

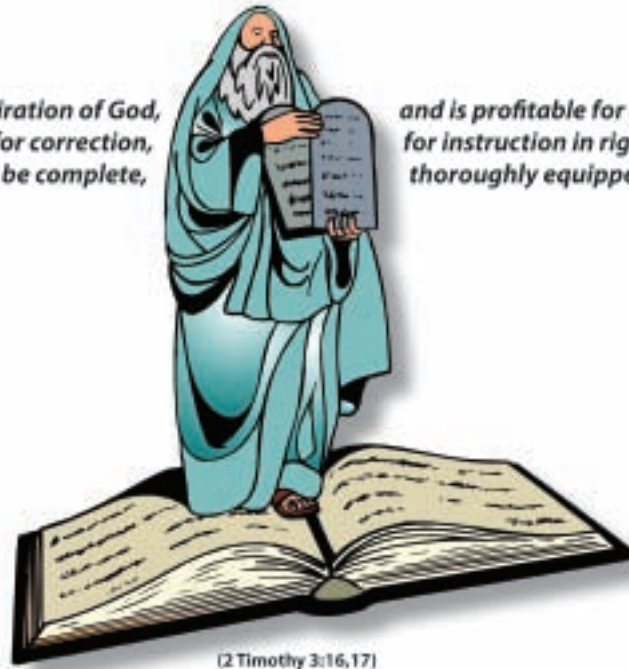
Teaching E-mails

Prophetic Warnings From a Righteous God

41. Obeying God's Moral Law (Part 2) (June 11, 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 is the final lesson in our series on emphasizing the *entire Bible* as the source for our moral and ethical guidance. The Older Testament is still the foundation upon which we learn what is sinful in God's sight and expand our understanding in the Newer Testament.

This lesson discusses several more moral and ethical laws given by our God to live by for our own well-being as well as that of others around us. Again, as we earnestly learn and apply His commands and teachings to our lives, we are actively responding in love to Him through our obedience and trust that His ways are good. And as we wrote previously, we're not to be *rule keepers*, but *loving representatives* of a righteous and holy God.

Compassion for the Disadvantaged

The God of mercy and loving kindness greatly cares for those who are challenged physically, mentally and emotionally. He warns us to neither mistreat them nor take advantage of their disabilities, for He our Lord is their Creator!

Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the LORD (Leviticus 19:14).

Cursed is the man who leads the blind astray on the road (Deuteronomy 27:18).

On the positive side, the needs of the handicapped are a catalyst for followers of Jesus to be transformed into His own nature of *compassion that takes action*. Like Job, we can be eyes to the blind and feet to the lame (Job 29:15).

A sure indicator that Messiah had come to His people Israel would be His fulfillment of key *Older Testament prophecies* about relieving the suffering and disadvantaged through compassionate inter-

vention: the blind would see, the lame walk, those afflicted with skin diseases would be cleansed, the deaf would hear, the dead be raised, and the Good News of redemption in Jesus would be told particularly to the poor (Luke 7:21,22, apperceiving Isaiah 35:5,6; 26:14, 61:1).

Lord Jesus responded with loving action to all who came to Him for healing, freeing them not only from their physical maladies but also delivering them from the attack of evil spirits. He modeled for His disciples the *grace* that underlay the Law of God, healing even on the Sabbath a suffering man. The response of those who had perverted God's gracious teaching into form? Silence in the face of compassion and truth. (See Luke 14:1-4.)

Most people are more comfortable when they're around those who are like them rather than those who are in some way different. You've probably heard those in wheelchairs or who are in some way disfigured lamenting that people are swift to look away when they encounter them.

But Jesus never looked away. He lovingly approached the disabled with restorative power and strengthening words. That's *Kingdom* love, the kind that commands people to share with people who can never pay you back: the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. Repayment for that kind of love comes at the resurrection of *the just* (Luke 14:14).

The character qualities of Christ are interconnected! Compassion that has hands and feet reflects the *justice* of God.

