

Relating to the Law

As Jesus sat to teach His disciples, He began with important attitudes that ought to characterize their lives as His disciples, the citizens of His kingdom.

These characteristics deal with **who** His followers **are**, rather than **what** His followers **do**. He follows this up with a metaphor through which He encourages them to retain their flavor like salt and radiate their light to the world around them, even if the world treats them badly for it.

Jesus now turns His attention to the law, beginning with an introduction to the subject with some important principles concerning His relationship to the law. Principles that if received, will help His disciples to deal with some of the confusion and criticism that will arise during His ministry.

- Jesus is not a pharisee, so does He teach the law?
- Jesus eats with sinners, so does He disregard the law?
- Jesus heals on the sabbath, so does He think He's above the law?

So before setting out to offer new insight and interpretation to the law, He first establishes His own relationship to it.

READ: Matthew 5:17-20

1. Jesus' relationship with the law. 5:17-18

a) He came to fulfil it.

17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

- While it is true that the Tanakh, or the Old Testament was divided into differing categories like the law, the prophets, history, and wisdom/poetic literature, when this term law and prophets is used in the New Testament it almost always refers to the entirety of the Hebrew scriptures.

NOTE: Jesus came as the living word of God, but rather than destroy or contradict the written word He came to fulfill it!

APPLICATION: We need to be careful in our estimation of the Old Testament. Without it we cannot fully understand the gospel and if Jesus esteemed it so highly we ought to follow His lead.

QUESTION: In what ways does Jesus fulfill OT scripture?

➤ **Through Prophetic Realization**

- One of the major reasons Matthew writes this gospel is to demonstrate how Jesus fulfills the predictive prophecies of the Messiah in the OT. Several have already been pointed out by Matthew.
 - *Jesus is the son of David.*
 - *Jesus is the son of Abraham.*
 - *Jesus was born of a virgin.*
 - *Jesus was born in Bethlehem.*
 - *Jesus was baptized by John.*
 - *Jesus ministered in Galilee.*

- It is through His perfect fulfillment of predictive prophecy that we can without any doubt identify Jesus as Messiah. The probability of a person fulfilling only a few of these prophecies is staggering, for one to fulfill them all is a miracle worthy of our consideration and affection.

NOTE: Not long ago we looked more deeply at some of the incredible prophecies fulfilled by Jesus, and while an extremely important study and certainly applicable to what Jesus states, I believe that He has something different in mind here.

➤ **Through Perfect Righteousness**

- Because this serves as an introduction to what Jesus is going to say, it helps us to identify what Jesus has in mind when He speaks of fulfilling of the law and prophets, and His perfect righteousness appears to be His major point.

GREEK: Fulfill - *Pleroo* (*play-ro'-o*) means to fill fully, to cram a fishing net full – and the righteousness of Jesus completely and perfectly fulfils or satisfies God's law as intended.

- The NT is clear concerning the life of Jesus. He was perfectly righteous according to the law both inwardly and outwardly.

NOTE: Jesus certainly broke with Jewish tradition when it came to keeping the law, but He lived His life in perfect obedience to the law itself.

Heb 4:15

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

- The NT is also clear that according to the law, there is nobody aside from Jesus who has lived such a life. *Rom 3:23* This is not good news, because the wages of sin is death! *Rom 6:23*

Isa 64:6

*But we are all like an unclean thing,
And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags;*

APPLICATION: This is the heart of the gospel message. That though you were indebted concerning righteousness, under the sentence of death due to sin that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus your sins have been paid for, God's wrath forward you has been settled, and the righteousness of Jesus is offered freely to you by God's grace!

Rom 3:21-26

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

2 Cor 5:21

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Rom 5:18-21

18 Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

20 Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, 21 so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

APPLICATION: When we read of Jesus' perfect righteousness it does more than present to us a path to follow, that might only serve to further discourage us. It presents to us a gift to receive, His righteousness added to our account!

➤ **Through Proper Revelation**

- The teaching of Jesus would be very different from what the people were hearing and seeing from the Pharisee's. Most of these teachers regurgitated interpretations from previous rabbis, esteeming the traditions of men as highly as the word of God. The teaching of Jesus however would reveal a proper understanding and application of scripture which would openly oppose these other teachers.

NOTE: Pharisee means separated one, and these men were widely regarded as righteous because of their strict adherence to the written law as well as the hundreds of oral traditions and regulations written on how one must keep the law. Externally, nobody appeared more righteous than these men.

- This intense pursuit of righteousness elevated external performance above inward character, to the extent that in Matthew 23 Jesus will refer to them as hypocrites who were like whitewashed tombs.

APPLICATION: The teaching of the pharisee's remains active today. There are plenty of people who pay attention only to what they are doing and not enough attention to who

they are. Remember, God doesn't see as man see's, men look at the outward appearance whereas God He looks at the heart. What you did this week matters less than where your heart is this morning!

