



## MAIN POINT

Those who come to Christ for mercy and obey the Father out of a desire to honor and express love to Him are seeking to protect their relationship with God rather than merely keep rules.

## THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. What is the best thing you have done for the wrong reasons? What happened?
2. What would the right motive have been? Would things have gone differently if your motives had been pure?
3. When George introduced the concept of “Relationship Protectors,” what did he mean? What is a Relationship Protector?

**Leader:** It is possible to fool people about our motives. You can help a friend in need out of a desire to look good or to manipulate others and get away with it in the eyes of men. While we may be able to deceive others about our motives, we cannot deceive God. It is possible to do everything right in the eyes of men and yet have a heart that is far from God. This is why Jesus said of the Pharisees, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean” (Matt. 23:27). If we go by appearances, the Pharisees kept the law better than anyone and yet Jesus said that they were headed for eternal punishment. This tells us something incredibly important about God. He cares about more than our outward actions—He cares about the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. The Pharisees tried to prove their own worth by keeping the law and, in so doing, they became full of pride. God isn’t looking for Law Keepers—the law will always do what it is designed to do—show us we are sinners and can’t keep it. God is looking for Relationship Protectors—those who worship Him from the heart and obey Him out of a desire to honor and express love to Him rather than merely keep rules.

## DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 5:17-20.

4. What did Jesus mean by saying that He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (v. 17)?

5. What are some ways Jesus fulfilled “the Law and the Prophets” (see Rom. 3:21-28, 4:15, 7:26-28, 8:3-4, and 8:6)?

**Leader:** While the knowledge that Jesus wasn’t disregarding the Old Testament might have put some at ease, by saying He came to fulfill the law, Jesus made a bold statement: He has authority over the law. Only God has such authority, so Jesus was asserting His divinity. During His ministry, Jesus was accused of preaching a new religion because His teaching often contradicted the common beliefs of His day. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus not only debunked that myth but also demonstrated that we are all guilty of breaking God’s law (Matt. 5:21-48). Thankfully, however, God did what the law was powerless to do “by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering . . . in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us” (Rom. 8:3-4).

6. If Jesus fulfilled the law through His life, death, and resurrection, what purpose does the law serve today (Rom. 7:7-8; Gal. 3:22-25)?

7. What was Jesus trying to communicate when He said we must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees (see Rom. 3:21-22)?

**Leader:** Christ’s fulfillment of the law does not nullify its importance. Later on in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus works through some of the laws in the Old Testament and demonstrates that while we might think we have kept it, if we look at the motives in our hearts we see that we have not (Matt. 5:21-48). You may not have committed murder or adultery but Jesus says if you have hatred or lust in your heart you are guilty of breaking the law. In other words Jesus’ teaching on the law demonstrates its value in the lives of believers by forcing us to reckon with our sinfulness so that we will run to Christ.

The scribes and the Pharisees prized themselves on being expert interpreters and keepers of the law and were considered to be the pillars of righteousness in Jewish communities. But their righteousness was largely external and superficial—Jesus demands something deeper. When Jesus fulfilled the law on our behalf through His death and resurrection, He made us new (2 Cor. 5:17-21). In other words, when we look to Christ, our righteousness will exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees because we will begin to obey the law from the heart. In other words, through Christ we can stop trying to keep the law so that we have something to brag about and instead obey God and do His will out of love for Him. Jesus changes both our motives and our actions. It is important, however, that we look to Him to change the former first. We cannot begin to live the way the Father desires until Christ changes our hearts. The Pharisees got that order wrong, as we will see in Jesus’ teaching on prayer, they sought to prove themselves with their outward actions and the result was hearts that were far from Him.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 6:5-8.

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8. Pastor George talked about the difference between Law Keepers and Relationship Protectors. How did the hypocrites and pagans both demonstrate a Law Keeper attitude in their prayers?

Jesus’ teaching on prayer demonstrates the difference between a “Law Keeper” and a “Relationship Protector.” Both pagans and hypocrites are Law Keepers in their own way. The hypocrite is more concerned about being seen by others than seeking God. The pagan, by repeating words and phrases, hopes to twist God’s arm to do what he wants. The focus of both is on themselves. In contrast, the focus of a Relationship Protector is on God.

Prayer that honors God is that which looks to Him as Provider and submits to His will. It is motivated by a desire for a deeper relationship with Him.

**9. What attitude is required to “close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen”? How does this type of prayer honor God and focus on protecting our relationship with Him?**

**10. If “your Father knows what you need before you ask Him,” why bother asking? How does asking God anyway strengthen our relationship with Him?**

**Leader:** The intent of Jesus’ command in verse 7 is not intended to forbid public prayer but rather to challenge us to consider the motives with which we pray. Believers must not pray for the purpose of impressing God or others, but rather they should pray out of desire to know, love, and submit to God. Further, our prayers reveal much about what we believe about God. We can pray confidently and honestly because we know that God is both all-knowing and all-loving toward His children. We don’t need to hold anything back from Him because He knows our hearts better than we do. When we pray, we can trust that ultimately He is going to act in our best interest because He loves us.

### DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**11. Ask those who are willing to honestly answer the following question: When you pray, how often do you ask God what He desires of you? What keeps you from honestly considering what God wants of you and how He would have you live?**

**12. How might we cultivate a greater awareness of the motives with which we seek and obey God? What is one step you could take toward moving away from living as Law Keeper and toward living as Relationship Protector?**

### PRAYER

Thank God for demonstrating His steadfast love for us through the cross of Jesus Christ. Pray that we would be mindful of our desperate sinful condition before Him and look to Christ for mercy. Pray that God would help us repent from the pride that is keeping us from a deeper relationship with Him and cultivate a more humble and dependent faith in Him.

### FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

☐ Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:

- **Honestly evaluate your motives in obeying God. How much room for improvement is in your own life? How is God speaking to you about this issue? When have you been insincere recently?**

## SERMON BASED GROWTH GROUP

- ☐ A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- ☐ The challenge to memorize Matthew 5:17.

### SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

#### MATTHEW 5:17-20

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5:17. Jesus warned not to assume He had come to destroy the Law or the Prophets (meaning the Old Testament Scriptures). Evidently some did assume He was throwing out the law. After all, Jesus persistently violated legalistic, inferred, man-made rules for keeping the Sabbath. He also ignored traditional washing rituals (not required in Scripture) that emphasized outward rather than inward cleansing (see Mark 7:1-16).

Jesus solidly affirmed the authority of Old Testament Scriptures by announcing He had come to fulfill them. How? The overarching predictive message of the Old Testament relates to humanity's sin and God's promise to bless all nations through Abraham's descendants. Jesus fulfilled that promise by coming as the Savior through whom God offers the blessing of redemption to all who will receive Him.

Jesus' atoning death and resurrection also fulfilled the purpose of laws associated with animal sacrifices and the priesthood, which simply foreshadowed Him (so we no longer need to sacrifice animals or have human priests to mediate between God and us). Furthermore, His teachings did not displace the law but rather obeyed or filled it full of its intended meaning.

5:18. So, is the Old Testament finished, over, done? Should we ignore it? Not according to Jesus. All Old Testament Scripture pertaining to Christ's first coming has been accomplished, but the prophecies related to Christ's return have not. The ethical and moral principles of the law are not only still in force but also are echoed in the New Testament.

5:19. Jesus' words instruct us to take the Old Testament teachings seriously. Those who dismiss them and encourage others to do so will miss blessings in this life and in the life to come—they will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. This kingdom is the realm in which Christ is honored as Lord and King, that is, the realm of the redeemed. Those who obey and teach the law will be called great.

5:20. Scribes and Pharisees were viewed as spiritual giants in Jesus' day (v. 20). Scribes were viewed as experts at interpreting and applying God's law. They knew the Old Testament teachings up, down, and sideways. Pharisees were known to take extreme measures to ensure they kept each of God's commands. Jesus was not talking here about God's imputing Christ's righteousness to sinners who believe in Him (justification). No, here He meant doing right by others, saying the right words, making the right choices, doing the right things—all the attitudes and actions labeled right in Scriptures.

Scribes and Pharisees were convinced they were righteous, and most people agreed with them. Their lives literally revolved around keeping religious rules, traditions, and rituals. Rabbis over centuries had been debating and defining how each biblical command was to be obeyed and how it could be broken. This resulted in a multitude of rules that formed a tradition they viewed as having as much authority as the Scriptures. Why, then, didn't Jesus commend them for their conscientious and scrupulous efforts to obey the law? Here's why: Their supposed righteousness was based on outward deeds rather than inward devotion (see Isaiah 29:13).

#### MATTHEW 6:5-8

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In Matthew 6, Jesus dealt with the heart attitudes that lay behind noble actions. The great Physician exposed the malignant sin of selfish hypocrisy. He does not desire His kingdom citizens to do right things from wrong motives. Going through the motions of keeping the law does not please God if your heart is not right. Jesus came to change your heart; He is not satisfied with an outward cosmetic change.

6:5. Because He says "whenever you pray," Jesus indeed expects us to pray. He often prayed early at the beginning of the day. At times, He prayed all night, especially before major decisions or significant events. Jesus cited three kinds of prayer to avoid. First, don't pray as those who love to be seen praying in synagogues and on street corners. Jesus was cautioning against praying in public with the motive of receiving admiring glances and pats on the back for being so devout.

6:6. Jesus instructed us to find a private place for prayer where thoughts of people's responses won't distract us. Thus in secret, we can focus on the Father. The greatest reward for praying may be simply having a personal conversation with God; He whom we cannot see sees us and hears us as well (v. 6). Jesus even provided a model prayer to show us how to pray. It begins with a focus on God and His purposes before moving to our personal requests.

6:7. A second mistake when praying is to babble like the idolaters. Jesus was not forbidding prayer for the same thing over and over (see 26:39-44). He even told parables about persistence in prayer (Matt. 7:7-11). Jesus stressed that the Father listens to earnest hearts, not endless words, especially when the words are mechanical. The word translated "babble" appears only here in the Bible (Matt. 6:7). Because of the word's sound, the basic meaning has been suggested as "to stammer"; that is, to repeat words. A derived meaning came to imply going on and on without thinking. This is reflected in various ways such as "use vain [or meaningless] repetitions," "heap up empty phrases," and the like. Prayer that is babble is prayer in form only; it has no substance. Jesus said idolaters prayed that way. Layering on words doesn't impress God, nor do prayers offered with the mind in neutral and the heart focused elsewhere.

6:8. Third, we need not feel compelled to inform God of endless details about our needs. Jesus reminded us the Father knows the things we need before we ask Him. This is not to discourage us from making specific requests in prayer, for He invites us to do that (7:7-11). It does assure us that He will answer in ways that best meet our needs, further His kingdom, and enhance our usefulness.