

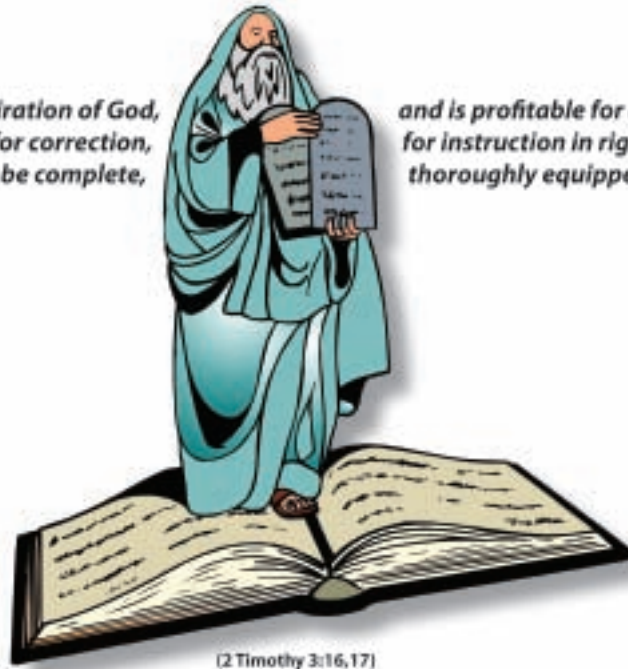
Teaching E-mails

Prophetic Warnings From a Righteous God

37. Are You Violating Our Holy God's Law? (May 15, 2008)

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,
for reproof, for correction,
that the man of God may be complete,*

*and is profitable for doctrine,
for instruction in righteousness,
thoroughly equipped for every good work.*



(2 Timothy 3:16, 17)



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Introduction

Just as in the days of Jesus' earthly sojourn, there are many who pride themselves on their religious practices but have not yielded to His Lordship in their lives. The Spirit of Christ has impressed on us to warn many of you who call yourselves "Christian" but neither belong to Him nor serve Him in loving obedient trust.

Beginning with this Teaching E-mail we're going to deal with a very substantive reality that has been lost in much of western Christendom—the appalling nature of each person's sin and the need for each one to repent.

The *anti*-Christ spirit that has control over so many who call themselves "Christian" has emptied the work of Jesus on the cross: *to pay the penalty for our sins and reconcile us to God*. Rather than confronting people's sin nature and bringing them to repentance, many faith communities have been influenced by the demonic Church Growth Movement. They appease the sin nature of people by making Christianity entertaining and pleasurable, never offending them with the heinousness of their sin.

But man-pleasing religious get-togethers in which sin is overlooked or excused are not the Kingdom of righteousness Jesus envisioned. His name is brought down among the nations because of this travesty!

Jesus proclaims to us an important element that's directly related to the expansion of His Kingdom: *"Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations..."* (Luke 24:47). Our Lord's call for repentance wasn't new. God's requirement for repentance is a consistent theme throughout the Older Testament. In fact, the words "repent" and "repentance" appear over 50 times in the Newer Testament. And, repentance is

The Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*, means a change of mind—not just how you think, but your *entire heart and life* as the Spirit of Jesus works in you. The process of repentance begins with your confession of your sin. The Greek word for confess, *homologeō*, means that you agree with God that you have sinned against Him. You have violated one of His commands and you realize your guilt.

But confession must press on into *metanoia*—replacing your sinful attitude or action with *what Jesus would do*. You can only do this by turning to Jesus for His help, so that through His Spirit you can be more like Him. This is where you *"take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"* (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Failure to both confess *and* repent for your sin is a two-fold insult to Jesus. First, by not confessing your sin you negate His sacrifice on the cross to pay the penalty your sin warrants. Second, by refusing to turn away from sin and turn to Him for the transformation only He can provide, you insult the King of the Kingdom. There may come a tragic day when He says, "I never knew you!" (Matthew 7:23)

the first stipulation our Father calls for in order to enter Covenant with Him.

Early in the Newer Testament John the Baptist heralds: *"Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near"* (Matthew 3:2). In order to repent, you must have violated some law or command of God. As we'll see, the Older Testament, that is, the Hebrew Bible, made crystal clear God's righteous laws and commands—the ways of life by which His people would thrive and reap blessing.

The question for us today, and the point of this e-mail, is this:

Do all (or any) of the laws, commands and teachings of the Older Testament apply to us as followers of Lord Jesus?



Is The Older Testament Less Important Than The Newer Testament?

Are you among the multitude who are missing the call to repent and as a result are not entering the Kingdom? There is so little call to *repentance* throughout western Christendom. A variety of reasons can be given, but all add up to a **failure to confront sin**. And the neglect to confront the hideous nature of sin from *God's perspective* is due in part to a lack of understanding the importance of the Older Testament.

