

# THE RIGHT REMEDY

## A SERMON

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“Then come and offer your gift.” Matthew 5:24

THOUGH I have taken these few words in a way of text, I shall not this morning in my discourse confine myself to the language of the text but shall take up the circumstances which are implied rather than expressed in the text. The words of the text refer to that kind of service, which is acceptable unto God, and therefore refer to that can which is virtually and eternally important, for if we and our services be rejected, then our religion is a thing of nothing; and you do read of one to whom the Lord had respect, and to his offering, and you read of one to whom the Lord had no respect. And we must be one character or the other; we must be of that cast of character that worships God acceptably, with that cast of character of which the Lord says, “Who has required this at your hands?” Now there is in connection with our text a description of the character to which no man by nature answers, in which Christians come exceedingly short of; in a word, there is a description of character in connection with our text that condemns every man and woman under the sun, believers and not believers, Christians or not Christians; that is to say, if you take the description of character expressive of what they should be in themselves. Hence, “He that breaks the least commandment shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.” But on the other hand there is not one just man upon the earth that does good and sins not; and there you are guilty: and he that is angry with his brother without a cause is in danger of judgment; there I am sure all are guilty; and he that shall say, Raca, (which is a term of malicious contempt the learned tell us) and I am sure there also we are all guilty, he shall be in danger of the council: and he that calls his brother a fool shall be in danger of hell fire; I am sure that here also we are all guilty. “Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you; leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” Now I shall try to make all this as plain and as easy as possible this morning, for the Savior says, “My yoke is easy;” and so it is the very business of the gospel to answer hard questions, and to bring us through hard things; for though the Lord shows his people hard things, he will open up those difficulties, and bring them out into a plain path, into a large place, and into a state of freedom, where they shall neither sigh, nor sorrow any more. I will then in the first place, in order to open up the subject, notice, *What we are by nature*; and then secondly, show, *How the Lord Jesus Christ himself answers to the description given, to which I have referred*; and then thirdly or rather I may take that in connection with the previous part that

*Christians by faith in him are partakers of the excellent spirit which these verses evidently embody; and then, lastly, Our personal and final complete remedy for all our deficiencies.*

First. I notice then first, in order to show the necessity of Christ being the forerunner, *What our state by Nature is*; and we shall then show the way in which the apostle deals with this our state by nature, which is given as you are aware at large, and there is no exception allowed to it, in the third of Romans. The apostle begins there with the sweeping declaration that “there is none righteous, no, not one.” Then if there be none righteous there is no one that can by any personal right enter the kingdom of heaven, for the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven. But I will not encumber that description with remarks, I will set the representation before you, and leave you to judge whether you can truly take home the description to yourselves; whether you can stand before God, and lay your hand upon your heart, and say, oh Lord, I see and I feel that I am in my heart, in my own nature, all that your holy law declares. And if you can do this you will love the Lord for admitting in his word that you are what you feel you are, for if you are brought to feel what a poor creature you are, and the word nowhere admitting that we are by nature just that which we feel, then you would indeed think that your case was hopeless, but when you come to the Lord’s word you learn that however deep your convictions may be you cannot be worse than the Lord himself says you are. Now “there is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understands.” Just so it is by nature, for here the apostle is speaking of us under sin and under the law; there is none that understands, so while in a state of nature we do not understand what vital godliness is, we do not understand what being born of God is, we do not understand what salvation is. And “there is none that seeks after God,” so by nature though we may become religious, yet we are not true seekers after God. “They are all gone out of the way;” gone out of the way by their fall in Adam; there we apostatized and went out of the way; “they are all together become unprofitable; so that you cannot do, spiritually speaking, anything acceptable to God, they that are in the flesh cannot please God. “There is none that does good, no, not one;” just now it was “there is none righteous, no not one,” now it is “there is none that does good, no not one;” that is, spiritually so, when the law of God is taken in its proper force, its proper spiritual pure, and perfect meaning. “Their throat is an open sepulcher,” the receptacle of everything that is deadly; “with their tongues they have used deceit.”

