

## **Zero Righteousness: Why the Pharisees are Burning**

### **INTRODUCTION: The Danger of Misreading Righteousness**

There's a lie that's crept into churches—one that says if you want to make it to heaven, you need to clean up, obey God's commandments, and prove you're serious. That sounds religious. But it's the same lie the Pharisees believed—and it's sending millions to hell.

Jesus said in **Matthew 5:20**, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." That sounds terrifying—until you realize the Pharisees had **zero** righteousness.

How righteous were the Pharisees? They had no righteousness. And I'm going to show you that today. I'll show you how people out there right now believe themselves to be righteous just as the Pharisees.

In this sermon, we'll walk through Matthew 5:19–20 step-by-step and show that salvation is **by faith alone**, not by commandment-keeping. We'll see why **obedience still matters**, but not for your eternal destiny—and why every Pharisee is in hell today while even the weakest believer is safe in Christ forever.

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### **POINT 1: Breaking the Commandments Doesn't Kick You Out of Heaven**

If breaking the commandments of God caused you to lose salvation, then everyone would lose their salvation every day all day long. But, the Bible doesn't ONCE say anything like this.

So, let's take a close look here at Matthew Chapter 5 verse 19.

#### **""Matthew 5:19**

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.""

The subject of this verse speaks of saved people. How do we know for sure? If you look closely at that verse, the Bible says: "in the kingdom of heaven." Only saved people go to heaven. They are already in heaven.

Saved people are already in heaven. Now, since we are saved, should we break God's commandments? Of course not. But let's say we do. And then we teach others to break the same commandments. "He shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven."

There are different levels in heaven. Least in the kingdom of heaven. But you're still in heaven.

**Truth:** Jesus is clearly speaking to people **already in the kingdom**. If someone breaks commandments and teaches others to do the same, they're **still saved**, but they'll be called **least**.

**""1 Corinthians 3:11-13**

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.""

Our foundation, once saved, is Jesus Christ. Once saved always saved. Then we still have our life to live. The works that we do in our life are going to be judged by God in heaven. "It shall be revealed by fire." Your works will be passed through a fire to see if they are good works. You are already in heaven. Saved.

**""1 Corinthians 3:14-15**

If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.""

If you have good works that pass through the fire (gold, silver, and precious stones don't burn up), then you receive rewards in heaven. Do good and lay up treasures for yourself in heaven.

**""Matthew 5:19**

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.""

If you won't follow God's commandments, you won't receive rewards. You will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. For example, Jesus commands us to go ye therefore and preach the Gospel. This is what we call soul winning. If you won't do that, you are breaking the commandment. You won't receive rewards you would have received in heaven.

**Illustration:** If you fornicate or have a sexual relationship outside of marriage, you break God's commandments. And while you do that, you are teaching others around you that are watching, the little ones, that it's okay to break God's commandments. It's not okay. There are warnings everywhere in the Bible.

So, no matter what you're going to heaven, but don't teach others to break God's commandments. Jesus Christ is clearly teaching you can't lose your salvation. But, you don't want to just enter into heaven when you have the chance to be great in the kingdom of heaven. The life that you're living is your chance to be great in the kingdom of heaven.

"But whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." For example, someone who gets married and shows their children how marriage should work, will be great in the kingdom of heaven. They are following the commandments of God.

**Application:**

You can be saved and still live a carnal life—but you'll **lose rewards**, not salvation. Salvation is **never based on your behavior**, only on belief. Don't lose rewards by going against God's commandments and then teach others to do the same. Your life is an example for others that look up to you. They are watching. Don't teach them to do wrong.

Again, you cannot lose your salvation. But you can lose the rewards in heaven that you would have had if you followed God's commandments. Imagine a pile of jewels, gold, crowns, a mansion, and treasure in heaven that is yours. As you live your life according to God's word, those treasures increase more and more each day.

As you come to church each week, the treasure is growing. When you are obedient to the word of God, the treasure grows more and more.

But let's say you choose to stop coming to church, stop reading your Bible, stop praying, stop increasing your faith, and stop following the commandments. The treasures won't grow. And these are eternal treasures that you won't receive. You could have. But you chose to do evil in this life.

Point 1 is breaking the commandments doesn't kick you out of heaven.

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## **POINT 2: Keeping the Commandments Doesn't Save You Either**

You aren't saved by keeping the commandments. And you don't lose salvation by not keeping the commandments.

**""Romans 4:5-7**

But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. 6 Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, 7 Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.""

You don't work to earn the free gift of salvation. Keeping the commandments is equal to good works. Loving thy neighbor is a good work. Getting baptized in water is a good work. Coming to a good church is a good work. Reading the Bible is a good work.

Believing or trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation is what saves you. God imputes his righteousness to you at the moment you believe. It is not your righteousness or the good things

you do for others. Jesus Christ is righteous. And he says he will give you his righteousness if you simply put your faith in him.

**Truth:** The one who **doesn't work for it**, but believes, is the one who is made righteous. That rules out salvation by law-keeping. Keeping the law will not save you.

You have broken the law so how could keeping the law save you?

