

Repentance Leads To Christ-like Character

Do You Use Your Spiritual Freedom to Indulge Your Sin Nature?

“For IF you live according to the sinful nature, you will DIE; but IF by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will LIVE, because those who are LED by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”

(Romans 8:13,14)

“You were called to BE FREE. But do not use your freedom to INDULGE the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love... So I say, LIVE by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

(Galatians 5:13,16)

What a glorious truth to be assured in our hearts that as disciples of our Lord Jesus we are no longer slaves to sin! But we didn't start out that way. We're all born with a SELF-focus which violates our Father's righteous ways. And when we choose to go on sinning as our way of life, we are *slaves to sin* (John 8:34).

But thanks be to God for Jesus, the Truth Who sets us free—free to *love and serve* our Lord and one another! This freedom means we have the power of His indwelling Spirit to *put to death* all those thoughts, attitudes and actions which held us in bondage. We can cast off the old sinful shackles and live to obey our Father's commands and do what pleases Him (1John 3:21-24).

But the battle between the desires of our earthly sin nature and our will to live by the Spirit doesn't end when we respond to our Father's call to follow Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Note that in both passages cited above, Paul is addressing *followers of Jesus*. We still have an ongoing choice to make between living according to our sin nature and reaping death, or

intentionally putting to death our old sinful practices so we might live. Being known by God as one of His children means purposefully allowing yourself to be *led by the Spirit*. Throughout the day you must choose Him, and not live as if your “spiritual life” is separated from your everyday decisions.

Our Father has called you to be free to *live a holy life* that's set apart from sin, not to compromise with the world's ways and erroneously excuse your disobedience because you're not “under the law.” A Spirit-led life is marked by *responsive obedience to our Father's will*, an enactment of your grateful love and appreciation for Jesus. Through His redemptive work you can now say “NO!” to sin and turn away from its former hold on you.

Consider this. When Paul wrote his epistles, the only Bible God's people knew was the *Older Testament*. In order for followers of Jesus to not give in to sin, they needed to know what God considered *sinful*, whether by what they did or what they failed to do. Through their obedience to His commands they would be expressing their love for Him (1John 5:2,3). God's commands (literally, His instructions and teaching) in the Hebrew Scriptures revealed both the *way to live uprightly* in relationship with Him and with one another, and our *innate inability to do this* in our own strength.

Because of the widespread biblical illiteracy among the church today, however, many Christians have no idea that the things they feel free to do are actually called *sinful* in God's Word. Paul insists in Ephesians 4:17-20 that those who follow Jesus no longer live the way pagans do—in rampant immorality that's remarkably similar to what's overtaking this country today.

Ignorance is no excuse. There is no shortage of Bibles in this land! It's your *personal privilege and responsibility* to search God's Word with your family to determine what you specifically need to *put off from your old self, which is being corrupted by its evil desires, and to be made new in the attitude of your mind* (Ephesians 4:22,23). Your mind is where you make decisions, and if you claim to follow Jesus as your Lord, then it's up to you to **"put on your new self"** so your thoughts and subsequent actions align with His (Ephesians 4:24).

Why is this exchange from old to new so important? Because God created your new self to be *like Him in true righteousness and holiness*—in other words, to live in such a way that your freedom in Jesus can be seen by your will and desire to please Him. So even if you're ignorant in your violation of God's ways, you're still sinning against Him and need to confess, repent, and return to His righteous path.

In this lesson we'll be discussing some examples of practices which Christians typically consider permissible today but are sinful from our Father's perspective.

"Everyone who is doing sin is also doing lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness" (1John 3:4, literal).

We recently commented on the proliferation of **clergy-managers** who encourage spiritual lethargy among their flocks by downplaying or disregarding God's commands, especially those found in the Older Testament. This disregard of the character of God and His holy ways for us to live has brought about a flood of **lawlessness** within Christendom. Yet without the foundation of the Hebrew Bible, the Bible by which Jesus Himself lived, today's concept of "grace" has been

perverted into a license to go on sinning because "I'm already forgiven."

Most Christians don't even take into consideration *how* they may be sinning against God by the choices they make. And few even care that the holy reputation of our Lord Jesus is brought down by the many gray areas of their lives that self-proclaimed "Christians" present to the world's critical eye.

