BUT I SAY TO YOU by David Diestelkamp

In His Sermon on the Mount, King Jesus shows how radically different His kingdom citizens will be from citizens of the kingdoms of the world. Six times in one section, Christ uses the contrasting literary structure “you have heard… but I say”. As King, He isn’t simply raising the moral bar. It is superficial and inadequate to observe that Jesus simply wants us to avoid things that lead to what are thought to be more egregious sins. Jesus is returning things to the way God originally intended them to be. These are the sort of things that characterize His kingdom and, therefore, its citizens.

In this section, Jesus talks about sexual sin, lying, retaliation, and hatred – but He starts with labeling others “fools.”

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.” (Mt. 5:21-22)

In our confidence that we aren’t going to murder anyone, we may ignore this scripture and allow the heart of a murderer to live in us. It is from that heart that adultery (5:27), divorce (5:31), lying (5:33), retaliation (5:38), and hatred (5:43) also proceed.

What Jesus is saying here is desperately needed today. “Raca” is a transliteration of an Aramaic term which was evidently a common insult meaning “useless and empty” and “without a brain.” In *Christ Revealed*, *A Commentary on Matthew,* Kenny Chumbley says it is a “quasi-swear word (*rake*) that means empty headed, worthless or imbecile” (pg. 97). Kingdom citizens do not exalt themselves over others, nor do they see others as completely worthless, so degrading insults are inconsistent with who they are.

Jesus then adds, “But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.” I am aware of the fact that Scripture calls some people fools. We can “speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11) by applying scriptures to show people that the Holy Spirit calls them “fools” when it applies. But kingdom citizens will not minimize what Jesus says here. This is not only about a change in vocabulary; it is about what we think about others (which then determines what we say about them—Lk. 6:45). Jesus is telling us that, unlike the world, those who submit to His rule will see value in all others, no matter what differences exist or what mistakes they have made.

“He is teaching that insulting language—name calling, racial, ethnic, and social slurs, etc.—that demeans a fellow human being is condemned by God” (Chumbley, pg. 98). Our English word “moron” comes from this Greek word “fool” (*moros*). Even more “acceptable” insults will not be spoken by kingdom citizens because they honor, respect, and value others.

When we disagree with people, or when we think someone is doing something without good reasoning or truth, we must not demean or devalue them. When people do what we think are silly things, unscientific things, thoughtless things, or blindly follow others, we must not think of and label them as worthless. We need to listen to ourselves. God is!

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