

Matthew 5:17-26: Jesus Fulfills the Law

Matthew 5:17-20 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.

This is one of the most controversial, misunderstood, and essential passages in the New Testament.

Consider how exceptionally daunting this task is: How do you fulfill the Law for a people without fostering a spirit of lawlessness in that same people?

James 2:10 ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.

The answer: Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the Law (perfection as the basis for a relationship with God) WITHOUT EXEMPTING US from the need to continue to observe and teach it. But this required a significant shift...

There had to be an exchange- our unrighteousness for His righteousness! To be declared righteous, we must accept BY FAITH that Jesus has fulfilled the requirements of the Law FOR us.

Still, the Law must be fulfilled IN us. We must get to the heart of the Law to find out the things that please God, things taught by the Spirit...

Leviticus 19:19 ¹⁹ ‘You are to keep My statutes. You shall not breed together two kinds of your cattle; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together.

2 Corinthians 6:14 ¹⁴ Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

2 Corinthians 3:6-8 ⁶ who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. ⁷ But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading *as* it was, ⁸ how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?

If you are obedient to the LETTER of the Law to become righteous, it means you are living under the ministry of death.

If you are obedient to the SPIRIT of the Law in pursuit of a righteous life BECAUSE YOU HAVE A NEW HEART, you are living under the ministry of the Spirit.

It is a choice between safety and liberty. Safety is the small prison cell of life under the letter. Liberty is the broad plain of freedom, being guided daily by the Holy Spirit. Which is more dangerous?

Romans 8:1-4 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³ For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Righteous living is no longer a matter of legalistic (letter-based) obedience, but spiritual obedience. Because we have a changed heart, we keep the Spirit of the Law as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2:13-15 ¹³ which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. ¹⁴ But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. ¹⁵ But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.

Appraisal is assigning value. To grow in the truth, and therefore in righteousness, we have to exceed legalistic righteousness and become spiritual, adopting the values of the Spirit.

To be spiritual means to be undervalued, taken for granted, and thought unintelligent by natural minds. Are you prepared to be a fool for Christ?

1 Corinthians 1:27-31 ²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God. ³⁰ But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, ³¹ so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."