God's commands in *both* testaments outline a way of living in which His people express in tangible ways what *love for Him* and *love for each other* looks like. So many people today are a law unto themselves; they figure that any limitation on their perceived rights and entitlements violates their autonomy. Yet the very instructions God gives His own are designed to facilitate their *mutual well-being*.

When we ignore the righteous boundaries of the Older Testament that teach us the attitudes and behaviors that please our Father, we are practicing **lawlessness**. (The lawless are equally ignorant that the Newer Testament contains *1050 commands*—directives given in an imperative sense that means *do it!*) Lawlessness has always plagued humanity. The first couple willfully transgressed the only command their loving Father had given them! And now the blatant disregard for God's boundaries is rationalized that God's grace means He won't hold anyone accountable for their sin if they're "Christian".

Paul not only warned that an especially deceitful individual would someday appear who would manifest lawlessness to the highest degree. The apostle also gave notice that a *"secret power of lawlessness"* is already at work in the world (2 Thessalonians 2:3,4,7). This is

the power that is manifested throughout the world as individuals and nations ignore the One True God and raise up counterfeit religions in His place.

When even *Christians* are oblivious to what is regarded as sinful in the Bible, lawlessness reigns! The distinction between godliness and self-gratifying depravity has become so blurred that “tolerance” has become the scepter of the lawless. The downfall of this nation looms ahead because the righteous in Christ have silenced themselves (or been silenced), while the unrighteous have clamored to get their lawless way (or create new laws to allow sin to snowball). If Jeremiah were alive today and proclaimed, “*Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD*” (Lamentations 3:40), he’d be laughed out of most congregations.

Are You a Product of the Generational Curse of God-less Education?

For decades God-less **public education** has teamed up with **lawlessness** to produce generations of graduates who've been educated without the centrality of God or His Word. Educators trained in public universities have been steeped in doctrines of humanism which deny God and the infallible truth of His Word.

- Is it any wonder that students are forbidden by school administration to bear witness of Jesus to other young people on school property?
- Or that teachers push an agenda in which indoctrination into very select (unbiblical) information is the norm?

Think, for example, of the theory of evolution presented as the only true account of life. Or same-sex unions which are flaunted in required reading textbooks. Or revised history in which

women’s liberation movements take precedence over the spiritual underpinning of the Founding Fathers.

Under that kind of pervasive unrighteous influence, the populace at large, including many Christians, have placed their pursuit of worldly success, pleasure, and greed at the center of their thoughts and motivations. Public education, or more accurately, **public indoctrination**, puts every child at the same level. The “**No Child Left Behind**” agenda brings education down to the lowest common denominator: teaching only toward the compulsory tests. Children are force-fed facts which have been preselected to fulfill the mandated agenda.

This is indoctrination rather than a venue for training a child to think **creatively** and **constructively**. Many kids have grown so mentally lethargic and unimaginative that parents have to find ways to entertain them, especially through techno gadgets. How many parents ever stop to consider they’re sinning against God in their neglect to train their children according to His ways rather than allowing a God-less system to mold them?

You’re probably aware that the National Education Association affirmed the *Humanist Manifesto* in 1932 to create a God-less society. That devious endeavor has certainly succeeded! The Bible literacy rate has dropped from 65% to 4% in three generations.

In the absence of God's holy Law to guide us, rebellion as evidenced in the **epidemic demand for perceived rights** dominates this nation. At the same time, the individual’s responsibility for his or her own actions has decreased dramatically since they aren’t held accountable. From the heads of government to the individual citizen, people

don't take responsibility for their actions. Blame, excuses, and lack of conscience hamstring the need to leave adolescent behavior behind and grow up! The end of adolescence is deemed when a person takes complete responsibility for their actions. In the 1960s this occurred around age 19. By the year 2000 it was approaching 40 years of age.

Without the Bible and its commands which require responsibility both to God and to one another, the individual's lawless sin nature rules their choices—the essence of the “self-esteem” programs which pervade public education.

Because the God-less humanism of public education has so infected their minds and motives, so many Christians now evaluate their decisions according to their *own rationale*, regardless of whether their choices are sinful in God's sight. If you're a product of public education, you must be intentional in pursuing the truths of both the Older and Newer Testaments! That's the only way you can deprogram yourself from the indoctrination you received.