- **How do you respond when you encounter a handicapped person or someone who is challenged in some way? Are you prepared to do whatever is necessary to help them?**

- **How do you respond to the needs of the challenged in a way that respects and uplifts their dignity? Describe a recent encounter with a stranger who was physically or mentally disadvantaged.**

Respect for the Elderly

Western culture idolizes youth. A recent TV commercial describes the generation that came of age in the late 1960s as those who vowed they'd *never get old* — and haven't because they exercise and color their hair!

Yet superficial changes aren't important to the God Who looks inside to the heart of a person for authenticity and devotion to Him (Acts 15:8). Those gray hairs are intended by our Father as indicators of maturity and a wisdom to be passed along to younger generations:

The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness (Proverbs 16:31).

A people who are *prepared for the Lord* need some major change in their lives, especially those among followers of Jesus who have had a poor relationship with their fathers. This need was foreseen by the prophet Malachi, through whom God spoke that the *hearts of fathers would be turned to the children, and the hearts of children would be turned to fathers* (Malachi 4:6, apperceived in Luke

1:17). Intergenerational contact is essential, especially within the extended spiritual family of a faith community in which wise elders are a type of "father".

It's no small things that God is called our *Father*. That term is loaded with implied deference from the children. For those who follow Jesus as their Lord, the command to honor the role of "father" is non-optional, independent of how it's been enacted in your own life. As you walk in forgiveness toward your own father, the Holy Spirit can bring about the healing that's needed by both parties.

The heart of the matter of older people sharing with younger ones revolves around the willingness of the former to *speak wisdom* with confident humility, and the *responsive deference* of the young to receive it and apply it to their lives. Keep in mind that your deference in seeking wisdom from those older than you will largely determine the level of willingness *your children* will have to seek and follow *your* counsel to them.

Obviously, not all older people have lived in such a way that they've learned wisdom. There are plenty of "old fools" who have lived only for themselves. Yet our Lord still commands a response of respect toward the aged as those who are called by Him represent His character and reputation. Again, it's not that the person has earned your respect but that *your Father* has called for you as His child to enact this heart attitude:

Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD (Leviticus 19:32).

- **Deference tests our humility. How do you act in the presence of older people? Do they sense that you're honoring them?**

- **Who are the older people in your life whose wisdom you seek? In what ways do you demonstrate that you've received their counsel or dismissed it? Does your attitude encourage or discourage them from speaking into your life?**

Be Generous As Your Father Is Generous

Let's continue our discussion of applying God's good and holy law to our lives as followers of Jesus who bring praise to His Name by our loving obedience. Repeatedly the Older Testament warns God's people to not forsake His teaching, warning them that they'll be particularly likely to do this when they've settled comfortably in the land He was giving them (Deuteronomy 8:12-14).

The tendency of any of us when we're complacent and satisfied is to grow less dependent on the Fatherhood of our God. If we're not careful to rehearse in our hearts and with our children how kindly He has intervened in our lives, we'll begin to take credit for those blessings ourselves. And that means we're becoming "proud in our heart", a condition our Father detests.

Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest...you say in your heart, "My power and the might of my hand have gained

me this wealth' (Deuteronomy 8:11,17).

When times are tight, we may rationalize how God wants us to use our resources. But Jesus was direct in apperceiving Deuteronomy 15:11, the command to "*open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.*" The manner in which we respond to the impoverished tests both our trust in our Lord as well as our character in our willingness to respect their dignity as we help meet their need.

Handouts don't uplift the dignity of the needy. Even as God called for Adam and Eve to work in the Garden, His laws call for the poor *to labor* for their basic needs. That's the principle behind the command to leave harvest gleanings for the "poor and the alien". Their *dignity* would be upheld as they set their hands to earning their food.

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the LORD your God (Leviticus 19:9,10).

What is the *motive of your heart* as you labor on behalf of your family? Is it to meet your needs and help others, or to sustain a lifestyle that's gratifying but wasteful? The current housing foreclosure crisis points up the tragedy of living beyond your means, presupposing that your financial status quo will continue. But using your resources just for yourself is *stingy*—definitely unlike the character of God!