Sin has little meaning for many Christians today. In fact, few of the churched truly value what Jesus accomplished on the cross in paying the penalty for their sins. The base corruption of the sinful, unforgiven heart holds little significance for those who look with disdain on others but ignore their own inner depravity.

Were you aware that until the mid-1950s few congregations were incorporated in the United States? And hardly any had mortgages to be repaid on their buildings. But then a litigious scheme rose up to plant doubt and fear in professional clergy: **“What if someone you counsel goes out and commits suicide?”**

Lawyers traveled throughout the country convincing clergy that they were *legally liable* if this happened. But, if their congregations incorporated, the *corporation* was now liable. As a result, there is hardly a congregation today that isn't incorporated.

Once congregations became corporations, banks were willing to lend them money. Thus arose the “church mortgage”. In the decades to follow, mortgages became the demonic yoke around the neck of clergy. Rather than forthrightly and boldly serving the interest of the King, many were forced to serve the next mortgage payment. And to do this they needed *people in pews* to pay it.

Because so many congregations have large mortgages, many clergy feel compelled to do anything to attract and retain people to pay the bills. As a result, “nickels and numbers” are the rallying cry of success, rather than Kingdom-hearted followers of Jesus abiding in communal righteousness for His glory. Sadly, entertainment has replaced the call to “Repent!!”

The burden to pay mortgages was the fertile soil to spawn the man-centered “Church Growth Movement”. Over the decades, ever slicker ways to attract people were copied from the world system. Since the media industry was so successful, entertainment replaced confronting sin. The “penitent pew” that once occupied the front of many congregations was replaced by a “worship leader” and a lively team of performers.

Before we venture further into our discussion, we want to ask you:

- **Do you rely on the *complete* Bible for how you live your life? Describe your personal assessment of the Older Testament.**

- **How relevant is the Older Testament as a guide to your faith walk in Lord Jesus?**

What You Don't Know *Can* Hurt You

If your response to either of the questions above had negative overtones, you may not be aware that you're being influenced by a man from the second century who was branded a "heretic". Let's review his heresy and its influence on contemporary Christendom.

During the second century a businessman named Marcion tried to persuade followers of Jesus that the Older Testament was inferior to the Newer Testament. He insisted that the Hebrew Scriptures be dismissed as unauthoritative. Borrowing from Plato, Marcion maintained that the God of the Older Testament was evil. By association, therefore, the chosen people of that God, the Israelites, were evil as well.

The God of the Hebrew Scriptures demanded sacrifice and blind obedience to unreasonable laws, said Marcion. The Newer Testament, however, introduced Jesus as a "god of love", one in whom there was no relationship to the wrathful deity of the Older Testament.

Coinciding with Marcion's influence, the Greek philosophers who had converted to Christianity *allegorized* much of the Older Testament. These men of renown refused to recognize the Hebrew Bible passages as a *historical narrative* containing laws and commands so that people might be able to have a right relationship with God. Instead, the converted philosophers altered the scriptural meaning to "sanitize" the earthly reality these accounts depicted. Some even divided God into a discarded "Older Testament" deity of the Law and emphasized instead a "Newer Testament" Lord

of grace who overlooks their sins.

While Marcion's teaching was ultimately denounced and he himself excommunicated, his views still permeate western Christianity by continuing to influence the negative view of many toward the Older Testament. You may be someone who has ignored or discounted these essential writings as irrelevant to anyone but Jews. But whenever you think (or are taught) that the Hebrew Bible is a secondary (or less) reference source for your practice of faith and conduct, you are under the influence of Marcion's teaching. You've *divided God*.

[For more on the loss of reliance on the Older Testament, see *Discussing How To Restore The Early Church*, Section 2, Lesson 15.]

How Does *God* Perceive The Older Testament?

"Whoever trusts in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified" (John 7:38,39).

The only Scripture in existence when Jesus spoke these words was the **Hebrew Bible**. How can you trust in Jesus 'as the Scriptures call for' if you don't intimately know the Older Testament as our gracious Father's way of life for His people?

These scriptures—the teachings of Moses (Torah), the Psalms and the Prophets—were the foundation on which Jesus based His teaching: the **1050 commands** in what is the New Covenant in Christ! The words of Jesus, of Paul, of the other Newer Testament writers certainly didn't appear out of a vacuum or from personal imagination.

Jesus pointedly affirmed the lasting nature of God's law and how our Lord made clear the nature of these commands and prophecies:

*Do not think that I came to destroy the **Law or the Prophets**. I did not come to destroy but to **fulfill** [to make full their meaning through completion]. For assuredly, I say to you, **till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is accomplished** [until everything that must happen has happened] (Matthew 5:18).*

Jesus directed a specific warning toward anyone present or future who would teach the laws and commands of the Hebrew Scriptures He had just emphasized in the previous passage. Note that these commands are an integral part of the Kingdom of Heaven of which He is King!