We're often asked about whether certain commands of the Older Testament pertain to followers of Jesus today. In that light consider these next areas to which you may have given little thought regarding whether you were violating our holy God's standards. Please discuss these topics with your family and ask the Spirit of Christ to direct your path accordingly.

Are You Activity-Driven?

“Busyness is NOT next to godliness.”

Are you and your family enslaved to **out-of-control activities**? We hear from so many Christians who are emotionally drained day after day, under constant tension because of the activities that con-

sume their lives. This weary anxiety isn't as much a cultural problem as a willful disregard for God's intent for a weekly Sabbath day of rest—that precious 24 hours in which we can refresh and edify ourselves so we can be His blessing to others the rest of the week. Parents in particular are drowning in busyness. Families have ceased to have a time of *togetherness* because parents are dominated by what they think they have to do. How few families even share meals together where children can be *listened to, understood, and trained how to have meaningful discussions with other people?*

Cyber distractions and techno gadgets have displaced the mutual enjoyment of spending time with each other. Each family member, whether Dad in front of the TV, Mom catching up on email, or kids with their video games, is isolated in their own little world. Each is addicted to their own form of **“activity-based gratification.”** They're all occupied, but not necessarily rested by what they're doing.

We've become an entertainment culture, stripped of personal creativity and imagination. In so doing, we are spiraling downward as did the ancient Greeks and Romans in their final stages of societal meltdown. And just as their sources of entertainment became increasingly more violent and sensual, so has the nature of what engages this nation's interest.

We in Christ can't let ourselves be sucked into the world's prison of preoccupied multi-tasking and frantic exhaustion. Don't give way to the *spirit of error* which so defines the world's ways and denies the Spirit of truth (see 1John 4:3-6). For example, just because your child's school offers an abundance of after-school activities doesn't mean he or she has to participate in them! And resist the fear that your child will somehow be incompetent

if he or she isn't taking a variety of lessons and classes. Provide them opportunity for **creative** and **constructive** interaction with buddies!

Our Father has called YOU as a parent to train your children in the kind of character and purpose which He intends for them. How much more effective in realizing this objective would be serving people in need side-by-side rather than keeping your child busy with programs and activities?

“You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.”

(Jeremiah 29:13)

There's an inherent danger when your brain has gotten used to being taught through repeated indoctrination and rote memorization. You get to know a lot *about* a topic but don't develop a heart understanding or emotional devotion to the object of your study. Yet *relational intimacy* is the key quality that our Father and His Son are seeking from those who love and serve Them.

Think, for example, of the vast difference between learning facts *about* God through catechism classes which teach creed, and pursuing through His Spirit the Father Who wants everyone to learn to value Him as **Abba**. Encountering Him as the Father of all fathers takes the **creative** and **constructive** yieldedness of a child, willing to pursue Him with an open mind that's eager to ask questions.

We need the kind of trust that responds with “ears to hear”—biblical vernacular for *obedience*. That's how we'll grow in the **love-based value** our Father wants us to have in our relationship with Him. It's the kind of love that encompasses our heart, soul, strength, and mind—the love that evidences He's the

highest value in our life (Luke 10:27).

If you're the product of public education, the most common hurdle you'll face in your walk in Christ is a mind that's been trained through indoctrination. The rift between inculcated facts and a *passion* for the Goal of your learning makes it that much more difficult to develop a love-based relationship with your Father and Lord Jesus. To overcome the barrier of confining God to an intellectual file in your mind, you must pursue Him with *all your heart* (see Jeremiah 29:13).

Anyone can accumulate Bible knowledge or hold creedal allegiance; even devout Muslims can recite large portions of the Koran and their creed. But wholeheartedly pursuing the One True God Who has revealed Himself through His Spirit and His Word is an intentional walk of loving trust—a daily experience between Father and child, Lord and beloved servant. And you know that this spiritual intimacy won't take place if you're too busy with the things of this world!

Throughout the Psalms the writers speak of times of rest in which they could *meditate* on God and His decrees. Think of “meditating” in terms of how a cow or sheep ruminates after eating—they peacefully redigest everything they've taken in. This is the kind of restful and reflective contemplation you need if you're to have the fullness of relationship **Abba** wants with you. It's in meditating on His commands—His good and righteous way of life for you in the Spirit—that you can discern how to apply them. That's the connection the psalmist understood—he so revered God that he made sure His Word was securely a part of his motives and subsequent actions: “*I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You*” (Psalms 119:11).

