

Third Presbyterian Church
Bible Study
Sermon on the Mount – Lesson 9
“Performance Religion”

Matthew 5:17-20 (NIV)

¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

¹⁹ Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Discussion Questions:

1. Performance religion is an attempt to earn the favor of God through the self-righteous actions of the keeping of rituals and adherence to the letter of the Law.
 - a. In your own words explain what this means and give practical examples of what that looks like.
2. Performance religion does not promote relationship. Please explain this concept and why is it true.
3. If the Law is from God, why is bondage to the law bad?
4. When someone says “I have done my good deed for the day,” what are they really saying or intending for this action to accomplish?
5. Why is grace essential in every relationship if it will be successful/strong?
6. Do you come church because you’re afraid that God will reward you if you do, and punish you if you don’t? please explain this disposition of church attendance.
7. Discuss the following truth and how does this truth eliminate our idea of performance religion? “We will never be more approved in the eyes of God than we were when we accepted his son Jesus as our Lord and Savior.
8. As a group, minister to someone who has this disposition, “I’ll never be good enough for heaven. God would never accept me – I’ve done too many horrible things in my life. I’m lost and there’s no hope for me.”

9. Share your major takeaways from the sermon/lesson this week.

Commentary

D. The Law & Jesus: Breaking the Law of God, 5:17-20

(5:17-20) Introduction: Jesus Christ was accused of destroying the law of God. He has always been accused of minimizing God's law. Every generation has its proponents who feel that Jesus *emphasized* love and de-emphasized the law. Many have felt that the thrust of Jesus is love and forgiveness, and the afterthought is law and justice. As a result, many have felt less obligated to follow God's law. They have felt freer to live a looser life and to do as they wished. The feeling has been that if they keep the law of God in the back of their mind, they have the Christian liberty to interpret behavior as they see fit (within some reason). After all, it is argued, the "priesthood and security of the believer" are two of the basic teachings of Scripture. Therefore, the law's clear restrictions and obligations and its demand for obedience are minimized, and what is called love and forgiveness are emphasized.

Christ pulls no punches and comes straight to the point: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law...." (Matthew 5:17), "whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments...." (Matthew 5:19), "except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees...." (Matthew 5:20).

1. (5:17-18) Jesus—Fulfills Law: a person must know that Christ came to fulfill the "law" (*nomon* ^{PWS: 2305}). Jesus said He was neither contradicting nor destroying the Old Testament Scriptures nor standing against them. He was fulfilling them, completing them, bringing out what was implied. He was showing what the real meaning of the Old Testament Scripture is, its full meaning—all that God intended the Scripture to say. As God's Son, He is the Revelation of the truth. He is to reveal the true and complete meaning of the Scriptures.

There are several ways in which Jesus Christ fulfilled the law.

1. Before Christ, the law described how God wanted man to live. The law was the ideal, the words that told man what he was to do. But Christ fulfilled and completed the law; that is, God gave man more than just mere words to describe how He wants man to live. He gave man the Life, the Person who perfectly pictures and demonstrates the law before the world's very eyes. Jesus Christ is the Picture, the Living Example, the Pattern, the Demonstration of life as it is to be lived. He is the Perfect Picture of God's will, the Ideal Man, the Representative Man, the Pattern for all men.

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

"And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not" (John 8:45).

"Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature" (Col. 1:15).

"Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3).

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled,

reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:21-23).

2. Before Christ, the law was only words and rules. It could only inject the idea of behavior into the mind of a person. It had no spirit, no life, no power to enable a person to do the law. But Christ fulfilled and completed the law. He was *Spirit and Life*, so He was able to put spirit and life to the words and rules of the law. He was able to live the life described by the words and rules. As such, He was able to inject both the idea and the power to behave into a person's mind and life. It is now His life that sets the standard and the rule for the believer; it is His Spirit and life that gives the believer power to obey.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1-4).

"For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:19-20).

"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (Galatians 5:16-18).

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Hebrews 8:10; cp. Hebrews 10:15-16).

3. Before Christ, the law stated only the rule and the principle of behavior. It did not explain the rule nor the spirit behind the rule. Neither did the law give the full meaning of the rule. The law always had to have an interpreter. But Christ fulfilled and completed the law. He explained the rule and the spirit behind the rule. He interpreted the law. He gave the law its real and full meaning.

