

# Jesus Against the Pharisees

By Don Green

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**Truth Community Church**  
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45255

**Website:** [truthcommunitychurch.org](http://truthcommunitychurch.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm](http://www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm)

Well, we are about to embark on a very crucial month to six weeks of teaching at Truth Community Church and I try to restrain when I say that because all of God's word is important, all of Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work, so every time that we would gather together and open the word of God, it's an important time because it's always important for God's people to hear what God has to say in his word. So that's always the case but what we're about to come into over the next several weeks on Sunday mornings and also for a couple of weeks on Tuesday, are just so absolutely fundamental for a correct understanding of Scripture and theology, of understanding the relationship of the law to the Gospel, the relationship of Christ to the law, of the relationship of the law to your own life, and the relationship that being a Christian has to all of those different realms, how God works in salvation and what is the responsibility of man in salvation. These are great important lofty themes that we are about to come into today and it all flows just from a natural study, a verse by verse exposition of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. So I say those things to encourage you to be especially diligent to be with us and to be able to hear the teaching of God's word, especially on the two Tuesdays that are about to come, because we're coming to things that are going to greatly clarify your understanding of Scripture, your understanding of your relationship to the word of God, and all of it begins to flow from the text that we are about to see in Matthew 5. I invite you to turn to Matthew 5 if you haven't already. Matthew 5, these lofty themes that are going to come to us.

As we begin our study, I'd just like to remind you of a very basic, important, foundational point: how is it that we know what the biblical author meant by what he said? We've studied this in the past, it's the question of hermeneutics, the science and the art of Bible interpretation. How do we know what the Bible means by what it says? There is no more important fundamental question that you could ask than that. It is only in the Bible that we have God's word, everything else is darkness. There is a circle of light, so to speak, in Scripture and everything outside of it is darkness. When we enter into that realm of light, that realm of God's word and we read it, how do we know what it means? How can we understand it? Well, in very simple and basic terms, we take the biblical writer in the natural sense of the words that he uses with his audience in their historical context. We don't look for hidden meanings. The whole idea of Bible codes that flourished a long time ago and people thought you could find secret messages in the Bible if you just looked at

it like a crossword puzzle and circled different things, that's all a bunch of hooley. That's a technical theological term that I have picked up since I began living in Kentucky, I guess. That's all a bunch of hooley. We don't read scripture in an allegorical way. We don't look for secret meanings behind the text. We simply read it for the words that it uses and understand them in their natural sense. That's very liberating. That means that Scripture is available to all who would read it with a dependence upon the Holy Spirit and that there is not a secret realm of knowledge underneath the text, not a hidden code that is reserved only for a few certain select people like groups like the Masons would teach, that they've got a secret knowledge that goes beyond Scripture. No, none of that. None of that. The word of God is open to everyone who would come and read it with a believing heart. This is what God has done for us and the way that he has done that is that we would read the words in their natural sense, what is apparent on the surface.

Along with that we say that we read those words in their historical context. We understand that we are stepping back 2,000 years and we need to understand these words as the original audience understood them and then bring it forward, rather than imposing our 21st-century mindset and saying Scripture must mean this because this is what it means to me, and what I think and this is what it means to me, therefore it must be what it means. Well look, beloved, I don't want to insult you or step on your toes, but no one cares what Scripture means to you. What matters is what Scripture means and that's what we're after, what Scripture means. What does Scripture mean if you had never been born, that's the question. What is the enduring meaning of Scripture, that's what we want to get at, and only then when we understand that do we ask questions of application, "Well, what do I do in light of that? How do I respond in light of that?" All of this is tied up in what is technically known as the grammatical historical method of interpreting the Bible and it is critical, all that background is critical for us to keep in mind as we go to our text today in Matthew 5:17 through 20. That's what I'm going to read for you here now and set the context for what we are about to consider together.

Matthew 5, beginning in verse 17.