Don't be like the Israelites whom the prophet was sent to warn: “*This is what*

the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: 'In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it' (Isaiah 30:15). Busyness is a spiritual and relational destroyer! So many Christians don't even know how to have meaningful, heartfelt conversations with their Father, or with each other for that matter. People do more factual talking *at* each other, Bible facts included, than talking *with* each other. Tweeting and texting only add to the problem of dehumanizing communication.

Meaningful conversation involves engaging the other person concerning what they said, and not focusing on what you want to say next. Behind the facts are values and goals that are dear to the other person's heart.

- When you read the Bible, do you explore it with an investigative mind probing God's commands for how He would have you live?
- Do you ask questions when you speak with other people, wanting to fully know the values and goals behind what they're sharing?
- Do your conversations with family and friends allow for feelings to be expressed?
- Describe what talking with other family members is like for you. Is it a chore, an intrusion, an eager exchange?

When people contact us with problems, we often refer them to materials we've posted on our website. Sadly, it's not unusual for them to contact us at a later date *with the same problem*. And when we ask if they've followed through with implementing the material we referred them to, too often they tell us they were too busy to read and discuss it! If they're too busy to help themselves, why do they expect someone else to push them along?

A common thread plagues contemporary Christendom: people don't take the time to rest and consider. An old adage applies here: **"A fool is the lumberman who doesn't stop to sharpen his axe."** Busyness is an addiction that's hard to overcome. Many think of addictions as some form of chemical dependency. But at its heart,

Addictive behavior is whatever absorbs you so intensely that you fail to fulfill your responsibility for the safety and/or dignity of others.

- Do you repeatedly gripe about the same problems over and over?
- Has anyone given you solid advice that you neglected to follow through on and are still suffering with the same situation?

Do You Disregard the Sabbath?

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" (Exodus 20:8; see also Genesis 2:2,3; Isaiah 58:13,14);

Holy is one of those words that people tend to relegate to the realm of super-spiritual. Yet the original meaning connotes being *made clean and set apart for God's use*. That, incidentally, is why Christ has set us free: to be purified by His death on our behalf so we can be in the presence of our God through His Spirit and serve His purposes and will! One of the reasons ancient Jerusalem was destroyed was because His chosen people were breaking the day of rest He had given to bless them—the Sabbath.

Note that Jesus didn't deny this day as irrelevant now that He had come. Rather He reaffirmed it as a special gift from His Father: **"[Jesus] said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath'"** (Mark 2:27,28). He also

made clear that it is *lawful* (ie., a freedom we enjoy within God's parameters) to do good on sabbath days (Matthew 12:12).

Our Father set aside the seventh day of each week so that humanity might put aside their usual work responsibilities and focus on Him and on one another, enjoying both emotional and physical recovery. We owe it to Him as the Giver that at the end of our Sabbath day we are emotionally and physically recuperated, ready to serve Him for the next six days.

God ended His creation work on the seventh day, and He commanded this day to be set apart weekly as a *blessing*. In keeping our Sabbath set apart from our usual work days we are identifying with our Lord's will that we be set apart as His own. The limitations He places on how we observe this day of recovery are, as with all His laws, intended to differentiate His people from those whose lives are ruled only by the concerns of this world.

"Also I gave them My Sabbaths as a sign between us, so they would know that I the LORD made them holy" (Ezekiel 20:12).

"But if you do not obey Me to keep the Sabbath day holy by not carrying any load as you come through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem that will consume her fortresses" (Jeremiah 17:27).

While we were living in Israel our hearts rejoiced to see how many families welcomed the weekly sabbath as a special time to enjoy one another and refresh themselves. Grandparents, parents and kids strolled freely around their neighborhoods, talking and laughing together without other distractions. We realized that when you're surrounded by constant threat of attack from the countries sur-

rounding your own tiny land, you need time intentionally set apart to appreciate one another! And, many observant Jews knew from their own history that violating the sabbaths God had given them ultimately resulted in chastisement upon their people. Holy fear is a good thing.

