

Entering Into Greatness Part 3

In [Parts 1](#) and [2](#), we answered the following questions:

1. What does it mean to *enter into* the kingdom?
2. What characterizes the “righteousness” of the Pharisees?

In this final installment we hope to answer two additional questions. Here is the third:

3. What is *greater* than Pharisaical righteousness?

If we, as children of God, would *enter into* the kingdom, then our righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees. What is greater than Pharisaical righteousness? The answer is found later in Matthew 5:

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect ([Matt. 5:48](#)).

Perfection is greater than Pharisaical righteousness. But Jesus is not talking about the positional, imputed righteousness you have in Christ. He is calling you to a discipleship mode of living that leads to perfection of lifestyle. Now don't misunderstand. Jesus is not saying you must be *sinless* to inherit the kingdom. That's not even possible. He is saying you must be *perfect* to inherit the kingdom. There is a difference, as we shall see.

Our tendency is to snap back: “No one's perfect!” Nevertheless, God called Job “perfect and upright...one that feared God and eschewed evil” ([Job 1:1](#)). God also called Noah “a just man and perfect” ([Gen. 6:9](#)). In [Genesis 17:1](#), God instructed Abraham to “walk before me, and be thou perfect.”

The Hebrew word used of Noah's perfection means “without blemish,” like the lambs that were offered undefiled and without spot to God. It is also the word used in the following verses:

For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it ([Prov. 2:21](#)).

The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way ([Prov. 11:5](#)).

The Hebrew word used of Job's perfection means “complete, pious, undefiled, upright.” It is also used in this verse:

Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace([Psalm 37:37](#)).

In the New Testament we find the goal of the church is perfection:

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ ([Eph. 4:13](#)).

Paul is obviously using the idea of growing unto a *perfect* man as a sanctification term—the goal of progressive sanctification.

What is perfection, according to [Ephesians 4:13](#)? It is the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Paul's goal, as stated in [Colossians 1:28](#), is to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." In the context, he's not referring to salvation, but rather to sanctification. Later, in [Colossians 4:12](#), Paul prays that they might "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." James admonishes the saints that by works (i.e., righteous living), faith is "made perfect" ([James 2:22](#)).

Jesus calls all children of God to *perfection*, but that is not the same as sinlessness. There is a difference, and we can easily distinguish between the two by defining *perfection*.

The Greek word means "finished, complete, having reached its end." This word is a form of the same word used by Jesus on Calvary when He cried, "It is finished." According to Vine, the way the word is used in [Matthew 5:48](#) conveys "the idea of goodness without necessary reference to maturity."

Thus, perfection is the idea of complete sanctification—the kind of sanctification that progresses to the extent Jesus deems it worthy of hearing "well done" at the Judgment Seat. In a nutshell, perfection is consistent obedience to the will of God. Of course, that is not the nature of Pharisaical "righteousness." The Pharisees were characterized by outward conformity to the letter of the law but not inward submission to the spirit of the law.

It is important to recognize that in Matthew 5 Jesus is not teaching the doctrine of justification. In other words, He is not teaching that if one would go to heaven, he must have greater righteousness than the Pharisees, in the sense of having the imputation of Christ's righteousness at salvation (which makes a believer righteous in the spirit realm of his being).

Rather, Jesus is teaching *soul* perfection, which is the idea of living completely righteous, in conformity to God's will, both inside and out—unlike the Pharisees, who were primarily focused on the outside. Again, perfection doesn't mean sinless; it simply means not sinning. That may sound perplexing, but perhaps it will become clearer when examining two seemingly contradictory verses in John's first epistle.

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God ([1 Jn. 3:9](#)).

As saints, we do not sin in the realm of our *spirit*, because our spirit has been made completely righteous at salvation. Old things have passed away; all things have become new. The Spirit of God dwells in the realm of our spirit, and it is a completely holy habitation, having been justified and positionally sanctified.

However, the realm of the *soul* is an entirely different story. Thus, the apostle John could say this:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (1 Jn. 1:8, 10).

The verses quoted above may sound in conflict, but they are not, when we understand that chapter 3 is referring to the *spirit* of man while chapter 1 is referring to the *soul*. For more help on this subject, refer to my previous article entitled, [*The Three Tenses of Salvation*](#).

Now look what happens when the *soul* of a saved man chooses to take his marching orders from his righteous *spirit*:

Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not (1 Jn. 3:6).

A believer lives righteously to the extent he is abiding in Christ (Who lives within the realm of that believer's righteous *spirit*). In fact, [1 John 1:9](#) makes it clear that a believer's *soul* can be cleansed of *all* unrighteousness! Therefore, it is possible for a believer to live consistently righteous (i.e., perfect), to the extent his heart is clean of sin—[1 John 1:7](#).

The objective is for the *soul* to learn to rely upon the provision in the *spirit* and thereby live righteously. When a Christian learns to live that way over the course of his life, his soul is made perfect (complete) in progressive sanctification. He is on the narrow path that leads to life, preparing to hear "well done" at the Judgment Seat.

That leads to the final question.

4. How can we possibly fulfill the righteousness of the law?

The question has already been partly answered by the passages in 1 John, but let us return again to [Matthew 5:17](#) for a fuller answer.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil (Matt. 5:17).

Jesus came to fulfill the law. He lived it perfectly, completely, and we can also, to the extent we let Him live His life through us. Notice something

very beautiful in [Matthew 5:17](#). Look at the word *fulfill*. In the Greek, it is the idea of rendering full and complete. It is carrying through to the end and accomplishing. Now look carefully at the following verse:

That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit ([Rom. 8:4](#)).

The word *fulfilled* here is the same Greek word as in [Matthew 5:17](#). In Matthew, we are told that Jesus came to *fulfill* the law—to carry it through to the end.

Here, we are told that we have the same possibility of *fulfilling*—that is, carrying through the law to the end. How? When we choose in our *soul* to walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Paul said it similarly in Galatians:

Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh ([Gal. 5:16](#)).

Does your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? If so, you will be *great* in the kingdom. If not, you will be *least* in the kingdom. There is no excuse for falling short of the perfection that Jesus requires for greatness, for Perfection dwells within your spirit. His name is Jesus!