"But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:23-24).

"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference" (Romans 3:20-22).

4. Before Christ, the law demanded perfect righteousness; it demanded a perfect life. But man failed at certain points. Man just could not obey the law perfectly; he fell short of perfect righteousness. But Christ fulfilled and completed the law. He kept the law in *every detail*. He secured the *perfect righteousness* demanded by the law. He fulfilled all the requirements, all the types, and all the ceremonies of the law—perfectly. As such, He became the Perfect Man, the Ideal Man, the Representative Man for all men. As the Ideal Man, He simply embraced all men; He embodied the righteousness that man must now have.

"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference" (Romans 3:20-22).

"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

5. Before Christ, the law demanded punishment for disobedience. If a man broke the law, he was to be punished. But Christ fulfilled and completed the law. In fact, He went to the farthest point possible in fulfilling the law. He paid the maximum price and showed the ultimate love. He bore the punishment of the law for every man's disobedience; He took the punishment of the law upon Himself. As the Ideal Man, He not only embodies the righteousness that must cover all men, He also frees all men from the penalty of the law. And He makes them sons of God. (Cp. Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 3:13-14; Galatians 4:1-7.)

Thought 1. Several other passages need to be looked at for a complete understanding of Christ and the law and the believer.

Thought 2. Christ speaks to two different people.

1) The strict religionist or legalist. Christ does not destroy or weaken the law. The liberty He preaches fulfills the law as it should be fulfilled. He is *not to be rejected* because a person thinks His liberty weakens the law. He is to be acknowledged as God's Son who is to be followed and obeyed.

2) The carnal or loose religionist. Christ does not weaken the law by allowing a person to live as he wishes—by conscience only. He does not release men from the duty and responsibility of the law. He fulfills and strengthens and even enlarges the law. Liberty does not mean license; it means that a person is now free to serve God in the spirit and life of the law, not just in the letter of the law

Thought 3. The Old Testament is the Word of God—according to Christ. (See notes—' 2 Tim. 3:16; note 3—' 1 Peter 1:11; note—' 2 Peter 1:19-21.)

Thought 4. Christ considered His coming to be significant—one of the pivotal points of history. The following words show this (cp. Matthew 5:17-18).

⇒ "I am come...."

⇒ "I am come...to fulfill."

⇒ "I say unto you, until heaven and earth pass...."

⇒ "Till all be fulfilled."

He speaks as a person whose entrance into the world held great meaning for the world. This fact says something of extreme importance to man: "Hear ye Him." What He says is binding. It is *as* binding, if not *more* binding, than the law itself.

"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Romans 10:3-4).

"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

DEEPER STUDY #2 (5:17) Law

2. (5:19) Law—Obedience—Disobedience—Teachers—Ministers: a person must do and teach the law in order to be great in the Kingdom of Heaven. *Breaking* and *doing* the law carries with it the idea of continuous action. No person is perfectly obedient all of the time. Every person fails sometime (Romans 3:23; James 3:2; 1 John 1:8, 10). But any person who continues to break a commandment, even if it is the least commandment, shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. And the person who continues to obey the commandments shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. A person cannot break a commandment and ask forgiveness, then go out and break another commandment and ask forgiveness over and over. Such a person cannot expect God to think he is serious about the commandments of God. No man would think he is serious—why should God? The person only deceives himself. Note two significant points.

1. Three persons teach the law to others.

a. The *keeper* and the *breaker* of the law. A person teaches by what he does. Others see and observe and learn from what he does. If a person breaks and breaks a law, no matter how small a law, he teaches that the law is not important—not worthy enough to be kept.

b. The *instructor* of the law. This refers to the teachers of the law and of religion. Each instructor either adheres to or rejects the law. Each instructor teaches his students the truth or else deceives his students into following human reasoning. The person who breaks and teaches the breaking of the law attempts to *void the law*, that is, to do away with it. (See note—' Romans 3:31; cp. Matthew 15:3; Psalms 119:126; cp. Psalms 89:39.) It would seem that an attempt to *void the law* is much more serious a crime than to disobey a commandment. Note also that continuing to disobey a commandment is denying the commandment—treating it as though it is unimportant and unnecessary. It treats the commandment as though it is not even existing and has no bearing upon a person's life. Such behavior is consciously or unconsciously teaching men to *void the law*.