17 Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Now, let me remind you a little bit of the context. I'm really glad, in a sense, that we're through the holidays and we're through my being away last week and all of that. We kind of need to settle into this passage as a church and what's ahead over the next few weeks as I've already said, are really critical to us developing and growing and maturing as a body of believers in our understanding of Scripture. This passage, verses 17 through 20,

is jam-packed with critical material. It is like drinking a triple espresso, is that a word even? I don't drink coffee, I don't know. But it's very intense. It's very concentrated in its importance and so we're going to take a few weeks to deal with this carefully and bit by bit. Of so many passages in Scripture, this is not one to rush through. And if the weight of the importance of this has never been brought to you, then this is a very critical time for you personally as well as for us as a body.

What's going on here in this passage? This is nothing less than a colossal confrontation between the Lord Jesus Christ and the existing religious authorities of the day. Christ here is asserting his authority and his truth over against the scribes and the Pharisees who were the dominating spiritual influence in life at that time in the Jewish world. And we're going to understand Jesus through the eyes of his audience today and understand why Jesus is saying what he is saying right here at this point. Why this, why did Jesus have to say this right now? Well, just by way of review, remember that he had opened up in the beginning 8 to 10 verses with the Beatitudes and he had pronounced his blessing on a certain type of spiritual character: those who are poor in spirit, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who are pure in heart, those who are peacemakers, and on it goes. Jesus is saying and he goes on and he says to his disciples, to these group of people who were listening to his teaching, "The people like you are the light of the world. People like you are the salt of the earth."

Now remember, we have to understand that in its original historical context and what that meant. What was the context in which these people heard these words? You see, to you and me who have grown up in a Christian environment maybe or have been somewhere around the teaching of Christianity, it doesn't strike our ears that this would be something really revolutionary, something very vibrant, something different because we're kind of in the flow of that, we understand certain things. Well, Jesus is teaching this even before the Bible was completed and the people that were hearing these words were hearing it with a completely different set of presuppositions than what you and I would bring to the table as we read God's word in this way. They were in a religious environment that was dominated by a group known as the Pharisees and we need to spend a little time just considering some background information about the Pharisees so that we could understand how that would affect the way they heard what Jesus had to say, and that's what we're going to do. We're going to break this simple message into two parts this morning. The first point that you need to write down in your notes, we're just going to call the control of the Pharisees. That will be point 1, then secondly, we're going to see the confrontation of Jesus in the second half of our message.

The control of the Pharisees. As the people listened to Jesus, they came to it with a mindset that was pre-existing. Beloved, this is so very important for you to know and to understand. When Jesus began teaching the people in front of him, he was not teaching people that had blank slates in their minds. They were people of their day. They were people of their culture. They were people of their spiritual environment. And they had prior beliefs that they brought to the table about God and about religious authority. Jesus' audience had been raised on the Old Testament since their birth. They had known the law of Moses. They had known the prophets. They had known the writings of these Old

Testament authors that we still study today. And beloved, as part of the economy of God in that, there were multiple feasts and multiple spiritual observances that reinforced those Old Testament truths to their minds from season to season and from year to year. There was a pattern of repetition that inculcated certain things into their minds that they just assumed to be true.

Now, the religious leaders were the Pharisees and that's who we need to spend some time contemplating here today. The Pharisees had strict views of the law. They were meticulous in their outward religious observances and they were the ones who were setting the spiritual tone for the people that were hearing Jesus when he spoke at this time. This is not incidental side information, this is central to what Jesus is saying so I encourage you to stay with me as we go through this. We're going to look at a lot of different passages here this morning. But the New Testament teaches us, contrary to some modern scholars who try to shave the edges off of it, the New Testament teaches us that the Pharisees were men of pride. They had a condescending attitude toward others. The Pharisees viewed themselves as the ones who kept the rules and other people didn't. They viewed themselves as the guardians of truth and everyone else was opposed to it. And Scripture shows us that they were self-righteous and they viewed other people with contempt, and these were the men who were setting the spiritual tone of the day.

Look over at the Gospel of John 7 just to illustrate this for you. John 7. And what we're doing here this morning as you're turning there, we're digging up ground and we're pouring concrete and we're laying a very important foundation for things that are going to come in the weeks to come. We have to be careful here. We need to take our time here and not rush through this with platitudes because when you see the control that the Pharisees had over the multitudes, you'll understand something of the magnitude of the confrontation that Jesus was bringing in the Sermon on the Mount.

