

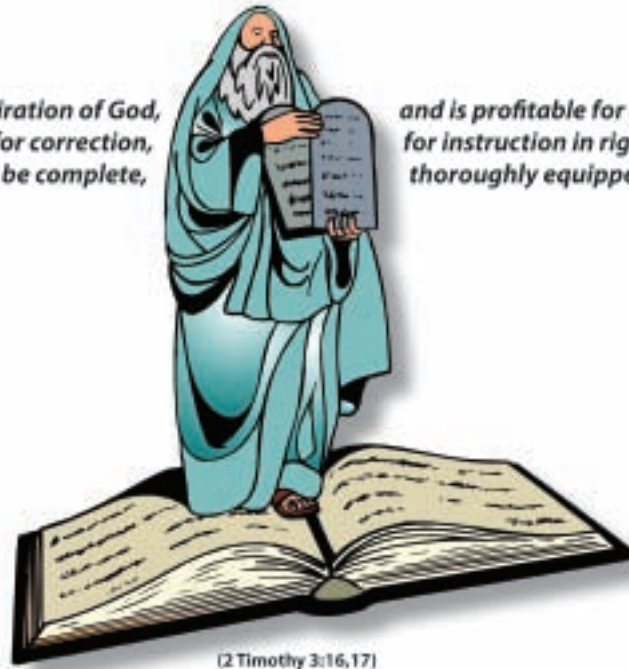
Teaching E-mails

Prophetic Warnings From a Righteous God

40. Obeying God's Moral Law (Part 1) (June 6, 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

This lesson in our series continues to emphasize God's intent for His *entire Word* to be applied in the lives of those who follow our Lord Jesus. We're focusing here on God's moral and ethical law as it applies to all who are called by Him to represent His Name and His redemption message.

As we've written earlier, walking in the steps of our Lord Jesus in obedient trust is *pleasing* to our Father but by no means earns our redemption. We are *not* "under" the law as a means of justification. Christ alone is our Justifier before our Father! But we *are* called by Lord Jesus to live righteously through His Spirit out of *love for God* and *love for one another*.

If you go through the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7) you see that Jesus uses the *Hebrew Bible* as His reference point. He then goes on to focus on our heart motive in our interaction with each other. *Never* does He call for His disciples to disregard the Law of His Father. Rather, our "good works" as we obey His commands bring praise to our Father (Matthew 5:16-19).

Beginning with the Hebrew Bible and on into the Newer Testament, there is no doubt that our God requires each of us to own our responsibility for our sins. That underlying ownership of our sinful depravity is key to our repentance: our response to the Spirit's call to *turn away from* that ugliness and *turn toward* the wonderful forgiveness and covenant union in our Lord Jesus!

Yet for many Christians today who have heard only that they need to "invite Jesus into their heart", the whole issue of sin is a mystery. Let's examine sin from *God's perspective*. What does *He* consider to be sin? The answer comes as we look to His entire Word as a *continuum*

of His revelation.

Sadly, much of western Christendom is illiterate when it comes to the Older Testament. Yet His character and His ways are set forth there for His Son's called-out ones to grasp the foundational truth upon which our Lord Jesus built His teaching.

Consider this: If God's moral and ethical laws in the Older Testament are disregarded or even negated by Christians today, then a large portion of what our Lord Jesus calls "sin" is meaningless. The Christian life will look no different than that of a "good" non-Christian.

In much of contemporary Christianity, anyone who cites the Older Testament as the "Word of God" for application is branded "legalistic", as though the commands Jesus taught and expanded upon had somehow emanated from a vacuum. Yet out of our Father's wonderful grace He made known to both Israel and to those who love His Son the *Abrahamic covenant* in which obedient trust was His relational parameter (see Genesis 22:12; Romans 4:16).

The term "legalism" is often referred to in many segments of western Christianity as "obedience to God's laws" as if His law is abolished as a way of life for followers of Jesus. Yet Paul himself called God's law (which includes all His teaching throughout the Hebrew Scripture) "holy, just and good" (Romans 7:12). So why is there this perceived disparity?

Perhaps this rendering of "legalism" from David Stern's *Jewish New Testament Commentary* will help clarify:

Legalism is the *perversion* of God's commands into a set of rules which can presumably be obeyed *without having faith, without having trust in God, without having love for God or*

for man, and *without* being empowered by the Holy Spirit.

