

## THE HEART OF GOD

When the prodigal son came back, the older brother was upset. It didn't seem fair that the younger brother got a feast and celebration for him while the older brother did not. He became angry because he never left. He kept all the commands of the father. As John Mark Hicks put it, "The older brother knew the rules of the father. He did not, however, know the heart of the father."

As Jesus spoke these words to the Pharisees and the scribes, He knew that this represented them. They were a people who knew the commands of the Father, but did not know His heart. They were more concerned about not working on the Sabbath than they were about keeping the Sabbath holy. They were mad at Jesus because he did work by healing. They were mad at a man because he carried his mat (thus working) on the Sabbath after having been healed. They were regularly "straining a gnat and swallowing a camel."

We can follow in the same vein. We can be so focused on rule keeping that we miss the "weightier part of the law." We can miss the heart of God. It is easier to quibble the rules of a board game than to play with a friend. We can get so caught up in the rules, we forget that the rules of the game are to help us have fun with our friends. There is an adage in poker, you play your opponent, not your hand.

On the other side, we need not go to the other extreme. We can find ourselves saying that rules don't matter at all. When the older son objects to the father saying he has been near and kept the commands, the father responds saying, "You have always been with me and all that I have is yours." The son was blessed by the father for being in his presence and for doing his will.

Many times, our world wants us to think that anything goes. People can do whatever they want if they are seeking their truth. Let us remember that the wages of sin is death. The wages can also be a hard life.

The older son forgot what the younger son went through. He forgot what he ate. He forgot the lowest of lows. The younger son had to hit rock bottom to come back up. Rock bottom stinks. It is not somewhere anyone wants to be. That is where we find ourselves when we don't follow the commands of God.

Let us be people who follow the commands of God, for they should lead us to the heart of God!

-Alex Swango