John 7:45. The Pharisees were responding to a debate that the people were having over the identity of Christ. Look at verse 40, "Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words," speaking of the words of Christ, "were saying, 'This certainly is the Prophet.' Others were saying, 'This is the Christ.' Still others were saying, 'Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?' So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him. Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him." So Jesus has been teaching and there is this recognition that there is someone unique in their midst but they can't quite figure it out. It's like when you wake up just out of a dream and the lights aren't on yet and you're kind of rubbing your eyes and you know that something is going on but your mind is fuzzy, it's cloudy, and you're trying to figure out what's in front of you. That's a little bit of a picture of what was going on and it is shown by the differences of opinion of who they were even listening to.

So in verse 45, this is all just to kind of set up things with the Pharisees, "The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, 'Why did you not bring Him?'" They wanted these officers to take Jesus into custody and bring him to these

religious leaders. "The officers answered, 'Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks.'" They are reporting back and saying, "You don't know, you don't realize what you're doing. No one speaks like this man. There is something unique." They were awestruck by what they had heard in Jesus' teaching. Well, what I want you to see is the way that the Pharisees responded to that. You know, I spoke of their condescension and their contempt for others and you see it bleeding out, you see it pouring out of their response to these men in verse 47, "The Pharisees then answered them, 'You have not also been led astray, have you? No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed.'" So they dismissed, they just asserted their own personal sense of importance as that which would settle the question. "We haven't believed in him. How could you know anything? And these crowds that are listening to him, well, they're just the accursed masses. No one would listen to them. No one should follow them." So the Pharisees were full of this contempt that said, "We're the religious authorities here. Don't pay attention to anyone else." And into that environment Jesus steps and speaks.

Now, let me give you a little bit of background about the teaching of the Pharisees because it's central to what Jesus taught as well. Again, stay with me. I realize this is sounding a bit more like a lecture in New Testament history than it is in Bible exposition, but it's all foundational to what we need to do over the next several weeks. Central to the Pharisees' teaching, central to their philosophy, was a belief that there was an oral tradition; they held to an oral tradition that was crucial to their interpretation of the Old Testament. The Pharisees, not unlike modern Catholics today who have their own body of tradition that they hold up on equal authority with the true Scriptures, the Pharisees believed that God in addition to the written word of God that we have today, that alongside that God had given an oral law to Moses; that he disclosed other things to Moses in addition to what was written down. And they said and they taught that Moses took this oral tradition and gave it to Joshua, and Joshua gave it to the elders of Israel, and the elders gave it to the prophets, and the prophets then, how convenient, give it to the Pharisees to uphold and to be that which should be communicated. Now, it is essential for you to realize there is no historical basis for that belief just as there is no historical basis for the tradition teaching of the Catholic Church. None whatsoever. It is not rooted in the revelation of God at all. It's all made up. But for the Pharisees, that presupposition allowed them – watch this – it allowed them to add things to God's word. It allowed them to add regulations and other observances and other things that the people had to follow if they wanted to be believers in the Old Testament. So they had the written revelation of God but then they added onto it a bunch of oral teaching that they say came down through the centuries and that that was part of their authority, that was part of their mystique, and they believe that this oral tradition had equal authority to the written law of Moses.

Take a breath. And what the Pharisees taught and what they believed was this: that through their tradition, you could get to a true understanding of the law. Indeed they said that if you follow our tradition, it would keep you from violating the law. What's the effect of that? They set themselves up as an exclusive club, as those who have possession of something unique; they have a key that no one else has that can get you into the

meaning of God's word. So many parallels to Catholicism in that. The Pharisees were men of great influence. They controlled the synagogues. They influenced people with their teaching and their charity. They dressed in a way that made them stand apart, that would call attention to themselves, and everything about their demeanor, about their teaching, about their philosophies, about their influence, elevated them in the sight of the general population and the people looked to the Pharisees as the one who had it, the ones who taught the truth, the ones who could be believed to say the true things about God. The first century historian, Josephus, a contemporary of all of these things, said this in his writings and I quote, he said, "The Pharisees have so great a power over the multitude that when they say anything against the king or against the high priest, they are immediately believed."