But God never intended that His good and holy ways be followed *apart from* a relationship grounded in loving trust in Him! The Israelites couldn't do it, and neither can we, as Paul forcefully notes in his letter to the Romans! Biblical love is *responsive*—it takes action. That's the sense of the love commanded in Deuteronomy 6:5 and emphasized by our Lord Jesus (Matthew 22:37)—obedience that's grounded in *love for God*.

Many translations of the Bible misinterpret Paul's letter to the Galatians to make it seem as if any obedience to the laws of God is wrong. However, Paul's intent was to expose and warn against the *Judaizers*. Their goal was a form of **self-justification** to convince others to keep the Law through circumcision as evidence of conversion.

But you can't earn favor with God by scrambling to obey His good and righteous ways in your own strength! Self-justification is *legalistic perversion*—attempting to gain salvation through keeping God's Law *apart from* the sacrifice of Christ and regeneration through His Spirit. Legalistic perversion nullifies the need for Jesus as the Sacrificial Substitute for the death we all deserve.

How tragic it would have been for the early Church if they had become chained to the bondage of legalistic perversion of God's commands as the unbelieving Jews had! How disastrous it would have been if the early followers of Jesus evaluated their relationship with Him based on behavioral practices of religious ritual and form rather than on a loving trust that responded with grateful obedience. [For more on the topic of legalistic perversion, see **Lifebyte 44. *The Grace of Our God's Law.***]

The moral and ethical laws in the Older Testament aren't negated for a follower of Jesus. The way of life which our Father intended to bring blessing isn't legalistic, but *righteous*. Lord Jesus has *made* us righteous by bearing our sin burden for us. AND, He has empowered us by His Spirit to progress on our lifelong journey in Him with ever-increasing transformation into His character, thoughts and actions (2 Corinthians 3:18).

It's because of our *love* for our Lord that we seek to know what He considers sin, so that we might turn from it and fill in that rut with His ways. This leads us back to our initial theme, that the parameters of *sin*—that which grieves God and violates His ways—are first introduced in the Older Testament.

In this Teaching E-mail we list a few of the laws of God found in the Hebrew Scriptures. Where appropriate, we cite where in the Newer Testament they've been apperceived from the Older Testament and reinforced.

Some of these commands are straightforward; the situation they address is as pertinent today as when it was first penned. For example, God's requirement for *parents* to teach and role model obedience to His good and righteous ways (Ephesians 6:1-4) apperceives the generational responsibilities of the Israelites to pass along His commands to their children and grandchildren (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

In other instances, our King's people must extrapolate a principle that we can then apply to similar circumstances. Discerning and applying the *principle* behind God's Law is necessary. Because of technological advancements, many situations today didn't exist when God first detailed His Law. For example, the principle to set no evil thing before our

eyes (Psalms 101:3) must be applied to anything in the media that would offend Jesus!

The specific ways in which we who follow Jesus apply His commands are called *halakhahs*. Our Lord Jesus gave His people authority to apply God's good and righteous ways (Matthew 28:18-20). He also gave us His empowering Spirit to walk in His steps in ever-increasing measure (2 Peter 1:3-8).

[For more on applying God's commands, see our book *Christian Halakhahs—Loving Jesus Through the Way You Apply His Word*, a free download].

1. Obedience As An Expression of Love

The “royal law” of the Older Testament is repeated by James because it summarizes how to walk in God's good and upright ways: “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” (Leviticus 19:18; James 2:8). As someone once said, all the rest is commentary!

Parents are called to an intensity of *loving purpose* to teach their children the commandments of God. Our Father never calls for *other* people to impress His ways on your children; this is the responsibility of *parents* in their daily interaction with them! Grandparents as well are part of the intergenerational passing along of God's commands and ways (see Deuteronomy 6:1-4). And undergirding all of this instruction in righteousness is the command to *love the Lord our God* with everything that's in us (v. 5).

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind

them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

Impressing God's commands onto your children takes more than a brief prayer at mealtime! Rather than watching TV or surfing the internet, your times of sitting at home and walking along the road can be intentional as you share how each day's encounters and circumstances have been God's way for you to apply His Word. *Applying* His Word means *knowing* it, so you are called upon by God to daily explore His Word so you'll have His truth to draw upon within your own spirit!

Our loving Father's commands are “symbols on our hands” so that *everything we do* will be measured by His ways. And binding them on our foreheads means that *every thought* is evaluated by the way He has shown to be good and pleasing to Him.

Be sure that your *home* is a sanctuary of peace for your family. Reviewing and applying His ways within the refuge of your home's “doorposts” will help your children discover the *Source* to personal and interrelational harmony.

The “gates” of your house need the protection of His commands, teachings and ways so that all who *enter and leave* have had an opportunity to be reminded that He is loved and served in this family.