*Anyone who **breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same** will be called **least in the Kingdom of Heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands** will be called **great in the Kingdom of Heaven** (Matthew 5:19).*

Again, at the time of the Newer Testament writers, the only Scripture available was the Hebrew Bible. The truths that equipped them for righteousness were the Hebrew texts of their forefathers. Each of the 33 times the word *scripture* was used in the Newer Testament was referring to the *Hebrew commands, laws and prophecies* given by God to the children of Israel!

Paul made clear the essential nature of the Hebrew Bible for all who would follow Jesus as Lord: "**All Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in**

righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16,17). He penned these words when only the Older Testament existed.

Can you articulate WHY Jesus became incarnate and died on the cross? We don't mean pat answers like, "He died for my sins." The answer to the *why* is found in the *Older Testament* in the 333 prophecies that pertain to our Lord's incarnation, death and resurrection!

What do you think about this observation:

The degree to which you understand why Jesus died on the cross is the intensity with which you cling to our King and serve Him rather than yourself. When you understand our Lord from the Older Testament, you gratefully embrace the freedom and boundaries of God's commandments.

The why greatly increases your appreciation of the sacrifice of Jesus — out of love for Him you want to apply the entire Bible to your life and bring glory to our Father.

The Law and Biblical (*Christ-like*) Character Development

From Adam we have all inherited the desire and propensity to sin: "*Therefore, just as **through one man** [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because **all sinned**. For as by one man's disobedience [Adam] **many were made sinners***" (Romans 5:12,19a).

Cain was the first to inherit from his father a desire to sin. Unlike his brother Abel, who resisted sin and offered God an acceptable sacrifice, Cain gave way to self-will and presented an unacceptable

offering of his own choosing. As a result his offering was rejected by God (Genesis 4:3-5). Sin then enticed Cain to murder Abel, an act which didn't pass unnoticed by God: "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do **not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it**" (Genesis 4:7).

The sin nature in each of us desires to do whatever it pleases—and that's the *opposite* of the way God would have us live according to His commands and ways. Each of us was born with a desire to sin rather than to do good. A child needs help to not give in to their propensity to sin, so parents are commanded to instill the law of God in them (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Ephesians 6:4).

Training children in the laws of God and living that way yourself is designed to impart *righteous character*. Parents are the first and most influential people to help their children become Christ-like in character. Keep in mind that personality is *not* character. Everyone is born with a personality, but no one is born with character!

Like your sin nature, your personality (your response to the world around you) is inherited from your parents. Character, on the other hand, must be actively instilled throughout your life, especially as you yield to the Spirit of Christ in you and allow Him to transform you.

From the Bible's standpoint:

Christ-like character may be viewed as motivations that are no longer under the control of the sin nature.

When a child or even an adult is trained according to the laws and commands of God, His truth confronts their sin nature. His laws are designed to produce biblical character, that is, Christ's likeness. This confrontation can be a very painful process. The development

of Christ-like character causes us to separate from our own sinful inclinations.

Let's review God requirements of parents and/or shepherds of His faith communities as they pertain to developing biblical character.

- The development of biblical character indicates embracing God's laws.
- Biblical character reveals that His laws are imprinted on your way of life. You uphold burdens and responsibilities that your sinful inclinations alone would avoid. Good manners, healthy relationships, responsible work attitudes, and proper deference toward others to whom it's due are just a few factors that are part of biblical character.



Every character quality you acquire is at first constraining. That is, you're no longer yielding to your sin nature in that area. In the diagram above, your sin nature wants to live in the red zone. The development of biblical character constrains you to uphold righteous motivations and actions.

Over time, as you see the beauty of the different biblical character qualities,

you appreciate them and willingly keep yourself from giving in to your sin nature so that you can grow in these attributes. For followers of Jesus, our love for our Lord helps us appreciate that as each Christ-like characteristic develops and deepens, we are becoming more like our Lord. Love for Him and for others around us compels us to want to be like Him more and more.

In Teaching E-mails to follow, we'll delve into the laws, commands and teachings found throughout the Bible. We want to help you grasp how important God's laws are for you, especially if you yearn to be more like Jesus and bring praise to Him.

In our next Teaching E-mail we're going to ask you the questions below. We want to include them now for you to have a chance to study and discuss them.

• If laws in the Older Testament are not repeated in the Newer Testament, does that mean they are no longer in effect?

• Are there laws in the Older Testament that no longer apply to followers of Jesus? Which ones?

• In the teachings of Jesus, did He do away with all of the Older Testament laws, or did He strengthen and make full the meaning of them?