Are you convinced of this, my hearer, that you have received into your mind falsehood after falsehood, deadly thing after deadly thing; and that you have, at least in relation to eternal things, used deceit, though at the same time you knew it not. “The poison of asps is under their lips;” so that man spread their sediments abroad; I mean those that know not God, they diffuse poison abroad; the profane man diffuses poison abroad, and all erroneous men diffuse abroad their poisonous doctrines. “O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you;” might, as I have often reminded you, with equal propriety be rendered, “Who has poisoned you?” Poisoned your minds against God’s truth. “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness;” here is their malice and enmity against God; “their feet are swift to shed blood;” that is to say, there is a deadly enmity in the mind against the Lord Jesus Christ; “destruction and misery are in their ways; there is no fear of God before their eyes.” Now you may take up these items one after the other, and if, by an overruling Providence, you have been kept from the practice of those things, remember you have them all in your heart; it is a description of what your nature is. Men will pretty readily confess that they are sinners outwardly, but there are but few that seem led into the imageries of their own hearts. But it is written concerning those who are to be saved that they shall know everyone the

plague of his own heart, that they shall know everyone his own grief, and his own sore. So then, poor sinner, you must stand before God, and say, Lord, I am all that, every item of it; if it there declares that I am not righteous, then I do confess that all my righteousness's are as filthy rags; and readily confess; and if it declares that there is none that seeks after God, there also I am guilty; and if it declares that with their tongues they have used deceit, and the poison of asps is under their lips, there also I am guilty; and if it declares their mouth is full of bitterness and cursing, there also I am guilty. And if their feet are swift to shed blood, if you and I had been living in the Savior's Day, and left under the dominion of sin and Satan, as the Jews were, we should have done the same; for is there one among us that has not consented while in a state of nature virtually unto the counsel and deed of them that crucified Jesus? All by nature being enemies, the carnal mind is enmity against God. "There is no fear of God before their eyes". Now see this description, there is not the admission of a particle of good, of holiness, or righteousness, or spirituality, or anything; it is all bad together. And if you are not convinced that you have a heart of which these words are a description, then you are not yet so convinced of your state as to render the Lord Jesus Christ truly acceptable to you. But why is this description given? Hear the apostle's explanation. "Now," he says, "we know," for what I have been saying is, of course the voice of the law, "that what things soever the law says, it says to them who are under the law," and all by nature are under the law; "that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law;" here is a poor wretch attempting to obey God's law; why, your obedience is as sinful as your heart, your doings are as sinful as your wicked heart, your works are as loathsome in the sight of God as sin itself; why, poor creature, the further you go, the deeper your damnation, and to put your supposed goodness into the place of Christ is only sinning a worse sin than ever you have yet sinned. Is it any wonder that the apostle, after thus setting us forth as sinners in the state he there describes, "Therefore by the deeds of the law, shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin", now how does the apostle deal with this; how does he settle this matter? Does he set the creature to work and say, well now you must set to and undo all this; and must set to and be better for the future; you must set to and amend all this; you must settle all this, you are accountable for all this? No but the sinner is accountable for all this; but how does the apostle deal with all this? He brings in that which stands in entire contrast to it; for while these words I have quoted just describe what we are as sinners, Jesus Christ stands, and I need not go through the items to prove it, Jesus Christ stands and in entire contrast to the description there given. And so, then the apostle would bring in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ as the way in which we are freed from every one of these charges brought against us, by which we are freed from every one of the evils there descriptive of us. "Being justified freely by his grace;" ah, he might well say it is freely, he might well say by his grace; "being justified freely by his grace through the redemption;" here it is, Christ buying us out of all this misery and bondage, "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; who God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past," for the remission of sins that are *passed*, as it should be, their sin passed over to Christ, and he passes them over to oblivion, and the Holy Ghost passes them over from their conscience; and the sinner goes free from them by the Holy Ghost power, the sinner gets free from them by what Christ has done, the sinner gets free from them by what the Father is, and thus he comes into the liberty of the gospel. "To declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;" so that the Lord instead of cutting us down for those sins, loved us notwithstanding all.

Now then, my hearer, this will serve as a kind of introduction to our text. You see there our state by nature, and you see how the apostle deals with it; ah, what a sweet gospel is the gospel of our dear God and Father: “justified freely by his grace.” All those charges rolling in upon us, like thunder after thunder, lightning after lightning, curse after curse, threatening after threatening; presently in comes the still small voice, “justified freely by his grace.” How the soul closes in with that; lingering, I say, the apostle does upon it; “to declare, I say, at this time,” at this time of sinfulness, at this time of our sad condition, at this time of our ruined condition, “his righteousness for the remission of sins:” that is the way he settles the matter.