So you see from just a little bit of basic background both from Scripture and from contemporary history, that the Pharisees held a unique place of influence, authority and respect in that time. The people respected them to such an extent that they – watch this – they equated the teaching of the Pharisees with what the Old Testament itself meant. There was no space between the two. Whatever the Pharisees said to the common man was what the Old Testament meant. To contradict the Pharisees would be to contradict God's word. That's how serious and how involved all of this was.

Now, that's the control of the Pharisees. Here's what you need to see, beloved, and all of a sudden why Jesus says what he says in Matthew 5:17 is going to explode on your understanding. When Jesus begins teaching his disciples, that's the mindset that they're bringing. That's the spiritual conditions and presuppositions. That's the prism through which they would have understood things. The Pharisees were the truth. The Pharisees were equated with the Old Testament. To contradict that would be to go against the Old Testament and that shaped the way that they would have received what Jesus was teaching because of the control of the Pharisees, not only over the synagogues but over the way that they thought and their very way of thinking was conditioned by this in a way that is hard for us to understand standing 2,000 years later.

Well, beloved, what happens? Jesus steps onto the scene. We can start our second point here: the confrontation of Jesus. The confrontation of Jesus. And what happened is this, is that Jesus shows up in his public ministry and he begins teaching and he's not in that same class. He's not coming to them from the same perspective and yet as he taught, men knew that they were hearing unparalleled greatness fall from his lips. They knew that whatever they were hearing was something completely different from what they were accustomed to.

Let me show you this from a couple of different passages. Go back to Matthew at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7. These are things that you tend to just gloss over as you're reading Scripture but it's important for us to see now. In Matthew 7:28 and 29, "When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." Look over at Matthew 13. You can find statements like this throughout the four Gospels. I'm just going to give you three in the context of the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew 13:54, "[Jesus] came

to His hometown and began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?'" One more in Matthew 22:33, "When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching." Again and again and again, the Gospel of Matthew calls attention to the fact that the crowds were astonished by the teaching that they were hearing at the feet of Jesus. And in some of the passages that we've looked at that we saw just now, they say, "This isn't like what our scribes did. There is an authority here that is unlike anything that we've heard. This man is distinct and he has power and he has authority and there is a clarity and there is a force to the way that he teaches that is totally different from anything that we've experienced in our lifetimes. We know nothing of anything like this."

So on the one hand put yourself, as I like to say, put yourself in the sandals of these first century hearers of Jesus. On the one hand, they have this mindset that they have been conditioned from birth, the Pharisees are the mouthpiece of the word of God. Not to be questioned. They hear Jesus speaking and they say, "This is completely different. There is a power, there is an authority there that is distinct from anything that we have known." So in their minds now there is this conflict, "What do we follow? What do we do?" The Pharisees are the representatives of God, so they thought, and yet there is nothing like this. There is a truth and a self-authenticating veracity to what Jesus said and they are torn. They are caught in the middle of it and that created a problem for them.

Going further, diving a little deeper into the Gospel of Matthew from a big picture perspective with this conflict now in your minds, you understand how they are seeing it. Along with this, Jesus as he goes through his public ministry, consistently embarrassed the Pharisees by exposing their ignorance and their violation of the law of God that they supposedly were upholding. He does this repeatedly and we need to see this in multiple ways. We need to take our time here so that the weight of the detail would help you see the massive confrontation that's taking place because this is fundamental to understanding the New Testament and what happened over the course of Jesus' ministry.

So with that in mind, remembering that the Pharisees had this aura about them that they were the authority, go to Matthew 12, for example. And what happens repeatedly in the New Testament is that Jesus starts to do things that were violating the rules that the Pharisees had made up and so the Pharisees challenge him and say he could not be from God because he's not keeping our rules.

Matthew 12:1, "At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, 'Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.'" They are asserting their authority. They are saying, "You're breaking authority. You're not from God." But Jesus in verse 3 said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? But I say to you

that something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,' then you would not have condemned the innocent." Jesus meets their charge with a response that says, "The word of God does not support your position. Haven't you even read it? Don't you know your own Scriptures?"