The Newer Testament looks specifically to *fathers* to fulfill this vital command, although mothers certainly aren't excluded. Your attitude as you fulfill this command of our Lord is crucial. *Talking at* your children is a needless source of irritation for them. They don't need you to lecture them, but rather to engage them in *discussing* His Word and helping them *apply it* to their lives.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4; see also Malachi 4:5,6).

The training and instruction referred to by Paul is *ongoing and interactive*—a Hebraic way of discussion in which questions are asked and responses given that encourage even more exchanges. God’s Word is living and active, sharp enough to penetrate heart motives and attitudes (Hebrews 4:12). You don’t want your children slavishly following a set of rules; rather, their *hearts* need to be aligned with God so that they’ll appreciate His gracious love and holiness and *want* to overcome sin’s pull.

- **If you’re a parent, how intentional are you in personally teaching your children to obey God’s Law and please Him? How well did your parents carry out God’s command to teach you? How does their way of training you affect you today?**

- **What changes do you need to make in your approach to impressing as with a stamp in clay God’s commands, ways and teaching on your children and grandchildren?**

- **What changes need to be made in your home so that your children will learn to lovingly obey God’s Word in all that they think and do, and not just while you’re observing them? Is pleasing God more important to them than pleasing themselves?**

2. Measures of Justice

Because He is a God of justice, His Word flows with commands that relate to *applying honesty* to our everyday lives. God called for honest business practices among His people. As He proclaimed, “*Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity. Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt*” (Leviticus 19:35,36).

God brought them out of darkness to *set them apart* as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). *How they lived* reflected to the nations around them the nature of the God they claimed to serve.

God’s reputation is at stake when we claim to be His own, abiding in His Spirit. Whether you slack off at work, cut corners in production, or slip the extra money from a careless cashier into your purse, His reputation is on the line by your choices. It also matters to our Lord how we treat one another, whether that other person is His follower or not. If the Israelites varied their weights and measures according to the customer, they were dealing unjustly. (This was a common practice, one that God *detested* (Deuteronomy 25:16).)

Such dishonesty violated His foundational command to *love your neighbor as yourself* (Leviticus 19:18), for again the verse concludes with, “*I am the LORD.*” If He is to be our Lord, then He has the right to declare the principles that guide and direct our relational interaction.

Since He is the one Who is making the commands, then we who are His people are called upon to uphold His Lordship in our lives and walk in His Spirit's power in love-grounded obedient trust.

The *measure of our love* for one another can be evaluated by how justly we treat each other. For instance, if we're quick to notice flaws in a brother or sister, we've missed our own need for heart examination. Both humility and love undergird the just desire to help someone in need. As Lord Jesus put it, "**First take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye**" (Luke 6:42).

The standards we use to evaluate other people's lives are the ones God will measure us by (Matthew 7:1,2). Those who demand a way of life they themselves are unwilling or unable to follow are called "Hypocrite!"—one who counterfeits reality by pretending to be something that they're not.

Our response to others is in direct proportion to our love for them. That's why our Lord Jesus can command us this summation of all of God's teaching and prophetic messages:

*Whatever you want men to do to you, **do also to them**, for this is the Law and the Prophets* (Matthew 7:12).

This command is justice encapsulated. Our Lord Jesus became man to lead justice to victory (Matthew 12:20). There is no peace without justice, and the love that our Lord works in and through us by His Spirit does not flourish where there is no peace.

- **Are you a just person? Do you treat others as you want to be treated? In what ways are you showing "unjust measures" of partiality among those around you?**

3. Going the Second Mile of Love

Many of the agrarian themes of the Hebrew Scriptures may seem irrelevant to urban Americans. Yet the principles of God's commands are timeless. No matter what the circumstance may be, if your brother is in need and you can help — do it!

*If you see your brother's ox or sheep straying, **do not ignore it but be sure to take it back to him**. If the brother does not live near you or if you do not know who he is, **take it home with you and keep it until he comes looking for it. Then give it back to him. Do the same if you find your brother's donkey or his cloak or anything he loses**. Do not ignore it. If you see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen on the road, **do not ignore it. Help him get it to its feet*** (Deuteronomy 22:1-4).

American society is one of convenience. If it's along your way and you have time, you'll extend kindness. Willingness to be *inconvenienced*, however, is a measure of the Spirit's love at work in you. That motivation translated into Jesus' command to carry a soldier's pack *two miles* (Matthew 5:41) — "the second mile of love."