Now let us see what we can do with these verses in connection with our text. And the reason I have made these remarks is to show we must take Jesus Christ as our forerunner. We can do nothing in the Scriptures without him; we can do nothing in the law without him, we can do nothing in the gospel without him; and if we have him, then we have everything. Now the Savior says, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets, I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, until all is fulfilled.” What a tremendous declaration is that, whether you see the force of it or not. Take it in connection with that description given in the third of Romans, not one jot or tittle of the 10 Commandments, must be spiritually understood, coming into the heart; shall pass away, till all be fulfilled. Take away Jesus Christ in what he has done, I know how the law must be fulfilled in us, it must be fulfilled in us by our living under wrath while we live here; it must be fulfilled in us by our dying under wrath in our sins when we die; it must be fulfilled in us by our being called to the great tribunal in all the chains of our sins, our countenance bearing testimony against us; it must be fulfilled in us with, “Depart you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” Now these are not mere hearsay things, these are matters that concern us now, that concern us every day, that concern us to all eternity. Let us then go on and see what is to be done with these solemn matters. “Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Ah, how sweet the truth that Jesus Christ lived not for himself, he lived for us; he died not for himself, but for sinners; he was not cut off for himself, but for sinners; he died for sin, and died for sinners. Now he never did break the least commandment, but he did keep the commandments, and he magnified the law the very essence of those commandments being, as the Savior himself so explains, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength, with all your soul, and your neighbor as yourself.” And the Lord Jesus Christ did this, and he is great in the kingdom of heaven. And “I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no way enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Now go back again to the third of Romans, and look at your state by nature, and how it is possible that your righteousness can exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees? It cannot by anything you can do. Their righteousness was the righteousness of the flesh and that is all the righteousness you have; their righteousness was in reality unrighteousness; their holiness stank in the nostrils of the Most High; their religion was an abomination to God. And yet except your righteousness be somewhat different from theirs, you cannot enter the kingdom of God. Let us settle these two points before we go further, namely, the keeping of the commandments and the superiority of the righteousness.

Jesus Christ received the law as a broken law; he came under a broken law, a violated law, we had broken the law, we had violated the law; you can understand that, can you not? And then he was made under the law, and that he did live a life of perfect conformity to the law, you can understand that; and that in his wondrous, wondrous death, he suffered the penalty of the law, so as to leave the declaration upon record, "There shall be no more curse." Also, that he is the end of the law for righteousness; you can understand that. Well, say you, yes, I can understand that. Well then, I will tell you what to do, I keep all the commandments by receiving the law as a fulfilled law for me, so that my sins and faults of which I am the subject, cannot violate that law, because I am not under it, for Christ is the end of the law, and I receive Christ's righteousness, and that by receiving his righteousness God the Father becomes an object that I love with all my heart and soul; and that Christ is revealed to me here putting away my sin, and setting me free from the law, I love him with all my heart and all my soul; "you know that I love you." Here I love the Holy Spirit with all my soul, and I love the people of God as myself, as far as they stand manifest to be his people. Now here then I keep the law, fulfilled for me; so that the life I now live is by faith of the Son of God. Christ received the law a broken law, he left it an established law; I received his righteousness, and in receiving him as the end of the law I cannot break one of the least commandments: and therefore I shall never be called little in the kingdom of heaven, I shall always be as great there as the atonement of Christ can make me; I shall always be as great there as the righteousness of Christ can make me; I shall always be as great there as the order of salvation can make me; I shall always be as great there as shall answer to God's great decree, that he has predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son. And that man that is washed in the Savior's blood, and clothed in his righteousness, and stands in God's order of things, that is the man that keeps the commandments in the spirit of them, as says the apostle in the eighth of Romans, but he does not say that until he has first brought in Christ Jesus; "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus;" and those that are thus in Christ Jesus walk in that new life they have, which the apostle calls, walking after the Spirit, because the carnal mind is enmity against God; but these walk in sweet reconciliation to God in Christ Jesus. Now notice the apostle's language, that "the righteousness of the law," meaning love, for love is the fulfilling of the law, "might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," or in this reconciliation to God in Christ Jesus the Lord. Now can you understand me that Christ received the law that you had broken, that he honored, magnified, and establish that law; that that is dead to you, you are dead to that, you have done with it, and your only way to keep the law now is to keep Jesus Christ; your only way to stand square with the law is to hold fast the perfection of Christ, your only way to stand square with your Judge is to hold fast the work of Christ, your only way to stand accepted before God is to hold fast the perfection of Christ Jesus. That is the way I do the commandments, by Christ's work, and that is the way I keep them, and that is the way I acquire greatness. Then your righteousness's must exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. So, it does. I have an evidential righteousness that exceeds theirs; for the Pharisees with all their doings they cannot love God's truth. Now I do; I love God's truth: that is, I love God in that representation which his truth makes of him. His truth represents him to me in a sworn covenant, "The Lord has sworn", my old favorite scripture; never mind, every minister has his favorite scripture, and that is a favorite of mine among many others; "The Lord has sworn, and will not repent, You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." This is the God I adore, this is the God I love, and that love I have to this God in the order of things is my evidential righteousness. "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him." The Pharisee has not that: the Pharisee is