Look over at chapter 19, verse 3, "Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?' And He answered and said, 'Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.'" What I want you to see here is Jesus says, "Haven't you even read the Scriptures?"

One more, chapter 21 in Matthew. Turn over to verse 14 in chapter 21. The New Testament also alludes to a group of men known as the scribes. These were the scholars of the Pharisees that did a lot of the teaching. There was a broad group called the Pharisees that comprised layman and others, there was a subset within them, they are specialists, the teachers, the scribes, generally speaking. And in verse 14 of chapter 21, "the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they became indignant 16 and said to Him, 'Do You hear what these children are saying?' And Jesus said to them, 'Yes; have you never read, "Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself"?"

Look, this was unthinkable. Those of you that grew up in the Catholic Church as traditional Catholics and were conditioned never to question the priest, you have some kind of sense of what this is like. Jesus confronts these people who were supposedly the guardians of the law and says, "You're ignorant of the very law that you claim to uphold. You have no idea what you're talking about." And he shows them from Scripture how that is true. "Haven't you even read the most basic fundamental points of the law that you say that you teach?" There it is, like a surgeon's scalpel splaying open their condition, splaying open their hearts and in an undeniable way, showing that it was all a façade, it was all fake, it was all a show, there was no substance to the authority that they claimed.

Now, you're in the sandals of the first century disciple and you are seeing everything that you believed about life to be demolished. You're seeing it undone. You're seeing it destroyed before your very eyes in an irrefutable way. But Jesus went further. Go back to Matthew 12. This message, it's like 50 minutes of introduction and five minutes of exposition. That's really weird, I know, but that's what's happening here. All of this is introduction to a five-minute message that I'm going to give at the close here.

Matthew 12:38, Jesus not only exposes them in teaching, he outwardly and explicitly condemns them. Verse 38, Matthew 12:38, "some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.' But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the



sign of Jonah the prophet." You want a sign? I'll tell you what that's a sign of I'll show you what that indicates, it shows that you are an evil and adulterous generation. He condemns them as spiritually guilty by even making the request.

Chapter 16, if you would. Chapter 16 in this same line. This is so repeated. This is so recurrent and the recurrent nature of the theme shows you how central this is to Matthew's Gospel. Matthew 16, "The Pharisees and Sadducees came up," verse 1, "and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. But He replied to them, 'When it is evening, you say, "It will be fair weather, for the sky is red." And in the morning, "There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening." Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times? An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.' And He left them and went away." Condemning them, "You are wicked." Saying that to the people who were supposedly the guardians of God's word, who were supposedly the religious authority not to be questioned, those who were immediately believed. And it's not just that this is a matter, it's not just that Jesus showed up as some guy on the street doing this, remember his teaching was accompanied by miraculous signs that vindicated his authority, that authenticated it, that he spoke with an authority that everyone recognized. So all of a sudden there is this great confrontation taking place through the lips and the hands of Christ. He condemned them as false teachers who transgressed the law of God while pretending to uphold it. They were blind guides who only produced sons of hell.

Look at Matthew 23 in a chapter where Jesus continually condemns the Pharisees. Matthew 23, beginning in verse 1, "Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: 'The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.'" Verse 12, he says, "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." Now look at verse 13, "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation." Verse 15, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' You fools and blind men!" And on and on and on he goes.

Now, stepping back from all of that, what do we see in all of this is that when Jesus came and began his teaching ministry and as he carried it on through his public ministry, Jesus had declared spiritual war against the existing spiritual authorities of the time and this was shocking to his hearers. They had to process all of this. Incidentally, it explains the hostility that the religious authorities had against him. It wasn't because he was doing good deeds or doing kind things, Jesus was a threat to their system. Jesus was attracting a crowd. People were beginning to follow him and their position of exclusive authority was crumbling before their very eyes. That's why they wanted to kill him, they had to put an end to this threat to their way of life, to their system, especially to their position. Pilate realized, Scripture says, that they handed him over to Pilate to be crucified simply because they were envious of him. What Jesus was doing, Jesus was proving his authority, his real authority, and in the process he was exposing their sham, their game, the fact that there was no substance to it, that they were not the men of God that people supposed them to be. He threatened their position.

