

# Repentance Leads To Christ-like Character

## The Sin of Irresponsibility with God's Law

(part 1)

### *Distorting God's Grace as a License to Sin*

#### Introduction

Having just read a newsletter from a very well-known Christian teacher, we were deeply concerned. His writing is symptomatic of how so many clergy have led thousands upon thousands to live in the *irresponsible lawlessness* that's so widespread throughout Christendom today. His very tone as well as content peddled God's Word like a sales pitch. Rather than being true to the Bible, this man misused scripture so the unrepentant could *feel good about themselves*.

Too many in positions of training others use unbiblical practices and teachings that help them attract people to their congregation or TV ministry. They lift from the Bible isolated verses that support their conjecture, carefully avoiding the passages that would refute their preordained conclusions—not unlike a used car salesman who dodges telling you what's wrong with a vehicle.

In order to be true to our Lord the way He calls for, we must first recognize that God's Word is THE authoritative source from which we derive our way of life. He purposes that we study His Word with the *intent to apply it* to all areas of how we live (2Timothy 3:16,17). In so doing, we must find out what *He forbids* (binds) and discover what *He allows* us to do (loosens). This process describes the authority Jesus gave to each of His followers:

*"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in*

*heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them"* (Matthew 18: 18-20).

The lawless irresponsibility which pervades contemporary Christendom has been fostered by false teachers as they've redefined the biblical understanding of *grace*:

- **"Grace" now excuses irresponsibility for your actions; you're too weak to obey your Father's righteous ways—you "couldn't resist that temptation."**
- **"Grace" has become a passive reliance on our Lord to "do it all for you", rather than your willing and intentional cooperation with the Spirit to do our Father's will.**
- **"Grace" means you don't need to repent because God overlooks your sins. Or, since your sins have already been paid for by Christ, you can disregard God's commands and compromise with the world's ways.**
- **In reality, "grace" has become the sales pitch by many clergy to make the unrepentant sinner feel irresponsibly complacent about how he or she lives their life.**

The Bible, however, proclaims an entirely different perception of grace:

**Grace is our Father's unmerited favor toward us (Hebrews 4:16), and the empowerment He gives us through His indwelling Spirit both to will and to obey His good and righteous commands (Philippians 2:13). Grace is also the desire and power to fulfill the purposes He's prepared for us in advance (Ephesians 2:8-10). Through His grace we can uphold our responsibilities to Him out of love for Him and not excuse ourselves (Romans 6:16-18).**

Contrary to the false teaching of many today, the *opposite* of God's holy law is not grace but *lawlessness*. Lawlessness completely disregards the righteous freedom (those things we loose) and boundaries (those things we bind) that are found in His Law. False teachers remove the responsibility for Christians to make God's laws their way of life as a grateful outflow of loving response to their Lord.

**Lawlessness disguised as grace is the human sin nature unrestrained.**

Paul well describes the rebellious, lawless spirit of our times:

*“Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man who **separates himself from God's Law** is revealed, the man doomed to destruction”* (2Thessalonians 2:3; see also 2:7; 1John 3:4).

*“For the time will come when men will **not put up with sound teaching**. Instead, to suit their own lusts, they will heap up to themselves **teachers who tickle their ears**”* (2Timothy 4:3).

With over 38,000 competing denominations and sects in Christendom, each claiming to believe the Bible, *lawlessness* is a common theme. The premise of false teachers is that the Older Testament is the (irrelevant) Law and the Newer Testament is (*lawless*) grace. If this were true, then think about this reality:

**There are 613 laws (God's commands and instructions) in the Older Testament and 1,050 in the Newer Testament. If the Older Testament is the Law and the Newer Testament is grace, then why have followers of Jesus been given even more commands to live by as His called-out ones?**

***“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’”*** (Luke 10:27; see also Deuteronomy 6:5).

The biblical differences between grace and Law are not the dichotomy that false teachers purport. Our loving and compassionate Father's grace permeates *both* Testaments. The Hebrew Scriptures overflow with His grace toward the Israelites.

- Who led them out of Egypt in power, fed and sustained them in the desert, and gave them the Promised Land?
- Who established the Day of Atonement so they could substitute a sacrificed lamb to pay for their sins?
- Who loved them enough to correct and chastise them when they sinned against Him?

