

## ~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

As people listened to Jesus' new and authoritative teaching and heard Him frequently debate the Pharisees and religious teachers, some may have thought He had come to introduce a brand new religion, abolishing the Law of Moses and the writings of the prophets. But nothing could be further from the truth. God was the author of the Old Testament, and Jesus, being God, certainly wouldn't invalidate even one small part of it. There was no contradiction between Jesus' teaching and the teaching found in the Old Testament. He wanted everyone to know that obeying God's commandments was still of utmost importance and therefore said, "If you break the smallest commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God's laws and teaches them will be great in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5:19).

Jesus wants our complete obedience, but from what we just read, He obviously wants us to know that we don't have to be perfect to get into heaven. He said that people who break small commandments and even teach others to do the same can still make it into heaven. However, Jesus made it clear that our degree of obedience in this life will affect our standing in the next life. There will be people in heaven who are lesser and greater than others who are there. And, lest anyone thinks Jesus was saying that it doesn't make any difference how people live their lives, He went on to say, "But I warn you---unless you obey God better than the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees do, you can't enter the Kingdom of Heaven at all!" (Matthew 5:20).

Jesus disagreed very much with the way the Pharisees and religious teachers had interpreted and twisted what God had said in the Old Testament. Many of their interpretations of God's laws allowed them to sin. They thought, for example, that they could be filled with hatred, anger and bitterness, and be embroiled in cursing, name-calling, strife and lawsuits with one another, but as long as they didn't murder any of the people they hated, they figured they were OK. But Jesus explained that those kinds of people are going to hell just as much as any murderer! God expects much more of us than that, and all true heaven-bound Christians will do better than that. Jesus taught that if our relationships with others aren't right, our relationship with God is not right. God expects us to love others, to be patient and kind, and to work toward reconciliation when we do have disagreements.

(Note: Parents should preview this paragraph before reading it to their children.) The Pharisees and religious teachers thought that as long as they kept clear of committing adultery, they were OK in God's eyes, even if they were full of lust or sexually involved, short of adultery, with a person to whom they were not married. God, however, expects much more than that! Jesus explained that a person who imagines having a sexual relationship with a person to whom he is not married has sinned in God's eyes. The one who continually dwells upon impure sexual thoughts or is involved sexually with someone with whom he is not married is in danger of hell---just as much as the person who constantly commits adultery.

This is serious stuff, and Jesus wanted to make His point unforgettable since it involved eternal consequences---heaven or hell. So He used a figure of speech we call a hyperbole, which is exaggerating to make a strong point. When your mother says, "I must have called you a thousand times to come home for dinner," that's a hyperbole.

Jesus said that if our eye or hand causes us to sin, we should cut them from our bodies, because it would be better to lose one part of our bodies than spend eternity in hell. We know, of course, that Jesus doesn't actually want us to cut off any parts of our bodies to keep from sinning. What He meant was that we should remove from our lives whatever is causing us to stumble into sin. Of course, cutting off a hand or gouging out an eye will not stop a person from lusting or committing acts of immorality. The problem is with people's hearts. However, once they repent of their sins, believe in Jesus and are born again, they will want to obey God from the inside. They will still be tempted to sin, but they will have the power not to give in to sin through the Holy Spirit within them.

**Q.** Was the point of Jesus' sermon saying that people could earn their way to heaven if they are holy enough?

**A.** No. Jesus clearly taught at other times that people are saved by believing in Him and being born again. In the sermon we've begun reading, Jesus was speaking to people who already were His disciples (see Matthew 5:1), and was revealing the standards of holiness He has set for them. He didn't want anyone who only held to the standards of the Pharisees to think they were actually saved. Jesus concluded this sermon by saying, "Not all people who sound religious are really godly. They may refer to me as 'Lord,' but they still won't enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The decisive issue is whether they obey my Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). True believers in Jesus live obedient lives according to God's standards.

**Q. (For teens only) Regarding sex, people often ask, "How far can I go sexually with someone I'm not married to before I'm sinning?" Based on what we've read today, how do you think Jesus would respond to that question?**

**A. He might first ask us why we are asking such a question. Does our question reveal that we are like the Pharisees, looking for an excuse to gratify our sexual desires by using a person to whom we are not committed as a lifetime partner? Sex is a sacred experience designed by God to be enjoyed only within the marriage relationship. God also designed that sex would be a progressive thing, one thing leading to another. It begins with thinking about it, which leads to physical contact. Even when a man and woman are just kissing, their bodies are preparing for intercourse. If, according to Jesus, thinking about sex with a person with whom you are not married is a sin, then it is safe to say that doing the things that lead to more intimate sex is also a sin. Additionally, when you are kissing someone to whom you are not married, you are kissing someone who may well be someone else's future husband or wife! For these reasons and others, most Bible-believing pastors strongly recommend to the single people that they avoid any and all sexual involvement with anyone to whom they are not engaged. Engagement, unlike marriage, is not a license for sex.**

**Application: God's standards for holiness are high when compared to what human beings normally expect from themselves. But, thanks to God, it is possible for us to attain His standards once we are born again. Then the Holy Spirit changes us, and we are no longer captive to sinful living.**