2. Christ warned all who break and teach others to break the law, even if they break only the least commandment: they shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. Note: there are four persons who are severely warned.

a. The worldly or carnal: the person who continues to break the commandments of God.

b. The teacher or instructor: the person who teaches that the commandment of God is a farce. The person who says there is no such thing as God's law, there are only the commandments of men.

c. The person who teaches and encourages others to sin and to disobey the commandments of God—even if the commandment is one of the least. Nothing is more contemptible and nothing will be judged more severely. This is one of the most serious offenses among men. (See outline—' Romans 2:17-29 and Deeper Study #1—Romans 2:17-29.)

"It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones" (Luke 17:2).

"Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written" (Romans 2:23-24).

"But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat [example], for whom Christ died" (Romans 14:15).

"But though we, or an angel, from heaven, preach [or teach] any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8-9).

d. The mocker or persecutor: the person who rebels, mocks, and curses *God's law* and its strictness (and the God and the followers of it).

"And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it" (Matthew 7:26-27).

"Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience" (Ephes. 5:6).

Thought 1. Four significant lessons are seen in this point.

1) All the commandments of God are important, but some are less important than others. The man who *breaks the least* commandment and continues and continues to break it (teaching men such) shall be *called the least* in the Kingdom of Heaven.

2) Breaking a commandment of God and continuing to break it is serious, even if it is one of the least commandments. Such behavior teaches men that the commandment is not important. The result: a person shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven.

3) When a commandment is broken, a person is to ask forgiveness and repent (see note 7—' Acts 17:29-30 and Deeper Study #1—Acts 17:29-30; note—' 1 John 2:1-2). He is not to continue breaking the commandment and asking forgiveness over and over. Continuous disobedience teaches that the commandments of God are not really all that important. It is that person who will be judged severely (see outline—' 1 Cor. 3:10-17 and notes—' 1 Cor. 3:10-17. Cp. 2 Cor. 5:10.)

4) The obedient person can expect great reward.

⇒ He shall be called great in heaven.

⇒ He is loved in a special way by both God and Christ (John 14:10, 14).

⇒ He receives very special manifestations of Christ's presence (see Deeper Study #3—John 14:21). (See Rewards—Master Subject Index.)

Thought 2. Who fails to do the law? Who breaks the law?

- 1) The person who neglects the law—just fails to do it.
- 2) The person who disobeys the law—does what it says not to do.
- 3) The person who does not know the law—cannot do it because he just does not know it.
- 4) The person who narrows the law, that is, limits and weakens the law by making it say less than what it really says. Many make the law apply only to what they want because it allows them to do their own thing and to live as they wish.

Thought 3. A person may neglect the law for several reasons.

- 1) He is deceived about the law's importance. Someone has misled him about its importance.
- 2) He is too preoccupied with worldly affairs to place much importance in the law.
- 3) He is reacting against some strict teaching in his past; therefore, he now neglects the law.
- 4) He has not been taught the seriousness of keeping God's law.
- 5) He fears the restrictions the law will place upon his life and behavior. He does not want to live as the law says, so he neglects it.

Thought 4. The law of God is often broken for two tragic reasons.

- 1) Some have never heard about God's law. Believers have failed to take the message of the law to the world.
- 2) Some do not have the law impressed upon their minds enough to worry about keeping it. Believers have not stressed the message with enough conviction and power to show its importance.

3. (5:20) Righteousness— Religionists: a person must have more righteousness than a religionist to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Note three facts.

1. Righteousness is necessary to enter heaven (see note 5—Matthew 5:6 and Deeper Study #5—Matthew 5:6; notes—Romans 3:21; note—Romans 4:5; Deeper Study #1—Romans 4:22; note—Romans 5:1; note—Romans 10:6; Deeper Study #2—Galatians 2:16; cp. Galatians 3:10).

"For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousnes" (Romans 1:18).

"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one....For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10, 23).

2. The religionists, the Pharisees and the Scribes, had some righteousness. They just did not have enough. They were, in fact, strict religionists. They worked at obeying thousands and thousands of rules and regulations, governing everything ranging from dress and social behavior to ministry and work. However, they lacked the one essential: loving God so much that they would deny themselves and seek their righteousness in His Son, Jesus Christ.