A stingy man is eager to get rich and is unaware that poverty awaits him (Proverbs 28:22).

Personal savings are at an all-time low as many individuals and families are stretching every penny to provide even necessities. Yet the Word of God is timeless in purpose, regardless of your wealth or lack. If Jesus could leave His glory in heaven to live as one who owned nothing of this world's means, then are we willing as His called-out ones to do with less so that others might be blessed?

You may have been infused with humanist education that placed you at the center of your existence. That doctrine encourages self-indulgence and greed in an ever-increasing sense of entitlement. If you're in that snare, you've discovered that your children are rarely grateful; in fact, they always have their eyes out for more! Their hearts are being trained to gratify foolish and harmful desires that will lead to their ruin (1 Timothy 6:9).

The wisdom of God, on the other hand, shows restraint (see Proverbs 23:4). Our sinful nature tempts us toward the idolatry of greed, which is abhorrent to God. Greed excludes anyone else in your life, seeking after that which is outside of God's will for you and disregarding the needs of others as well. That's why we're commanded to *put greed to death!* (See Colossians 3:5.)

Followers of Jesus are an *interconnected Body*, His collective chosen ones who respond to each other's needs willingly with love (see Romans 12:10,13). That which we do for the least of His we do for Him! The *relational responsibility* that tied the children of Israel together as family is even more so ours in the Lordship of Jesus:

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).

- **How do you consider the funds God entrusts to you? Are they yours, or are you a steward of His resources? Have you spent His resources on a home and lifestyle that you feel befits your economic status? Would our Lord Jesus call you “greedy”?**

- **Have you become trapped in gratifying your children's or grandchildren's wants, training them to be self-indulgent and greedy? How can you break this ruinous worldly cycle?**

Refuse to Treat Others with Contempt

An underlying assumption of all of God's Law is this: our call to *be holy* (set apart for relationship with God and for His purposes) because *our God is holy* (1 Peter 1:15,16, apperceiving Leviticus 20:26 et al.). As children of the Kingdom, we are *representing our King* in all that we say as well as do.

Every human being is made in God's image and was worth the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross—a love that can't be measured. But how often the worth of an individual is undermined with contempt, particularly through gossip and slander.

Gossip and slander share similarities. Gossips pass along rumors, while people who slander maliciously defame a reputation. Neither slander nor gossip is redemptive, reconciliatory or restorative.

Therefore neither can be tolerated in any context among followers of Jesus.

Interestingly, God's command against slander connects that sin with endangering a life. Certainly dissension is stirred up when bad reports are shared; might destructive words also arouse uncontrolled anger directed toward your *neighbor*—anyone God puts in your path?

Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the LORD (Leviticus 19:16).

You may think that in the vast scheme of things in this wicked world, slander and gossip would rate rather low from God's perspective. But think again!

LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? [He who] has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman (Psalms 15:1,3).

Your tongue is fully capable of destroying other people's lives, even if that's not your intention. Whatever you speak is likely to be believed by someone and passed along as "truth". Our sin nature is all too ready to believe anything bad spoken about someone; then we appear better by comparison! (See Proverbs 18:8.)

When you have contempt for others, you aren't concerned about their relationships (Proverbs 16:28). Whether they lose friends or not by what you say doesn't matter to you, proving that the love of Christ is indeed not your motivation.

Your tongue betrays the reality of sin harbored in your heart, defiling your whole person through hellish influence within (James 3:6). That was the fear Paul had for his beloved people in Corinth — that they'd be overcome by sinful misuse of their mouth. His heart

ached that they would hold each other in such light regard.

I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, arrogance and disorder (2 Corinthians 12:20).

We share relationship with one another because we share a *family heritage* in our Lord Jesus. The people of Israel whom God chose to be His treasured possession were gifted with the Law—with His teachings and commands which were for their good from a *loving Father* (Isaiah 64:8).