wrong upon that score; this is just what he hates, this is just what a poor sinner loves. Second, I have a better equitable righteousness than the Pharisee. I receive Christ's righteousness; I receive his righteousness as the wedding garment. And we may get into the church militant without a wedding garment, but when we cannot get into the church triumphant without this wedding garment of Christ's righteousness. Now in receiving that righteousness, I am sure I have a better righteousness than the Scribes and Pharisees, just as superior to theirs as Christ is superior to the mere creature, as he was as man superior to the sinner, and as much superior to the creature as God is above the creature. Third, I have a practical righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. My practical righteousness consists in standing out for God's truth, in standing out a consecrated contrast, both from the profane, and from the mere professing world for God's truth. Very few will give us credit for doing so, they will call the bigots, and all sorts of names; never mind, God help us to care nothing for that, but to care for a good conscience and the approbation of our God: and if the Lord Jesus Christ shall say to us, "you are they that have continued with me," never mind what men may say, that if he shall say to my soul presently when I resign my ministerial office, and lay my head upon my dying pillow; if I can hear his voice speaking to me there, "Well done, you good and faithful servant, you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things; enter you into the joy of your Lord;" one smile from his sunlit countenance will more than repay for all the malice and hatred that men may heap upon me. Ah, there is nothing like the approbation of the blessed God.

Fourth, our ascriptive righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. It is a poor glory that you free willers give to God, very poor. You go home and say, God is my Father, But he would not have been my Father if I had not done my part. Very nice that, certainly. Jesus Christ is my Savior, but he would not have been so if I had not done my part. The Holy Spirit is my teacher; he offered to begin the work, but he would not if I had not let him; and when it is begun, he would not have carried it on if I had not let him. That's the glory you have to give to God, is it? Well now, search the Scriptures and see if you can find any of the saints of God ascribing such glory as that to God. No, my hearer. Why, even the Jews acknowledge that their national distinction originated in God's choice; "God chose our fathers;" and if their national distinction rose in the sovereign choice of God, how much more does that eternal distinction that exists between the saved and the lost originate in the sovereignty of God. Ah then, the people of God have more glory to ascribed to him than any other people. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ according to as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world;" the Pharisee cannot join in that. "You are worthy to take the book for you have redeemed us to God;" your blood has done it all, brought us to God, and here we are. The Pharisee cannot say that. And of the Holy Spirit "He takes up the isles as a very little thing;" "he began the good work and will carry it on to the day of Jesus Christ." Thus, then, the Christian has an evidential righteousness, and equitable righteousness, a practical righteousness, an ascriptive righteousness, that exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. Thus, we stand square with the law by faith in Christ; and thus, we have the superiority of standing, being brought up out of the horrible pit, and the miry clay of the old Adam, made to stand upon the Rock of Ages, and there all is well.

But I will go on again. "He that is angry with his brother;" you see the Pharisees had made religion to consist of mere externals. "You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not kill; but I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger

of judgment;” does not say positively he will be judged of condemnation, but is in danger of it while he is in that state. Is there a man or woman free from this? No. Do we always treat each other, as Christians, as we ought to? Are we always ready to forgive? That will make us feel the force of the words, “If we forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you.” Now where is there one that is not guilty of being angry with his brother without a cause? I confess in the presence of this assembly, that I am guilty; I have been angry sometimes unjustly, with men and women too that I ought to have prayed for in sympathized with. I am sorry I have been guilty; I confess I am, and so the Lord might have condemned me. Well, say some, I wonder how you get out of that. Why, though I have been angry without a cause, and so in heart a murderer, Jesus Christ never was. He stood in my place; he might have been angry with his brethren, but he never was. He looked around about upon his enemies with anger, now notice what I am going to say, but he looked on his disciples and said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted. Blessed are they which do hunger after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” He looked on his disciples with love. He angry with his brethren? No. And though Peter, with awful oaths denied that he knew the Savior, even that could not make Jesus angry with Peter. “Simon, love you me?” I love you, Peter, if you don’t me. Well, Lord I do; “you know all things, you know that I love you.” So that I am obliged to flee to Christ for shelter to get away from that charge as well. But having Christ as my substitute, I also have him as the great example whom I do wish to follow, and to pray that that spirit which was in him of love to his brethren may also abound in me, that I may love the brethren also, that I may be willing to do anything, and everything, to serve them.