"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference" (Romans 3:20-22).

"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Romans 10:3-4).

3. The point is shattering: a person must have more righteousness than a strict religionist to enter heaven. Many are religious, but few are strict religionists. What did Christ mean? Who can enter heaven if a strict religionist cannot?

"To him who worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Romans 4:5).

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephes. 2:8-9).

"But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:4-5).

Thought 1. There are four facts in this verse that must be heeded. They should stir everyone of us, stir us to search our hearts and make sure we are approaching God as we should.

1) Many religionists make the same fatal mistake that the Pharisees and Scribes made. They seek acceptance with God...

- by giving God a formal worship instead of giving God a confession of unworthiness and of their need for Him in a personal way.
- by giving God good works instead of giving God their hearts.
- by giving God a clean and moral body instead of giving God a confession of needing help spiritually.
- by giving God only a part of their lives, instead of giving God the total abandonment of themselves. (See Deeper Study #1—Luke 9:23.)

2) Many make the fatal mistake the religionists made, but to a lesser degree. They worship and do good...

- to be respectable in the community
- to seek the acceptance of God
- to have the fellowship of others
- because they were forced by their parents to do good
- to feel comfortable within their own consciences.
- to secure the approval of family and friends.
- because they were taught to do good.

3) Some feel they must do good to be acceptable to God. Their motive in life is to work and work at doing good in order to secure God's acceptance. They have never learned the truth: they cannot do enough good to be perfectly acceptable to God. They must trust His love—that He loves them so much that He will take their trust and count it as righteousness (see note 5—Matthew 5:6 and Deeper Study #5—Matthew 5:6; note—Romans 4:5; Deeper Study #1—Romans 4:22; note—Romans 5:1).

⇒ Many worship and do just enough good to satisfy their consciences. They do just enough good to make them feel comfortable and acceptable to God. But they miss the whole point. What God is after—the only thing that makes a person acceptable to God—is the giving of his total being over to God (day and night) in unworthiness and confession: that he has need for God in his life now and forever.

⇒ in trust and love: that he trusts and loves God because God has given His own Son and promised to accept him in His righteousness.

⇒ in thankfulness and appreciation: because God has accepted and assured abundant life now and eternally.

⇒ in adoration and praise: because God is God (Elohim) and has revealed His glorious love in Christ who has redeemed him eternally.

⇒ in worship and service: because the love of Christ constrains him.

DEEPER STUDY #1

(5:17-48) **Law—Jesus, Fulfills Law**: this Scripture is of critical importance. It is God's Son explaining the law of God.

1. Christ confirmed God's law, all the Scripture of the Old Testament. Christ said He was not destroying *the law or the prophets*. The term "the law and the prophets" was a reference to the whole Old Testament. What Christ said was that He, as God's Son, came to fulfill the law; and His teaching was just as binding as the Old Testament law. (See note—Matthew 5:17-18.)

2. Christ illustrated God's laws, explaining the broad principles which were and still are to be applied to everyday life. He took a few practical laws and showed how a person was to take the broad principle and apply it to his own daily behavior.

3. Christ condemned the oral or Scribal Law (condemned it rather strongly.) When Jesus Christ and the other New Testament writers condemned the law, it always referred to the oral or Scribal Law, not to God's Law (see note—Matthew 5:17-18).

DEEPER STUDY #2

(5:17) **Law** (*nomon* ^{PWS: 2305}): the law referred to four different writings to the Jews.

1. It referred to the Ten Commandments.
2. It referred to the first five books of the Bible, that is the Pentateuch.
3. It referred to the law and the prophets, that is, all the Scripture of the Old Testament.
4. It referred to the oral or the Scribal Law.

God's law, given in the Old Testament, was not enough for the Jews. They reasoned that if the law was really God's Word, then it must include—have embodied within it—every rule and regulation for conduct. Therefore, they took the great principles of the law and reduced them to thousands upon thousands of rules and regulations. These rules and regulations became the oral or Scribal Law.

There were two groups who gave their lives to the teaching and keeping of the law.

1. The Scribes: they were the writers and teachers of the law (see Deeper Study #1—Luke 6:2).
2. The Pharisees: they were the strict followers of the law (see Deeper Study #3—Acts 23:8).

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