God has never nullified His moral and ethical laws for His people because He knows how keenly we need to walk in His ways. Our blessing beyond words is the empowering presence of His Spirit, the *experiential reality* of our Redeemer's work within us. Through the Spirit we can be grateful that He's given us the way to live that pleases Him, and the means to be reconciled when we stumble.

Brothers, do not speak evil of one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. But if you judge the law, you are not doing it, but a judge of it (James 4:11).

The antidote for giving way to contempt of others is the same requirement of repentance commanded regarding any sin: agree with God's perspective about it, turn away from it, and receive God's good way for you so you can fulfill His purpose:

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation (1 Peter 2:1,2).

- **Do you ever speak disparagingly about others when they're not present? If you do, with whom do you most often commit this sin? What circumstances prompt your verbal contempt?**

- **Recall when you were the victim of slander or gossip. How was your relationship with those who listened to it affected?**

Do Not Seek Reprisal

If anyone had just cause to repay evil for evil, our Lord Jesus did. Yet His heart overflowed with such love that He could readily forgive His torturers, even unto death. That kind of love was the *fullness of the Law* (Romans 13:10).

But that kind of love is *supernatural*. It has to come from God since our sinful human nature would rather taste vengeance when we're wronged. Revenge is a begrudging attitude that wants to hurt someone for an act they've committed against you. You want them to experience the kind of pain you've gone through because of them.

God's relational law addresses this yearning of our sin nature to be satiated even as He calls for a drastic response that only He as Lord can bring about:

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD (Leviticus 19:18).

Followers of Jesus in Rome were especially susceptible to persecution. It would be all too easy for them to respond to maltreatment with thoughts (and acts) of vengeance. Yet Paul knew that the name of His beloved Lord would be brought down if they repaid evil for evil. Instead, he called upon them to bless their persecutors and live at peace with them! (See Romans 12:14,17,18.)

God keeps account of those who refuse to yield to His loving grace and redemption. All who have refused to come under the sacrificial substitute of Lord Jesus remain under God's condemnation. They've been judged already (John 3:18). *Our* part is to minister to the need of all who are against us in word or in deed, thereby allowing Him within us to triumph. Paul apperceives God's Law as he brings it forward to application

Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but leave room for God's wrath, for it has been written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord [Deuteronomy 5:17,18]. On the contrary, 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink. For in so doing, you will heap coals of fire on his head' [Proverbs 25:21-22]. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:19-21).

- **Are you currently holding a grudge? If so, against whom? What did that person do to precipitate your ill feelings? What do you need to do to free yourself?**

- **Describe a situation in which you yielded to the Spirit when someone hurt you rather**

than giving way to a desire to get back at them. How did your decision affect that relationship?

Rebuke Those Who Sin

We all like the commands of God which call us to love and serve and be kind. However, many of the relational commands of God call upon us to take the hard steps: to rebuke and correct out of love someone who is straying from God's ways.

Do not hate your brother in your heart, but rebuke your neighbor frankly, so that you won't carry sin because of him (Leviticus 19:17).

A rebuke from a heart that longs to see someone restored to God's path is a treasure. If you allow your heart to become hardened toward someone who is close to you because they are violating God's ways, then you're allowing yourself to be drawn into anger and avoidance.

How can you call someone a brother or sister if you don't confront him with *God's perspective* from a heart that's grieved? That person's snare of unconfessed tolerated sin will fester into deeper darkness if you don't hold up a stop sign for him. "*Better is open rebuke than hidden love*" (Proverbs 27:5).

The Holy Scriptures, as Paul refers to the Older Testament, are able to make us "*wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*" (2 Timothy 3:16). Those commands, laws and teachings are *breathed by God* for us to use as we teach, rebuke, correct and train in righteousness. That's how those who are in the

Spirit become thoroughly equipped for every purpose He has for us (v. 17).

