1:17; Ephesians 4:24; James 1:20

⁷⁵ Romans 3:22

⁷⁶ Romans 4:4; James 2:23

⁷⁷ Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11

⁷⁸ Romans 1:17; 3:22; Philippians 3:9

⁷⁹ 1 Peter 2:24

⁸⁰ Such is the case with of the first and second centuries, as well as its re-emergence throughout the centuries, even today in the New Age movement. Because the early Gnostics viewed the material realm as being evil, some of their teachings asserted that sin is not a moral failing but a problem arising from the mixing of the spiritual and material realms. (*The Gospel of Mary*) It may be that those who left the Johannine community valued the spiritual realm and despised the material realm in such a way that it led them to lay all their emphasis on the heavenly Christ rather than the human Jesus. A misguided emphasis on the spiritual, led them to believe that salvation was being set free from the evil material realm, ultimate redemption would do away with the material realm, it therefore didn’t really matter how they behaved in this material realm, and that whatever they did in their bodies could not be considered sinful. A modern-day example of a sect that holds to and practices this teaching is the *New Apostolic Church*. Indeed, in a Gnostic document it is stated that “we have not sinned”. (*Second Treatise of the Great Seth*) In his epistle, John addressed exactly this perspective: I John 1:8-10

right-relationship with God through faith in Christ.⁸¹

In the same way, neither can there be the “shalom” of world peace with a just and moral society without coming into right-relationship with God through faith in Christ, the Prince of Peace⁸². Isaiah prophesied:

¹⁵ *“Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is counted as a forest. ¹⁶ Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. ¹⁷ The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. ¹⁸ My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.”* Isaiah 32:15-18

I do believe that in “the new heavens and new earth” “righteousness will dwell” in the sense of a just and moral society. But as the apostle Peter explains, that will be *after* “the heavens pass away, being destroyed by burning”, and *after* “the elements are destroyed by melting with intense heat”, and *after* “the earth and its works are burned up” – in other words **not during this age and not on this present earth.**⁸³

⁸¹ Romans 5:1

⁸² Isaiah 9:6

⁸³ 2 Peter 3:10-13. I am aware of the controversy regarding the alternate translation of the end of v. 10: “... and its works will be discovered” instead of “... and its works will be burned up.” Since only two out of many manuscripts suggest this reading, and since this reading is quite inconsistent and therefore very problematic to the meaning of the passage, like the majority of Greek scholars, I do not see the necessity for over-spiritualizing the passage to mean that there will be a “renewed” earth instead of a literal “new” earth.

People may be sincerely motivated to work towards a just and moral human society, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that motivation, as long as we realize that is not the kingdom of God. If we say that is the kingdom of God, we are not only deceiving ourselves, but also the others – giving them “a different gospel”⁸⁴, leading them to believe they actually have the kingdom and the righteousness. That is not only spiritually dangerous, but also blasphemous in that **it denies Christ’s atonement for sin through the death of His human body on the Cross**. I use the word “denies” in that it would render this mystery redundant, and that denial is what the apostle John identified as **the spirit of error and the spirit of the anti-Christ**.⁸⁵

⁹“The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, ¹⁰and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. ¹¹And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie.”

2 Thessalonians 2:9-11

There are two reasons why people “believe the lie”:

1) “The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel

⁸⁴ Galatians 1:6

⁸⁵ 1 John 4

of the glory of Christ.”⁸⁶ And he is able to do so because
...

2) They love something more than the Truth, and that is **pride in their own righteousness**. This is exactly what caused most of Israel to reject Jesus as the Messiah the first time He came to earth. They didn't understand the mystery of the Incarnation. And the mystery of the Cross was an offense.

The gospel of the kingdom is that through Christ's Incarnation and Atonement on the Cross, “God demonstrated **His** righteousness”⁸⁷, not that humanity can demonstrate our righteousness here on this earth. Those who would establish a kingdom on this present earth by their own righteousness seek a city whose builder and maker is Humanity. This is Babylon.⁸⁸ But those who “confess that they are strangers and exiles on this earth” – “those of whom the world is not worthy” – “say such things making it clear that they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ 2 Corinthians 2:4

⁸⁷ Romans 3:25-26

⁸⁸ Genesis 11; Revelation 14-18

⁸⁹ Hebrews 11:13-16 and v. 38

Bill & Frances Furioso
~ At Christ's Table ~



Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, disciplined many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, he can no longer travel, so their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet... www.AtChristsTable.org

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