



Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church

The Sermon on the Mount - Part 1 • Performance Based Love • Matthew 5:17-22 • 07/01/2018

Main Point

God's love for us is not impacted by our performance for Him.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What are some of the ways you have used the word “love” today? What were the objects of that love?

Do you think, given how much we use the word, that we define “love” the way God does?

If not, what do you think we mean when we use the word? How can that definition of love be destructive in our relationship with God?

We love movies, food, relatives, pets, and celebrities. In short, we are a culture in love with being in love. But the very fact that we use the same word to describe how we feel about pizza that we do about how God relates to us reveals that we have bought into lies regarding the nature of love. When we use the word love, we typically refer to a feeling that ebbs and flows based on circumstances. But God's love is radically different than that. Rather than being based on the object, God's love is based in Himself. That's why the love of God does not change based on our performance.

Understanding

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

Do you ever feel like you have to perform for God to approve of you? In what kinds of situations are you most likely to feel that way?

Does that need for performance-approval bleed into other areas of your life (i.e., parenting, work, friendships, etc.)? If so, what does that indicate about the way you view God's love?

What in your current life or your past might contribute to the belief that you have to perform in order for God to love you?

A firm belief in God's unchanging love is essential for us to move forward spiritually. Until we truly believe God loves us, apart from our performance, our spiritual lives will be stagnant. We'll constantly be trying to prove ourselves to God. Fortunately, Jesus helps us see that we are free from this lie because of what He has done on our behalf.

| Have a volunteer read Matthew 5:17-22.

What did Jesus mean by saying He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets?

Jesus' use of "the Law and the Prophets" referred to two key sections of the Old Testament. During His ministry, Jesus was accused of preaching a new religion, because His teaching often contradicted the common beliefs of His day. Jesus loved the Law and the Prophets—He created them, and He came to keep them perfectly and bring God's covenant promises to fruition.

Why wasn't the way the scribes and Pharisees obeyed the law sufficient?

What was Jesus trying to communicate when He said we must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees? How did this teaching raise people's expectation of righteousness?

In verse 20, Jesus said that the kingdom belongs to those whose righteousness outshines that of the scribes and Pharisees. The scribes were the keepers of Scripture (in this case the Old Testament), and the Pharisees were the teachers 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.

How does Jesus' interpretation of murder (v. 21) show what kind of righteousness He is looking for?

Is that interpretation encouraging or discouraging to you? Why? Is it possible for you to achieve that level of righteousness?

At first, this passage might seem like bad news—that no matter how hard we try, we will never live up to God's standard of righteousness. But remember that Jesus has fulfilled the Law perfectly. Because He has, the burden of performance is lifted from us.

| Have a volunteer read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.

In what sense are you a new creation right now?

Have you ever considered that you have become the righteousness of Christ—the kind of righteousness that He described in Matthew 5? How does knowing that make you feel?

How does believing that we have the righteousness of Christ combat the lie that the better we perform, the more God will love us?

Why might God want you to know, today, that you don't have to perform to earn His love?

How would knowing that change the way you relate to Him?

God is not the kind of father who is always looking for his children to earn his affection. Nor is he like the employer who constantly demands the bigger and better work. He has fully given His love and approval to us, not because of our merit, but based on the sacrifice of Jesus. When we stop believing the lie of performance, we move deeper into the great life of joy that God has for us.

Application

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

Does knowing you don't have to earn God's approval affect your behavior? How so?

How can you best live in the freedom of God's love? What specifically does the knowledge of His love free you to do?

Pray

Pray and thank God that His love for you is not dependent on your performance for Him. Thank God for the life and death of Jesus Christ who fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. Ask Him for the faith to believe what He says to be true about you in Christ.

Commentary

| Matthew 5:17-20

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).