Luke 18:9-14

Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

NOTE: It's tragic when I hear of someone who refuses fellowship because they feel too sinful to come. They may think they are avoiding hypocrisy, when they may actually demonstrate they have bought into the deception of self righteousness. The real way to avoid hypocrisy is to humble yourself before God openly and honestly. When we only come to church when we performed well we risk becoming more like the Pharisee than we think.

b) It will be fulfilled completely.

18 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.

➤ **Scripture will persevere**

- Jesus here reveals His high regard for scripture by pointing out the fact that it will persevere till the end. In doing this, He assures His followers that they can trust that God's word will persevere.

NOTE: Sadly, there are so many people who have lost confidence in God's word. Pastors refuse to teach it, as if the words of men as if they are more reliable or relatable than Gods. People refuse to read it thinking it is outdated, as if there were something better to help them through life. Some turn to substances, others pursue various forms of spirituality.

APPLICATION: In a world that is rapidly changing, where what were once considered facts are now fluid, we must turn to the word of God more than ever as our constant source of objective truth! The world may grow increasingly hostile toward the truth, but it will outlive this world!

- “Save the planet” is the cry of this world, but there will be some who gain the whole world and lose their own souls. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, He came that you might have abundant and eternal life through Him. The message of the creator will outlast the creation that so many people live for.

➤ **Scripture will be preserved**

- Not only will scripture persevere, but to the smallest detail it will be preserved and fulfilled.

NOTE: A jot and a tittle are the smallest markings in Hebrew writing. A jot is something like an apostrophe, whereas a tittle is even smaller.

- Scripture is reliable, and will be fulfilled from its biggest thoughts to its smallest letters.

NOTE: I find it rather disturbing that while Jesus thought of scripture so highly, there are some in the church today who attempt to undermine it completely, changing words to suit their theology, and choosing to ignore deeper study as it undermines what they desire to believe.

- When we think of scripture today, we ought to recognize that what we read are at best translations of scripture from their original language. Most of the time translators do a good job but there is one method of translation that I believe more trustworthy for study than others – and that is word for word translation rather than thought for thought or thought equivalent.

NOTE: There are still other Bibles that present themselves as translations that are in fact paraphrases. This is a persons attempt to interpret the Bible for you, and if read as a translation rather than a paraphrase it can be quite dangerous. Some can be quite helpful, while others may not be. A popular one that comes to mind is the Message, but an even more dangerous one that bills itself as a translation is called the passion translation.

APPLICATION: Though there have been people who have attempted to corrupt or destroy scripture, Jesus came to fulfil it and He promises that it will persevere and be preserved permanently.

2. Our relationship with the law. 5:19-20

READ: 5:19-20

19 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. 20 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.

a) *We should promote real righteousness*

- What becomes obvious as Jesus speaks is that He is taking aim at the scribes and pharisees, two differing Jewish religious sects that were active during the life and ministry of Jesus.

NOTE: The scribes were mainly responsible for anything pertaining to writing, and they were experts in legal documentation. The Pharisee's were also well versed in the law both written and oral, as well as being involved in politics. Though not entirely accurate, the scribes sought to record the law while the Pharisee's behaved like the law enforcers, imposing the laws on the people.

- These groups are the obvious reference, as they imposed the law on others but were themselves guilty of breaking the law – and Jesus calls them the least in the kingdom.

APPLICATION: This is a sobering thought for anyone acting or aspiring to the role of a teacher. This role may be a blessed one, but only when that teacher lives according to the things that he teaches.

James 3:1

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

b) We should pursue real righteousness

- This is the entire crux of the matter; Jesus implores His followers toward a better kind of righteousness than that of the scribes and pharisees. In fact, He warns His followers that such a righteousness will not lead them to the Kingdom of God!

NOTE: I imagine this would have stunned many in the crowd. Many of the people listening to Jesus would not have been able to read, let alone interpret the scriptures for themselves. They had grown up on a diet of teaching they received from these men, and for them the Pharisees were a picture of righteousness. There was nobody who appeared to keep the laws better than they did, so how are the followers of Jesus to exceed the righteousness of these religious men?

- It is through the inward righteousness that is ultimately ours by faith in Jesus! It isn't that we need to do more work than the Pharisees, or keep the laws better than them – it's that we need Christ!

Phil 3:5-11

circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

- In Christ we are offered real righteousness through faith!

FINAL NOTES: Jesus will continue by identifying the true nature of the law and what we will see is that according to the law we are all condemned. This isn't to say that the law has been destroyed, or that it is in some way evil – the law instead serves its purpose to condemn us as sinners so that we would seek real righteousness through Christ!

The Pharisees sought righteousness through religion, we find it through relationship.

