

Different On Purpose: Checking Boxes Is Not Enough Matthew 5:17-20

Passage

Matthew 5:17-20 Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus and the Law

Assertion

- Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets... I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

Possible Objection

- Wait, doesn't Jesus replace the Old Testament law? Isn't Christianity about moving beyond rules?

Application

- Read Scripture this week with the intentional question, "*What does this reveal about Christ and His work?*"

- Biblical Grounding:

- Luke 24:27 "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me."

- Why it matters: You move from rule-following to a relationship when you see Scripture as leading you to Christ.

The Enduring Authority of God's Word

Assertion

- Jesus says, "until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."

Possible Objection

- But parts of the Old Testament feel outdated or culturally distant. How can all of it still carry weight?

Application

- Choose not to selectively obey the Word of God—but fully trust God's Word. Even when it challenges your preferences

- Biblical Grounding:

- James 1:22 "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

- Why it matters: Spiritual maturity grows when we stop editing God's Word to fit our lives.

The Danger of Minimizing Obedience

Assertion

- Jesus warns, "Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven."

Possible Objection

- Isn't that a bit extreme? Do the 'small' things really matter that much?

Application

- Address one "small" area of disobedience you've been excusing—and take concrete action to change it.

Biblical Grounding:

- Luke 16:10 "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much."

- Why it matters: Faithfulness in small things shapes the trajectory of your whole life.

The Righteousness Problem

Assertion

- Jesus makes a startling statement: "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Possible Objection

- Hold on, the Pharisees were the most religious people around. If their righteousness isn't enough, what chance do we have?

Application

- Before addressing behavior, examine the heart motivation behind it. *Am I doing this to honor God or to appear righteous to others?*

Biblical Grounding:

- 1 Samuel 16:7 "But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

- Why it matters: God is not impressed with outward performance disconnected from inward sincerity.

The Limits of Box-Checking

Assertion

- This passage exposes the insufficiency of checklist Christianity.

Possible Objection

- But aren't spiritual disciplines, like prayer and Scripture, important? Isn't that what we're supposed to do?

Application

- Turn one spiritual habit this week into a relational encounter instead of a routine task.
- Biblical Grounding:
 - Psalm 63:1 "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water."
- Why it matters: Spiritual disciplines are meant to connect you to God, not just complete a checklist.

What Jesus Is Actually Calling For

Assertion

- Jesus is calling His followers to a deeper, more authentic righteousness.

Possible Objection

- So what does that actually look like in real life?

Application

- Invite God to change a desire, not just a behavior. Pray specifically: *"Lord, don't just help me do what's right, help me want what's right."*

Biblical Grounding:

- Ezekiel 36:26 "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."
- Why it matters: Real righteousness flows from transformed desires, not forced discipline.

Conclusion

- So here are the closing questions to sit with:
 - Where have I reduced my faith to a checklist?
 - Where am I relying on outward behavior instead of inward change?
 - Where is Jesus calling me deeper than surface-level obedience?