People don't like to be corrected. But from our Father's view, correction is *discipline*, a sign of His love for us. He corrects individuals as well as nations to deter them from a lawless path so that we may learn righteousness:

*“Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God **disciplines you**”* (Deuteronomy 8:5).

Our Father hasn't changed His way of showing His love. He disciplines followers of His Son Jesus so that we may live responsibly to Him and His holy ways:

*“The Lord **disciplines** those He loves, and He **punishes** everyone He accepts as a son. Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God **disciplines** us for our good, that we may **share in His holiness**. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. **Later on**, however, it produces a har-*

*vest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:6,10,11).*

The real issue for Christians today is not whether you keep the laws of God, but your motive for *why you want to obey them*. **Love** is the difference. In both testaments our God requires love to be the primary motivation for those who belong to Him (Deuteronomy 6:5; Luke 10:27). It's out of *love for Him* that you seek to know and apply His laws to your life.

Throughout the Book of Romans God makes it clear that *His Spirit* is the source to love-based obedience to His commands. Of course, no one is self-justified through their obedience. Justification is found only through the shed blood of our Lord Jesus.

It's because of your love for Him that you repent and ask forgiveness when you violate one of our Father's laws. This is what any loving person does (or should do) when they hurt or offend someone. Asking forgiveness, whether from our heavenly Father or from other people, restores the relationship. You repent not to gain anything from your Father or anyone else, but to restore the intimate relationship your actions have harmed.

Your heavenly Father won't love you more when you repent, because His love for you isn't altered when you give way to your sin nature. It is because of His *love for you* that He has already accepted the sacrifice of Jesus as payment for your sins. But as His Word clearly reveals, you need to confess and repent when you violate His laws. Repentance restores your fellowship with Him and strengthens your will to live according to the righteous standards of His commands.

Think about this:

- Doesn't a husband or wife want to know what hurts their spouse so they can avoid that behavior and replace it with goodness?
- Don't people who really care for each other try to learn what offends the other so they can turn that affront to joy?

Of course they do! *“Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fullness of the law” (Romans 13:10)*. It's not *what* you do as much as your motive for your actions that matters. And, if love toward God and toward others becomes your foremost concern, you'll be far less likely to hurt your relationship with them.

*“And this is love: that we walk in obedience to His commands. As you have heard from the beginning, His command is that you walk in love” (2John 1:6)*.

*“[Jesus] is the head of the body, the called-out-ones; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy” (Colossians 1:18)*.

Only our heavenly Father Himself is responsible to no one (Hebrews 6:13-18). His actions and His promises to His own are reliable because it's within His own righteous character to be that way. Beginning with our Lord Jesus as the Head of all His called-out ones and in Whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been entrusted, our Father has created a chain-of-authority of responsibility for humanity: *Each person is given unique responsibilities in which specific laws in His Word apply to carrying them out*.

In any venue in which there are laws, whether city, state or nation, people have

a responsibility to *know them* and to *obey them*. Throughout the Bible our Father holds His children responsible to abide by His laws (Deuteronomy 6:1,2; 1John 3:24, 5:3). As we noted earlier, the motive behind this responsibility is love. The biblical concept of *responsibility* includes:

- complying with our Lord as His servant/child to do something He commands, or being accountable to Him for the care of another individual, such as a spouse, child, or even an employee.
- being uniquely entrusted by Him to fulfill a specific purpose in which you are held accountable when you fail or are commended when you succeed.
- having to report to Him and be answerable for your actions without blaming others or giving excuses.
- being morally accountable to our Lord for how you represent Him to others.

You can readily recognize these personal responsibilities as you read His Word. For example, our Father has created specific laws and commands within the Bible that apply to specific individuals within a family. In our next segment we'll discuss the various family responsibilities of husbands, wives and children.

Scripture presents a particular sequence of authority and responsibility that flows from God through our Lord Jesus to men and their wives. To our heavenly Father a family which is supported by extended family is the basic building block for spiritual development. Within the context of the family is where biblical responsibilities are learned and where God's laws as appropriate for each family member are learned and applied.