During the first century Roman occupation of Israel, a soldier could demand that you carry his heavy pack the equivalent of one mile. That was your duty. However, Lord Jesus commanded His disciples to go *beyond* the call of duty so that His Father in heaven might be praised for their good work (Matthew 5:16).

Just think of the conversation be-

tween the soldier and the follower of Jesus during that volunteered second mile. What an opportunity to sow seeds of witness about Jesus during this “inconvenient” service! When you go above and beyond what’s expected, people want to know *why*. Be prepared to tell them.

With today’s media resources, you can go the extra mile by sending out feelers to reunite lost items and their owners. Who knows where stopping to help someone with a need may lead! Our son was helped with a flat tire by a stranger who mentioned that he and his wife managed an apartment complex. As God would have it, our son and his family were earnestly seeking a place to live. Follow-up led them to that complex!

In the parable of the Samaritan who showed such responsive love to one whom most of his people would have despised, Jesus takes extra-mile living to a new level. Our Lord related this parable as a practical example of the greatest commandment: “**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). Wholehearted love for God ties in with sacrificial love for another human being.

Both the priest and the Levite passing by violated God’s command to help someone in need. In fact, the beaten man was a brother, a fellow Jew! They ignored him and went out of their way to avoid contact. The Samaritan, however, willingly took upon himself the burden of the robbed man. He went the second mile to meet his every need. Jesus uses this parable to show the extent our love must go to be revealed by compassionate actions. (See Luke 10:29-36.)

- **Are you a *first-mile-only* Christian? Do you do only that which is convenient for you? How available are you in your heart to do whatever is necessary to help others?**

- **Describe a recent situation in which your “inconvenience level” was tested. How did you feel about what you were asked to do? Can you honestly say you were motivated by love as God’s ambassador?**

4. Treatment of aliens

Think about this: God’s Word always reveals *His character*. He commanded His chosen ones to *love* the aliens in their midst, those who weren’t ethnically the same but “outsiders”. They were to treat them with respect and dignity as one of their own. His reputation among His people was at stake.

When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God (Leviticus 19:33,34).

God is particularly concerned with those who have left the comfort zone of familiar surroundings to live among a new people. What a wonderful opportunity for us who are His beloved bondservants to introduce them by deed and by word to the Word of Life!

The justice of God extends to the “foreigner” even before it reaches the fatherless or the widowed!

*Do not deprive the **alien** or the fatherless of **justice**, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge... Cursed is the man who **withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow** (Deuteronomy 27:17,19).*

Like the Samaritan to whom the Jewish man was an “alien”, our God judges us by how we respond to people who are different than ourselves. Since *He* is impartial, He calls for us as His children and His representatives to show no partiality regardless of background, gender, or position (Leviticus 19:15; Luke 20:21; Romans 12:16; James 3:17; 1 Timothy 5:21).

We were blessed to serve international students at a nearby university by finding host families who could invite them to their home as friends. It was such a delight to spend meaningful time with our friends from other lands and to spark their interest in the Gospel by our love for them!

Your loving outreach can have the effect our Father intends when a person from a far-off land comes to our shores as either a follower of Jesus or one whom you’re privileged to lead to Him. For the sake of His great Name, our Lord may use the testimony of a visitor to penetrate their own culture as they call, write e-mail or return to visit their countrymen.

The media is filled with reports about illegal aliens and how to be more effective in identifying them and keeping them out of the US. Very often, however, these are the only people who are willing to do the poorly paid, backbreaking labor of picking crops in all kinds of weather, living in often deplorable housing so that we can enjoy the fruits and vegetables of

their labor. May the prayer of Solomon find fulfillment in our day:

*[T]hen hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the **foreigner calls to You**, that **all peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You** (2 Chronicles 6:33).*

- **Do you show partiality or disdain people different than yourself? When you hear the phrase “illegal alien”, do you think that person is intruding on your rights and privileges? Or is he someone our Lord has sent you to help?**

- **Have you ever felt like an “alien” yourself? Describe a situation in which you were the “odd person out”. Did someone from the prevailing group come to your aid?**

Conclusion

We’ve included this sampling of God’s good and righteous Law for you to discuss with your family and faith family. In our next Teaching E-mail we’ll share a few more. We encourage you to go through the entire Bible to develop personal and family *halakhahs* of application.

Remember, this *won’t justify* you before Him nor earn approval points. Rather, live with love as your motivator—love for God and love for others. Then, as you live in a way that pleases Him, that love will be seen in choices that stand out from the world’s way of darkness (Ephesians 5:8-10).