Now, here's my five minutes of sermon now after that 40 minute introduction. Go back to what I said. This all ties together. We understand Scripture by understanding it in its historical and grammatical context. In the historical context of his audience, they would have thought with their presupposition that for Jesus to oppose the Pharisees whom they acquainted with the law and the Old Testament, for Jesus to oppose the Pharisees meant that he was setting himself in opposition to the written word of God and Jesus has to correct that misunderstanding.

With all of that background in mind, go to Matthew 5 again. Matthew 5:17, we will pick this up more next week and let's try to wrap all of this together before we go to the beginning of Matthew 5:17. You've seen from Scriptures that we referred to of the self-righteous, pompous attitude of the Pharisees, their condescending attitude. Jesus exposes them as being concerned only with external ritual and what Jesus has done here in the Sermon on the Mount is he opens his teaching by pronouncing blessing on people who had a certain kind of inner character, who had a certain kind of heart, a certain kind of demeanor, a disposition of humility, of brokenness over sin and desiring righteousness. This had nothing to do, there was none of that reflected in the teaching of the Pharisees. They just gloried in the external observances and controlling people. Jesus says, "This is the character that God blesses, blessed are the people who are poor in spirit, who mourn over their sin, who are meek, who hunger and thirst for righteousness." This was never on the lips of the Pharisees. Then Jesus goes, having gone through the Beatitudes, looking at disciples having just said, "This is the character that God blesses," and he says, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world." Not the Pharisees. People of an inner character, not those that were in the established religious elite. And this was new wine in old wineskins to their mind. It was going to burst their minds. And the temptation, the spiritual threat, the mental pitfall that they were about to fall into was to think that Jesus therefore was opposed to the law of God when in reality he was only opposed to the Pharisees who had hijacked the law to their own purposes.

So Jesus in that context, with that flowing from his teaching in Matthew 5:3-16 says this in verse 17, he says, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did

not come to abolish but to fulfill." Like I said, we'll look at this more next week. But Jesus here gives them a command that has the sense, it's a negative command that has the sense, "Don't start. Don't do this. Whatever you do, don't go there in your thinking. Don't think that I am opposed to the law of God. Quite to the contrary, I didn't come to abolish it, I didn't come to tear it down, I came to fulfill it. I am the fulfillment of everything that the Old Testament Scriptures had to say. I am not here to tear it down," in a sense, he's here to rescue it from those who had hijacked it over the preceding years. Jesus is saying, "I'm not the one departing from the law. Your Pharisees, these that you hold up as your authority, they are the ones who have departed. They are the ones who are the heretics. They are the ones who have led you astray."

So Jesus here in Matthew 5:17 is addressing a critical pivot point in the thinking of his audience. As they hear him teach things that undermine the Pharisees, as they hear him teach and condemn the Pharisees, they have to realize that they are seeing the law restored, the law protected by Jesus no matter what their prior cultural thinking had been. And it's on that basis and it's for that reason that Jesus says, "Don't think this. Don't think for a moment that I am in opposition to the written Scriptures. My purpose here is to fulfill them, not to set them aside." So he simultaneously affirms the content of the written Old Testament, he sets himself up as the fulfillment of it, and he demolishes the claim of authority that the Pharisees had been arrogating to themselves over the prior decades and even centuries, 150 years or more.

What's our take away from this? This is so very fundamental. It doesn't get more fundamental than this, and realize that we are talking to some who are brand-new to our church, just been here a few weeks maybe, others that have been here for a very long time. This all has great direct personal application for you. This brings great clarity to your own spiritual understanding. The whole question that's at stake in this text is who is the authority? Who has the right to speak for God? To whom do we look, to what do we look in order to know the truth? And what Jesus establishes is that he is the authority, not the traditions of men, no matter how long they've been established. This is earth shattering. And as you come to God's word, as you would be one who would want to be rightly related to God, you have to come and deal with the question of who has the authority to speak for him. And Christ is the authority and Christ has spoken in his word and that's what the authority is. And we reject and you must reject in your mind, any claim to parallel authority that men present to you whether it is the spurious books of the Mormons, whether it is the priesthood and the traditions of the Catholic Church, whether it is Islam speaking about Mohammed, you have to reject all of that and say there is no other authority but Christ and Christ has spoken in this book. And that is the authority by which we measure truth and everything else that contradicts it must fall to the side and be rejected.

