

## iT's a Matter of the Heart

### Scripture Reading — Matthew 5:17-20

*"Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees ... you will ... not enter the kingdom."  
Matt. 5:20 —*

On Saturday nights my grandfather shaved, and my grandmother peeled potatoes for the next day's meal. Sunday shoes were also polished on Saturday nights. As children, we were not allowed to ride our bikes or play sports on Sundays. These were some of the rules we grew up with. They were set with good intentions, but there was a danger in thinking that if you simply followed the rules, you could be a Christian.

Jesus teaches that a true believer is not someone who just follows rules. You may be as strict as Pharisees in observing the laws of God, Jesus says, but you still have to be more righteous than they are. The Pharisees were religious leaders who added many rules to God's law of the Old Testament, thinking this would make them obedient in every situation.

For example, some Pharisees walked around with their heads bowed so that they would avoid looking at any woman. They figured this would protect them from ever violating the commandment "You shall not commit adultery." As a result, they would often bump into buildings and other things, which caused them to bleed. So they were called "Bleeding Pharisees."

We need to obey God's law, but we can't treat it like a mere list of external rules. Our love for God and neighbor must come from the heart, as Jesus shows.

### Prayer

*Sometimes, Lord, I have a heart problem. I do the external things, but I miss the joy of serving you. Holy Spirit, renew my heart today. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

**Devotion topics:** [Bible](#), [Books of the Bible](#)

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