

When Jennifer and I were getting ready to move down here we sold an SUV and a Jet-Ski. We put ads together on Craigslist and posted a price. The number included some wiggle room for us to negotiate. A nice woman and her brother came to look at the vehicle. After looking it over and thinking about it they offered us full asking price. No negotiations, no wiggle, no coming down. She paid full asking price. I think she was happy. We were amazed but happy. Although, for a moment we couldn't help but wonder if we asked too low of a price.

Moving the price up after she made her offer was never an option. To say we'd accept this price, then raise it didn't seem right. If we wanted higher we could've asked for higher from the start. No new surprises. We certainly don't expect those with God. When God puts out his expectations we understand those to be the expectations. He won't move the requirements just as we get close to them.

In the middle of a sermon Jesus was preaching he stopped to give some examples of just what he was talking about. He had mentioned that to get into heaven would require a certain level of righteousness, being right before God. As he unfolded the expectations some might have wondered if he wasn't moving the requirements. But as he shares with us in the gospel there's...

**Nothing new in these laws
God wanted this righteousness all along
God alone provides this righteousness**

Everyone has tried the excuse for why they didn't get something accomplished that they didn't understand what was expected. "You know I would have finished the cleaning if I knew what I was supposed to do. I would have finished my homework but I didn't know what was due." The people Jesus was talking to were acting like that. Their ancestors and their current religious leaders had told them one way of pleasing God. What they had heard actually sounded pretty easy. Not too high of a level of expectation. Turns out they were way off.

Jesus was correcting them. In a series of four examples, of which we'll look closely at the first two, Jesus calls to mind what they were taught. **"You have heard that it was said."** Jesus means to put into stark contrast what they thought they knew and what he would tell them. These words are just a reminder of the low expectations they were operating under. For example, with murder, it seemed easy enough to avoid. **"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, do not murder."** Just don't kill someone. In another example, **"You have heard that it was said, do not commit adultery."** So don't sleep with someone who you aren't married to. Both were simple enough. The religious leaders continued to give the people the impression that if they could meet these simple expectations they would be alright before God. God would be pleased with them.

Stop for a moment and consider these low expectations for pleasing God. Beyond these two examples, are we to believe that God is setting up some sort of checklist we can mark off? Where is your expectations low? God only expects me to not kill someone. Done! No sleeping around. Check! Come to church. I'm here, aren't I? No stealing. No problem! We convince ourselves that God's expectations really are low. We've heard others say God doesn't expect much, only follow a few rules, do a few things for him, and you'll be okay. Be righteous according to God's low expectations and he'll bring you to heaven based on what you accomplish. Turns out we are way off.

Whenever we hear Jesus speak we always expect it to be good news. Jesus as the quiet, loving, compassionate guy. The soft hearted, easy going person of the Trinity. Only speaks comfort. So we imagine. That's why when we hear Jesus speak here it sounds a little foreign. Jesus speaks with authority, the authority that God wanted this righteousness all along. **"But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."** Our understandings of God's expectations are clarified by Jesus. Anger, hatred, even just those thoughts are enough to send someone to hell. Gazing at a woman, letting thoughts linger in your mind about another man, these are adultery and every bit sinful enough to have someone thrown in hell. It isn't just your actions that can be sinful. God judges your whole person, including thoughts and words.

Wait, God expects us to control our words and thoughts? Those just come out. Like when I'm behind someone on the highway and they're going too slow. I get mad without even thinking, maybe even terrible words come out. Who hasn't had the moment sitting across from a brother or sister and wishing they would just disappear? Or walking away from a spouse in an argument and slamming the door, my thoughts at that moment I wouldn't want God knowing. Jesus says he knows and he judges those. God judges every thought, every word, and every action. There are no free passes just because you can't seem to control your anger or your eyes when a beautiful person walks by. There's nothing new in these laws or expectations. God wanted this kind of righteousness all along. He demanded perfection.

Like me you're probably feeling a little hot under the collar. God's expectations are high, and there are no waivers. **"Anyone who says, 'You fool' will be in danger of the fire of hell."** Even thoughts never spoken or acted on can be sin. Feelings buried deep inside are known by God and judged sinful. Every thought that God probably didn't care, every hope that sin wasn't that serious, it's all blown up by Jesus. Sin is serious. It is deadly. So deadly serious that Jesus says if you figure your hand or eye is causing you to sin then cut them off. **"It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell."** Of course he's exaggerating for effect, not because sin isn't serious, but because sin isn't in your hand to cut off. Sin is in your heart.

Jesus seems to be giving the combination of what will get us right with God. The opposite of sin must be right. And in a way Jesus is saying that if you can do these things, if you can keep these laws perfectly to the level God always expected then you truly will be granted heaven as a reward. You'll have earned your way to heaven if you can achieve what Jesus lays out here. But don't be confused. The perfection God expects, has always expected, is something you and I will never achieve. God alone provides the righteousness he demands.

We need one who never had an action sparked by anger. Enter Jesus our Savior. When the religious leaders continued to reject him to his face not one bad thought crept in, not one evil eye given to them, not one hateful thought slipped out uncontrolled. Even when they were wishing to throw him off the cliff and kill him quickly Jesus didn't wish harm upon them. When they were pounding the nails into his hands and feet on the cross he was asking God to forgive them. Jesus didn't have one evil angry hateful thought, word, or action.

We need one who never had an action sparked by lust. Enter Jesus our Savior. Jesus interacted with women each day of his life. Mary and Martha were good friends of his. Jesus never looked or thought of them as women who he could use for his own personal desires. They were not objects to be desired or lusted after. When Mary came to anoint him at the home of a religious leader Jesus didn't allow others to take advantage of her or speak down about her. Rather he praised her. The woman Jesus met at the well when no one was around brought no lustful thoughts of what Jesus could do or get away with. Rather his focus wasn't on what he could get from her but what eternal blessings he could offer her.

Over and over we see Jesus was always the righteous person we were supposed to be but never could be. Jesus was perfect and lived up to God's laws. Jesus was perfect in words, thoughts, and actions for you and for me. Self-righteousness never is the pathway to God, not now, not ever. Instead Jesus hung on the cross as the perfect substitute for you and me. He was innocent but considered guilty of all sins. Jesus' own righteousness is the pathway to God. It's the only path. Jesus offered his righteousness and filled in the gap that our lack of righteousness caused with God. That was his gift for you.

With that loving gift from Christ Jesus, all the laws and the rest of Scriptures become an open book of things pleasing to God. The love of Jesus and his perfection pave the way for our good works to be thank-offerings given as tokens of our love for God. We avoid sinful thoughts, words, and actions. Anger doesn't get the best of us. We control our rage and keep the hateful thoughts from starting. We treat the opposite sex with respect, dignity, and honor. We do these motivated by our Savior who lived and died for us. With the Holy Spirit's power we seek to overcome that which our Savior has already overcome for us. His victory assures us of total victory.

God hasn't moved the expectations on you or me. He still demands perfection. Jesus tells the truth. The laws weren't set aside, they were fulfilled. Jesus kept them perfectly for us. Christ our Savior shows us there's nothing new in these laws. Through him alone and the grace of God we're right with God.