

Sermon on the Mount Series
Sermon 14
A Religious Show

There is a television commercial running right now. A young man is sitting in a huge library across from a young woman. Just then another young woman comes walking by swinging her hips and the young man gives a very interested smile to her. The girl sitting across from the young man slaps his face and rises to her feet and storms off.

Did the young man break a law? Well, he didn't violate a written law of the Turkish legal system. But he did violate a law of relationship that is well known to everyone. When you are taking out a girl, you don't show interest in another woman. That isn't done.

Laws and rules whether written or not written, govern relationships. God's law governs relationships between God and man and between people. We learned last time that how we relate to laws reveals our attitude and relationship to the lawgiver. If we break laws because we think the law is stupid or inconvenient, we are in essence saying that the lawgiver has made a mistake and not evaluated the situation correctly.

Psalm 19:7 The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple;

The Bible says that the law of the Lord is perfect. There is no mistake or error in it. All of God's requirements are for the good of man and they are perfectly adapted for every situation of life. Now let's turn to the Sermon on the Mount and read what Jesus says about the law of God.

Matthew 5:19 "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

When we break one command of God, no matter how small, in spirit and in truth we have rejected the authority of the lawgiver. It is not the size of the deed that makes something a sin. It is the fact of variance with God's will that make it sin. It shows that our hearts are still in communion or relationship with sin.

The woman in the library slapped her boyfriend because he showed that his heart was not fully committed to her. His little smile to the other girl was not such a big thing. It is not illegal to smile at a girl in Turkey. But for the relationship between of the couple that little smile to the other woman was an indication of a deeper problem. And by the end of the commercial the boy was with the other girl.

Matthew 5:19 "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

Some people read Jesus' words here and think that they can break God's law and enter the kingdom of God. They say, "The lawbreakers will be the least in the kingdom but they will be in the kingdom." Jesus spoke an idiom. Lawbreakers cannot enter the kingdom of heaven because their hearts are not in harmony with the king. They are outside of God's will. They are rebels. The act of rebellion may seem small to human eyes, but the root goes deep. When Eve ate the forbidden fruit, it seemed like a small deed. But her son became the first murderer. The seed of rebellion was sown with the eating of the forbidden fruit. The harvest of rebellion was fearful. Do not be deceived. No one can continue to break God's law and enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:20 "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

Who were the scribes and Pharisees? The scribes were religious scholars. They taught and interpreted scripture. In Jesus' day they held influential positions among Jews as the teachers of God's word. The Pharisees were a conservative religious sect. The name comes from a transliteration of a Hebrew word that meant "separate ones." They began as a conservative group of Jews who opposed worldly influences mixing with the religion and lives of the Jews. They stressed the importance of strict adherence to the Law of Moses, the Torah. Most of the scribes were Pharisees. So the scribes and Pharisees would have been considered among the most conservative and religious and faithful people of their day.

The Pharisees tried to apply God's law to every situation of life and while doing so, they made many rules. These rules became the "tradition of the elders" and were considered by most people to be as necessary as God's word. In time, people came to have a narrow view of God and His law. They came to believe that if they kept all the rules and regulations of the scribes and Pharisees that they would be good enough to enter heaven. But a legal religion cannot change the motivation of the heart. What do I mean by a legal religion?

A legal religion is one that is composed of rules and regulations to be kept. It is a religion where people think that by work and effort they can make compensation for their sins. They think that they will satisfy God's requirements by religious activity and God will take them to heaven because of it.

There are many problems with a legal religion. First of all, because it does not change the motivation of the heart, people are struggling in vain to overcome their selfish, sinful desires. There is no power inherent in people to control themselves. They work to overcome sin but they cannot. They hide their sins from others. But sometimes the truth comes out. In some of the most religious groups of our day, sexual perversions, alcohol and drug abuse are found among leaders.

Generally two types of people emerge in these legal religious groups. One group is very proud because they think they are keeping God's law very well. They look down on others and show contempt for them. Others can see very well that they are not good people, but they themselves cannot see it. They treat others poorly. They are often harsh and overbearing, devoid of an ounce of love or pity. They seem to love to condemn others.

Another group of people in legal religions are very conscientious and are trying to be good enough to go to heaven. But because they are honest with themselves, they know that they are not holy. They know they have sinful desires that they cannot overcome. They work and do religious duties and their faith becomes a heavy burden and they are not happy at all. They have little hope that they can be good enough to go to heaven but they keep trying. They really want to please God but they know they are committing sin. They wish there was some relief from their sense of guilt.

People must have been shocked at Jesus' words, "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." They must have thought, "Well if the scribes and Pharisees don't go to heaven, who can go?" Jesus was saying that their religion was lacking. He was saying that their religion was not good enough. There was a zeal for law but lacking the motivation of love. Jesus said that a loveless religion of law is worthless. It will not take you or anyone else to heaven.

When I was 12 years old my older brother earned money by delivering newspapers house to house early morning and afternoon. I worked with him often. One morning about 5:00 I was going through the parking lot of one of the apartment buildings and I came across a race car. A race car! It was sleek and

blue and had lots of stickers on it advertising various car products. Just like on T.V.

"Steve" I said excitedly, "Check out this race car! It says Porche 917 on it. What is it doing here? I wonder if this car could go 250 miles an hour."

My brother laughed. "That isn't a race car" he said. That is a Volkswagen beetle with a Porche 917 car body. Mom's car could beat that thing in a race!"

I was so brokenhearted. It looked just like a real race car. But it was a fake. The body of the car was just a show. The heart of the car was a VW bug. I thought to myself, "I would be embarrassed to drive such a thing. People would come alongside and challenge the car to go fast and it wouldn't be able to do it. It would be like bragging and then not be able to do what you bragged about."

The religion of the scribes and Pharisees was like that car. It was a big show. It looked good to the unknowledgeable. But to someone who knew what was going on, they could see that the religion of the scribes and Pharisees was a fake. Good looks, but nothing inside. Empty.

Have you seen people with a showy religion but the inside of it is empty? Have you seen people who seem to have a lot of religious activity but they are proud, harsh and mean-spirited and there is sin in their life? Have you seen people who have a legal religion and are just tired and worn out and discouraged because they know that they are not holy?

Unless your righteous exceeds these things, you can't enter heaven. But how can you have a new heart? How can you have new motivations?

You must have a power come into you from God. You must be spiritually born again.

John 3:3 Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

John 3:5 Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.