

Theme: Holy Living

Series: A Theology for Living

GOD'S RULES FOR TREATING YOUR BROTHER

Suppose that you found a portrait in an old attic. As you study it you see something familiar in the face. The paint strokes are precise and the colors are clear and vivid. But the face, it is fascinating but unclear. You see character and greatness and even glory in the portrait but you still cannot make out the face because it is unfinished. It is an unfinished masterpiece. There are greatness and beauty and even a demanding presence but it is still unclear who the subject of the portrait.

You do a little research and you find out that many hands had painted on this canvas. They were all trying to capture the same subject over generations of time. Each artist has a calling to make known a little bit more of the portrait. You could even predict what the face might look like here and there. Perhaps an eye or a part of the cheek. But even after all those hands, the picture is not clear.

This is exactly what we have with the Old Testament. Dozens of hands over 1400 years had painted the portrait of God. It was not finished until God was ready for it to be finished. "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world." (Heb 1:1-2) "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." (Rom. 5:6). When the time was right, God made himself know fully in Christ.

The Old Testament, what Jesus called the Law and the Prophets, was all about him. Even Israel was about Jesus. They were a type or a symbol of who was to come. The face of God is so complex that it took millennia to compose. And even then we did not understand who He is. Jesus said that he did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. He came to fulfill them. In other words, he is the fulfillment of all that God has made known to humanity through the Old Testament, even through Israel itself. Rather than abolishing it, he completed it. Jesus is the correction to our misconceptions about God.

Some of the best thinkers of the day had so convoluted the Law that no one but them understood it or could keep it. They thought they were the only ones who could please God. Jesus said, that they were wrong. In fact he told the people that their righteousness had to be greater than the Scribes and Pharisees or they could not enter the kingdom of God!

Because Jesus is the completion and fulfilment of the Law, our relationship to God and to our neighbor is radically changed. Our need to be transformed is even greater than we thought. He said that from the ancients you have heard that you shall not commit murder. And that anyone who committed murder was accountable to stand before the court of judgement. But Jesus wants us to understand that there is far more to this command than just an act. What we do in our minds makes us just as guilty as what we do in our actions. Whoever is angry with his brother is guilty before the court. The anger referred to here is utter contempt for the other person. Jesus says that whoever calls his brother empty headed or the equivalent of blockhead, is guilty before the supreme court and whoever calls his brother a fool is guilty enough to be thrown into hell. All of these nuances of the law are acts of the mind. Suddenly all of us are guilty of murder. If you are angry with your brother, your wife, your husband, your fellow church member, your friend, you are guilty of murder. There is a place for righteous anger against the terrible things that people can commit against others. We know that from the acts of Jesus and from the words of Paul. But most of the time our anger is rooted in selfishness, our thoughts are evil, even murderous.

Our attitude about our brothers and sisters in Christ is a serious matter. How we feel about others affects our spiritual well being. In fact, our attitude toward others affects our relationship with God. Jesus said that if you go to worship and you have something against your brother, you are angry with him, we must go get right with our brother before you worship. If not, our worship is in vain.

Jesus said that you have heard that you shall not commit adultery. He again takes it from the arena of action to the arena of the thought world. If anyone looks on a woman to lust, he has committed adultery. Jesus is not talking about attraction or even admiration of beauty. He is talking about lust. We are encouraged by our society to lust through the advertisements, movies, TV programs, videos. There is an evil that wants us to degrade minds. Yet we are responsible for our deliberate thoughts. What we think about reveals the desires of our hearts.

God knows us on the level of our thoughts and he judges us there. Is there any hope? Thank God that Salvation is not by keeping the Law but by faith. Even in The Old Testament that was so. According to a third century rabbi, Moses gave 365 prohibitions and 248 positive commands. David reduced them to eleven in Psalm 15. Isaiah made them six (Isaiah 33:14, 15). Micah 6:8 binds them into three commands. Habbakuk reduces them all to one

great statement: The just shall live by faith.

Jesus was once asked what is the greatest commandment and his answer was “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” (Mat 22:37) When we answer the call of God to follow him, we call him Lord. He is not only the Lord of our souls and our bodies, he is the Lord of our minds as well. The result is that we must submit our minds to God. We must let God consciously transform our minds as well as our hearts.

If we leave it here, we might all feel that we are doomed. Living by faith, righteousness greater than the Pharisees, our thoughts making us guilty of death, how can we ever make it? Paul makes it very clear that we can submit our minds to Jesus: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom 12:2)

Scripture tells us that we are in Christ. “In Christ” is a phrase that Paul uses over and over again to explain our new relationship to God. For instance, “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” (Rom 8:1-2) Also consider “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” (Gal 2:20)

All of this means that whatever holiness we have it comes to us because we have been joined to Christ. His perfection is like a shield that covers us. Because we are in Christ, God transforms our minds through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit teaches us to think about the things of God. When our thoughts are patterned about the thoughts of God, we will treat our brother accordingly.

The rules for living are made clear because Jesus fulfills the Law. The rules for treating our brothers and sisters are more powerful than we thought. We don't have a right to most of our judgments against our neighbor. And we don't have a right to the kind of anger that belittles or reduces the other person to an object to be used. That leaves us with the responsibility to love one another.

Proverbs said, “As a man thinks so is He.” How do you think? Do you think like a lost man? Do you think like a fleshly man? Or do you think with the mind of Christ?

–by Randy Davis