And not only – this is so very important for your spiritual well-being – not only do you reject it as a matter of conscious deliberation and decision but, beloved, you reject it with a sense of safety, with a sense of certainty and a sense of security. You reject the traditions of men that rise up in competition with God's word, you reject it with a sense that there is no spiritual danger to you as you do. You are not missing the path of God

when you reject those who claim equal extra-biblical authority to Scripture. No one is in spiritual danger in rejecting charismatics who come and say, "God has spoken to me. I have been to heaven. Let me tell you what I saw there." You're in no danger when you reject that and say, "God didn't speak to you." Colossians says, "Do not listen to those who take their stand on visions that they have seen." Reject that. Reject it out of hand because only when you are standing alone on the word of God are you safe. Everything else is designed to take you away from that. Everything else is a satanic deception. Everything else is a product of him who has rule over this evil and wicked world.

So what you see here and for those of you maybe that are new here, maybe you've been entrenched in a religious tradition, this is so very vital to you: Christ calls you out of that religious tradition. Christ calls you and commands you to reject those competing claims of authority and to reject it as that which you cannot bow to, which you will not accept, and to recognize that Christ alone is Lord, that Christ alone speaks for God and he has spoken for God and has recorded it for us in his written word.

And don't think, beloved, don't think that when the confrontation of authority is being made, that Christ is calling you away from the things that speak to God. Don't think that Christ is calling you away from that which has any value. Christ is calling you away from that because he alone is the one who can fulfill the word of God. He alone is the one who can deliver your soul from sin. And he calls you to believe his word, to receive it as the word of God, and to trust in him completely and – watch this – to trust in him alone and to trust his word alone and to not bring other things alongside it. And as he makes that call, he tells you, he warns you, he commands you, he invites you, "Don't think that I have come to abolish the law, don't think that I've come to abolish the authority of God in your life." When Christ makes a call on your heart and calls you to himself, he makes a call that is in fulfillment of everything that the Scriptures have to say.

So we look at this and we see Christ elevated before us. We see his supreme authority manifested. Verified by the authority with which he taught that was attested to by all who heard him, verified by the works and miracles that he did, verified by the testimony of Scripture, verified by the voice of God from heaven who said, "This is my beloved Son, listen to him." Christ calls us to listen to him. Our hope is in his word alone. We give allegiance to no one else but Christ. We have no authority other than the written word of God. Beloved, set that in your mind. Give your heart allegiance over to those truths and spiritual good will come to life.

Let's pray together.

*Our Lord, we praise you and thank you for the clarity of your word and we are astonished on so many levels at your greatness. We see your authority and your truth vindicated in the way that you stepped into that realm and asserted yourself against the prevailing mindset of the day and though they crucified you, you rose again. And by your resurrection, God has set for all time the seal of authenticity on everything that you said and on all that is recorded in the word that you verified and authorized in the Old and New Testaments. So, Father, let the picture of true authority be clear in our minds, let us*

*see and understand that Jesus presents himself as the fulfillment of the law, and as we go forward in our study of this great magnificent text, help us to grasp and understand something of the significance of what that means so that we might truly follow you, truly know you, truly proclaim Christ who alone is the Savior of sinners, the only Savior of the world, and yet the complete and sufficient Savior for those who put their faith and trust in him.*

*Lord, we ask that for those that are here that love sin, those that are here that have given themselves over to a different kind of authority, that have followed something else other than Christ as he is revealed in the 66 books of the Bible, Father, we ask you to enlighten them, to break the chains of darkness that they are bound to without even recognizing it, open their hearts to believe the things that they have heard so that they might rise and give themselves to Christ and receive him as their all in all. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you made a perfect blood atonement for sinners just like us and that in that blood atonement alone is the path of reconciliation to a holy God. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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