You can't walk in fellowship with God and walk in darkness at the same time (1 John 1:6). Satan is a deceiver, and will go to great lengths to fan erroneous rationalization that God's grace overlooks sin. But His wonderful grace is *not* a license to sin! His Name is brought down when someone who calls himself a follower of Jesus is living in a way that defiles His reputation.

When you are made aware that darkness is abiding in a brother or sister, His love compels you to confront that person with the intention of helping him regain fellowship with our Lord. Isn't that the point of Christ's command of "relational responsibility"?

Moreover if your brother sins, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother (Matthew 18:15).

To rebuke someone as a brother or sister means that you know that person well enough to do more than a "drive-by shooting" out of a sense of duty. People who have spent meaningful time together, as in an extended spiritual family, get to know one another pretty well, and can ascertain if love is prompting the rebuke and correction.

A rebuke is probably a hard step of obedience for you. But from our Father's view, you're His *merciful voice of intervention* so that your brother or sister might turn and be restored in fellowship with Him. If you're a follower of Jesus, your obedience to rebuke and correct is a picture of His wonderful love.

- **When did you last rebuke a sister or brother who was abiding in sin? If you haven't, what has held you back?**

- **Were you ever straying from fellowship with our Lord and in need of a corrective rebuke? Did someone love you enough to confront you, or did everyone instead choose to tolerate your sin? How did you feel when you were grieving God by choosing sin rather than righteousness?**

Don't Desecrate Your Body

God is concerned by all aspects of our physical well-being, including food, shelter and clothing. That's why His love for the alien entails giving clothing as well as food through the generosity of His people (Deuteronomy 10:18).

He's also concerned with modesty, and that His people give no appearance of evil. One of His commands mentions women not wearing men's clothes and vice versa (Deuteronomy 22:5). Perhaps if more attention were paid to that, the curse of gender confusion wouldn't be as widespread today!

While God doesn't specify the kind of clothing men should wear, He does make clear through Paul that *women* should dress modestly and decently, not trying to draw attention to themselves through elaborate hairstyles or expensive clothing and jewelry (1 Timothy 1:9).

Part of human nature is attracted by what we see. Even Samuel thought that Jesse's oldest son would be God's choice for king just because he was so tall and

striking! (1 Samuel 16:7, apperceived in Galatians 2:6). But the outward appearance can be deceiving; that's why God focuses on the inner beauty and integrity of the heart .

The world, on the other hand, convinces young people especially that they need to be noticed—especially in how they look. Black is the color of choice these days among the young, perhaps reflecting inner joylessness and despair. Makeup is wildly bright or somberly dark. Yet so many parents respond with a smile, not recognizing the deeper message their child is revealing.

And while clothes and makeup can be discarded and changed, the more disturbing trend toward tattooing and skin cutting is ominous. In Israelite times, pagans showed their grief for the dead by cutting themselves or otherwise marking their bodies. God specifically warned His people to avoid this kind of bodily desecration.

*Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put **tattoo marks** on yourselves. I am the LORD (Leviticus 19:28).*

God has called the followers of His Son to be a kingdom of priests, a temple of His Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16,17). He has set us apart to represent Himself, and any aspect of our being that presents a faulty view of Him needs to be addressed and modified!

We realize that your life may be "time-challenged". But do make sure that your inner person receives more attention that the time you spend on your appearance. That doesn't mean being frumpy or careless. You're a son or daughter of the King! Evaluate what you eat, how much you exercise and what you wear according to a parameter befitting His child. What would Jesus do?

- **Is your body fit for the indwelling Holy Spirit? If not, what do you need to change to be a temple that reflects Jesus?**

- **In what ways would your life be different if you spent as much time feeding your spirit as you do tending to your physical needs? What message would this change give to your children or grandchildren?**

Conclusion

We've included just a sampling of God's good and righteous Law for you to discuss with your family and faith family. 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 *responsive love* as your motivator—love for God and love for others. Then, as you live in a way that pleases Him, your love will be seen in choices that stand out from the world's way of darkness (Ephesians 5:8-10).