"Put to death... greed, which is idolatry"
(Colossians 3:5).

Greed has become a national idol at all levels of society, and it has stolen the Sabbath! Even within Christendom so many treat their sabbath day like any other—except for the additional activity of worship services. Few are even aware that they've missed God's purpose for this day of rest. Rather, as with so many other gray areas of compromise with the world's ways, they use their time off from work (that is, if they're not working themselves) to catch up on things they feel they must get done.

Yet just as in the days of Nehemiah when the sabbath gift from God had become just another day to make money, this land has succumbed to the idolatry of greed as well. For example, how many people do you know who eagerly rush to restaurants after worship, not even considering that their expenditure means someone else has to work on that day to serve them? How many head for the mall (or Walmart) to purchase what they need for the coming week?

Nehemiah's heart was so grieved by the blatant and willful disobedience of buying and selling that had overtaken Jerusalem that he ordered the city gates to be shut from sundown to sundown to halt sabbath commercialism (Nehemiah 13:19-22). Maybe it's time for Christians to stop doing what they think they're "free" to do on the sabbath and consider

from His Word what God considers *restful*. As Jesus made clear, doing good on the sabbath is time well spent in our Father's sight.

- Have you ever considered that one reason for our Father's forthcoming chastisement of this nation is that His children have willfully neglected His gift of the sabbath?
- Have you established your own biblical basis for how you and your family use your sabbaths?
- Would our Father commend you and your family for how you use your sabbath? Has it ever occurred to you that on this day others might appreciate time spent with you as an extension of His love through you?
- Do others have to work so you can be entertained or accommodated on your sabbath?

There's a direct correlation between personal and family problems, and not using the sabbath to rest and refresh as God intended. Test this for yourself!

The Sin of Endangering Others

"If [a person] has a bull that has had the habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up and it kills a man or woman, the bull must be stoned and the owner also must be put to death" (Exodus 21:29).

This verse applies far beyond violent livestock and negligent owners. Our Father doesn't want people to live in ongoing apprehension that they might get hurt. Throughout Leviticus 19 our Lord presents sound, interrelational commands that prescribe how we're to treat each other. One in particular addresses people who put others at risk by what they do: *"Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the LORD"* (Leviticus 19:16).

Do *you* create fear and apprehension in others by what you do? Do you text or talk on your cell while you're driving? (Note that talking "hands-free" doesn't prevent accidents. It's your *mind* that's distracted, not your hands!) Recent studies show that when you're texting while driving, you're **23 times more likely to cause an accident**. You may even inadvertently kill someone. How do you feel about that?

Just because you feel free to contact someone when you're behind the wheel, aren't you sinning when you increase your probability of harming others? Aren't you being *lawless* in your negligent disregard for others? *"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets"* (Matthew 7:12).

To unnecessarily endanger someone else is the height of arrogance and pride! Note this: If you are experiencing a resistant spirit or rebellion in your child(ren), consider your own rebellion as you exercise your perceived rights that jeopardize others. Everyone reaps what they sow!

It's time that we who follow Jesus as our Lord give up pursuing our perceived rights and find out what's right *in our Lord's sight*. To belong to our Lord Jesus is to become like Him in character, motive and goal. How different was the response of our Lord in the midst of persecution than the world's self-obsessed reaction would be: *"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth"* (Isaiah 53:7).

Humility and love don't exercise perceived rights, but seek only to bless others—and especially not endanger them. This is the true freedom we have in

Christ—to give of ourselves in serving others and protecting them from any misdeeds on our part. Freedom in our Lord never allows us to indulge our sin nature by pursuing choices that violate His Word. So, how do we know if we're tripping into a snare?

In our sanctification into Christ's likeness our Father uses events and circumstances in our lives as an opportunity to yield our perceived rights, especially those choices that jeopardize other people.

Think of this as one of His ways of showing you that you're using your "freedom" as a license to sin: If a situation occurs in which you're finding yourself frustrated, that response indicates you're clinging to a perceived right our Lord isn't giving you. If He isn't giving it to you, then His grace isn't accompanying that "right" either. Your frustration and/or anger is a sign that your sinning against Him! It's time to repent and be changed. Please take some time and reflect on this in regard to each of the choices you make.