Throughout your life each day, you break God's laws and you sin. Here's a sin that most people don't know.

""**1 Samuel 12:23**

Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way:"

You sin against the Lord when you stop praying for someone that you should be praying for that needs your prayers. We sin when we don't even realize it. We continuously break God's laws so keeping his law won't save you. You break his laws all the time. If God had police officers, we would all be locked away in prison. We didn't keep the law and we don't keep the law.

**Illustration:** A man could spend his life trying to follow the commandments, attending church, and avoiding sin—but if he never believes on Christ, he's lost. The thief on the cross never kept a commandment after he believed—and Jesus said, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

He believed and immediately Jesus told him he was going to heaven. Jesus did not wait for him to keep a commandment before he told him he was going to heaven.

**Application:** Don't tell sinners to "turn from sin to be saved." Tell them to **believe on the Lord Jesus Christ**. Righteousness is **credited**, not earned. God credits you. He has it. He gives it to you. You don't have it. You never had it. You can't get it. The only one who has it is God. You need to get it from him, or you don't get it.

Point 1 is breaking the commandments doesn't kick you out of heaven. Point 2 is keeping the commandments doesn't save you. The Pharisees thought keeping the law would save them.

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## **POINT 3: The Pharisees Had ZERO Righteousness**

This next verse is very interesting. People take this the wrong way. Look closely.

""**Matthew 5:20**

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.""

False teachers will say that Jesus is teaching a works based salvation and that we have to do good to get to heaven. They think Jesus is saying that you have to be better than the Pharisees and do more than what they did.

""**Romans 10:3**

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.""

People attempt to establish their own righteousness. They haven't submitted themselves to the righteousness of God. They have no idea what type of righteousness is required for heaven. We're talking about pure righteousness.

**Truth:** Jesus wasn't saying, "Do better than the Pharisees." He was saying, "You need a different kind of righteousness entirely."

The righteousness of God is required to enter into heaven.

**Key Insight:** The Pharisees trusted in themselves, their rules, their appearances—but they **rejected Christ**. That means they had **none** of what God counts as righteousness. For example, Catholics believe themselves to be good because they follow all these rituals. They cross themselves so they think they are good.

Again, the Pharisees had zero righteousness because they believed in themselves. All works based religions are just as the Pharisees.

They believed in something that was not good. The Bible says there's none good but one and that is God. We are not good without God's goodness. We need his goodness and not our own. For people who believe themselves to be good, they will never be good. Never. Not a chance. They are sinners who need a Savior. But they won't accept that they aren't good.

""**John 5:39-40**

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. 40 And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.""

The Scriptures and the commandments speak of Jesus. They point you to Jesus clearly. But people won't come to Jesus alone. They always try to make themselves a part of being the Savior of the world.

**Application:** There are modern Pharisees today—church people trusting their lifestyle, not the cross. They're still **dead in sins**.

One must trust in Jesus alone to be saved. If they won't do that, they will die in their sins. They will not be forgiven of their sins. They will go to hell with their so-called "goodness."

Point 3 is the Pharisees had zero righteousness. None.

## **POINT 4: The Only Way to Exceed Their Righteousness is to Believe on Jesus**

The only way we are made righteous is through Jesus Christ. We will have zero righteousness unless we believe on Jesus Christ.

### **""2 Corinthians 5:21**

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.""

We can't be righteous because we are sinners. It's obvious. We need someone who isn't a sinner to save us. That's Jesus. He took all our sin away from us. And he made us righteous because we put our faith IN him.

**Truth:** Jesus gives you **His righteousness** the moment you believe.

### **""Philippians 3:9**

And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: ""

The Bible is very clear throughout. That's simple to understand.

**Real-Life Example:** One man trusts Christ after a life of sin—he's declared righteous. Another lives squeaky clean, but never believes—he dies with **zero** righteousness and ends up in hell.

And that's the truth.

**Application:** This is the heart of the Gospel. You don't become righteous—you are **made** righteous **in Christ**.

Point 4 is the only way to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and have his righteousness added to you.

## **CONCLUSION: The Only Righteousness That Counts Is Christ's**

Jesus said your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. Some people believe that to be difficult. And it would be if we had to obtain our own righteousness. They had zero. We have zero.

That only happens, exceeding zero righteousness, when you stop trusting yourself and **believe** on Him. They had **zero righteousness**—and so does anyone who thinks they're "good enough" for God.

But the moment you believe, you get **perfect righteousness**—and that's what gets you into heaven.

Point 1 is breaking the commandments doesn't kick you out of heaven. Point 2 is keeping the commandments doesn't save you. Point 3 is the Pharisees had zero righteousness. Point 4 is the only way to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and have his righteousness added to you.

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### CALL TO ACTION:

1. **If you've never believed on Jesus alone—do it today.** Stop trusting your works, your walk, or your record.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." (Acts 16:31)

2. **If you are saved, start living and teaching the commandments.** Not to keep your salvation—but to be **great** in the kingdom.
3. **Warn others against Pharisee religion.** Tell the truth: salvation is by **faith alone**. Period.

Let's pray.