Again, “Whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council.” Some have thought that these respective classes have reference to differently constituted courts among the Jews; perhaps they have, but we have no account of them in the Bible; and as I dear not deal in assumptions or conjectures, I shall come to reality. A counsel means a company of persons chosen by proper authority to consult and decide upon certain matters. God’s prophets and apostles are his counsel; and the man that holds a Christian in contempt is in danger of having that counsel against him; then he has a very formidable array against him; for whosoever sins they remit, they are remitted, and he read whosoever sins they retained, they are retained. Raca, say the learned, I do not understand the meaning of the word any further than the learned tell us, it is used only once in the New Testament, but they tell us it is used very frequently by the ancients, and signifies contempt. Well now, if this be the right interpretation, what a mercy for us that Jesus Christ never held us in contempt; even when we were dead in sin, he did not hold us in contempt. We hated him, but he never hated us; we despise Joseph, but Joseph never despised us. Here again I am guilty: I believe I have held the child of God sometimes in contempt. Why, say some, you are making yourself out very bad this morning. I am only confessing that after the flesh I am no better than while in a state of nature; and if God had not given me counteracting grace, I should have been now just what I was then. But it is my delight that I have a Surety to stand before me here; and that if I have been sometimes a sinner in this respect, I desire not to hold in contempt a child of God, one that loves the Lord Jesus Christ: it is my delight that Christ was infinitely free from this, and that by him our fault in this department also is covered.

Again, “Whosoever shall say, You fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.” Now you would naturally say, if such a person be a non-elect vessel, he is sure to be lost, and therefore it cannot be said of him that he is in danger of hell fire, because he is sure to go there. The word danger is a qualifying

clause, you see. And then you will say, if he is an elect vessel he could not be in any danger of hell, for he cannot go there; and therefore, you say, where is the propriety of this kind of reasoning? If he be a non-elect vessel, he is sure to go to hell, if he is one of God's elect, he cannot go to hell; where in then, is the propriety of the word danger? The Savior is not reasoning thereupon doctrinal grounds, he is reasoning upon characteristic grounds, and that gives propriety to the reasoning. Do you call the man that loves the truth with all his heart awful? As a Wesleyan once did me. He said, what, do you believe election? I said, I do. Then he said, you are a fool. And do you believe in predestination? Not in fatalism, sir, I believe that God decreed all that was good. Then you are a fool, he said.

Well now, we will suppose a person professing to belong to the Lord, and that he calls the man of fool who holds the truth. Why, sir, yours is a dangerous state; you seem to have some concern about your soul, and yet you call that man a fool because he holds these doctrines; while in that state you are in danger of hell fire, that is evidently so, your character is such that to die in that state would you be saved? I should question it. What then, you would say, is my case hopeless? No, I do not say that, but if you die in that state, calling that free grace man a fool because he holds the truth in all its purity, perfection, and certainly, I should think hell would be your portion. Why, you are committing what is called in the Bible the great transgression, among men the unpardonable sin; and so, you are in danger, sir, of eternal condemnation. Ah, but suppose the remark I made should fall into his mind, and he should say, I see I have sinned, I see I have done wrong. Ah, now you are another man. But if I have committed that sin, what is to be done? Ah, Jesus Christ never called his brother a fool, not in that way, he calls them fools in kindness and sympathy when he said, "Oh fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken;" but he never called them fools in the other way. So, then you had better plead guilty to all these charges, and flee to the Savior as the way of escape from them, and pray to the Lord to give you more and more of the spirit of him who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; for the more we have of him the nearer we are brought to the spirit, letter, and order of his eternal truth. I hope I am understood. Another item yet. Well now, you are angry with your brother without a cause you are holding him in contempt, and you are calling him a fool because he loves the truth; and yet you are going to pray to God, and you are going to give something to his cause. Well now, "If you remember that your brother has anything against you, go your way, first be reconciled to your brother;" for unless your prayers and gifts come up in a spirit of reconciliation to God's truth, and to God's people as his people, your service is not acceptable. Let us see how easily this answers with the Savior. Could he remember that any of his brother and had anything against him? No, he could not, he could not remember that any of his brethren had anything against, but he could remember that it was not possible for them to have anything against him.