

God'S Epistle

Conduct Becoming A Christian

John O. Reid (1930-2016)

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The light turns green, but the man does not notice. The woman in a convertible behind him waits, but the man does not notice the light change. The woman begins pounding on her steering wheel and yelling at the man to move, but the man does not move. The woman goes ballistic inside her car, ranting and raving at the man, pounding on her steering wheel and dashboard. The light turns yellow and the woman begins to blow her horn and screams and curses at the man. The man, hearing the commotion, looks up and sees the yellow light and accelerates through the intersection just as the light turns red.

Now the woman is beside herself and is screaming in frustration as she misses her chance to get through the intersection. Still in mid-ranting, she looks up into the barrel of a gun held by a very serious policeman. The policeman tells her to shut off her car while keeping both hands in sight. She complies, speechless at what is happening. After she shuts off the engine, she is ordered to exit the car with her hands up and to then place her hands on the car. She is quickly cuffed and hustled off in a patrol car, too bewildered to ask any questions.

She is hustled off to the station where she is fingerprinted, photographed, searched, booked, and put in a cell. After several hours, an officer removes her from the cell and returns her to the booking room where the arresting officer is waiting with her personal effects. "I am really sorry," he says, "for the mistake. You see, I pulled up behind you when you were blowing your horn and cussing a blue streak at the car in front of you. And then I noticed the 'CHOOSE LIFE' license plate holder and the 'FOLLOW ME TO SUNDAY SCHOOL' bumper sticker and the chrome plated "Christian" fish symbol on the trunk. So, naturally, I assumed that you stole the car."

Now, this is one of those religious e-mails that we all receive from time to time. We know that nobody would be arrested in this manner, and yet this fictitious story struck a chord with me. Hopefully it did with you, too. It should serve to remind us of the great responsibility we have had placed upon us. We have been called to represent God's way of life to this world and to one another. We are to do so by the way that we live.

There is no doubt that we live in a world that is "anti-God." That does not mean that there is no belief IN God, of sorts. But the belief professed by the vast majority of people is not a force that motivates right conduct or develops right character. God is just someone who is called upon as a last resort when all else fails.

Many of our people are not even aware that there IS a God. We see evidence of this in all the killings, gangs, broken homes, the production of pornographic films, Enron-type scandals, stock market manipulation, counterfeit money schemes, hatred, prejudice, lack of ethics, the shading of the truth, dishonesty in leaders, laxness on the job, shoddy workmanship, sharp dealings, imbalances on the scales, and so on and so forth and so on!

There is even a scam that I had checked into where a phone message will be left asking that you call someone because you have an important message. The phone number will start with the prefix "809," "284," or "876." And the unsuspecting person calls and finds later that he has a telephone bill somewhere in the neighborhood of \$24,000! It is a pay-per-call number from the Bahamas, or the Virgin Islands and the rates are not stated prior to the person returning the call.

This is the society in which we live!

Now Psalm 14 teaches us that nothing in man has changed throughout his generations and this particular reading will be taken from the *New English Bible*.

Psalm 14:1-3 (NEB) The impious fool says in his heart, "There is no God!" How vile are men, how depraved and loathsome! Not one does anything good. The LORD looks down from heaven on all of mankind to see if any act wisely, if any seek God; but all are disloyal, all are rotten to the core. No one does anything good, no, not even one.

Then he talks about the hope for God's people

Psalm 14:4-7 (NEB) Shall they rue it, all the evil doers who devour my people as men devour bread and never call upon the LORD? There they were in dire alarm; for God was with the brotherhood of the godly. The resistance of their victim was too much for them because the LORD was his refuge. If only Israel's deliverance might come out of Zion! When the LORD restores His people's fortunes, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.

Now the point of this message is not to warn us of crooked phone calls or of the many problems that the world has. But it is to point out that we live in a world where everybody is on guard. There is no one who really feels that he can count on his neighbor. No one, whether consciously or unconsciously, feels he can trust others. And everyone feels threatened by the society in which we live. Everyone suspects that, in one way or another, we are being manipulated and living in dangerous times!

And at this point enters those called by God to be a light to this world. And whom does He call? The weak and the foolish are called to confound the mighty and wise of the society in which we live—through our example!

Matthew 5:13-16 You are the salt of the earth: but if the salt has lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it gives light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Let the example of our right conduct shine forth to this world that they may see what we believe. When we are called we tend to look forward to the World Tomorrow and being changed into spirit. We do not always stop to think of the importance of our example. And aside from our general obedience to God, we do not stop to consider the expanded role that we are to play in this world. Nor do we normally consider the circumstances into which we are called.

Salt tends to preserve and/or disinfect. And those called by God are to act, in a sense, as a moral disinfectant in a world where moral standards are low or completely nonexistent. We can only serve in this capacity if we, ourselves, continually are working to be morally right.

Now Jesus makes a statement concerning light we may not have realized before. It is emphatic! He says, "You are the light of this world!" It means that we, His followers and no others, are the lights of the world. This tells us that even though we may not feel special by virtue of the fact that we are called and have God's Holy Spirit, we are, indeed, the light of His correct way of living. At least that is what we are supposed to be. A light symbolizes purity as opposed to pollution; truth and knowledge as opposed to ignorance and error.

And thus everything we do, to the best of our abilities, should reflect the mind of God. Not just in words, because the world is full of words about God, but in our deeds, which is the real witness to those around us. When Christ instructs us to let our lights shine, to let our good works be seen that men might glorify the Father, it sounds relatively simple. But this will require sacrifice and criticism.

I knew a young man who worked in an office. The phone rang one day and the caller wanted to speak to this man's boss. His boss was a woman and she said to tell the caller that she was not in the office at that time. This young man thought for a moment and concluded that she had just asked him to lie. He thought, "How can I do this? I cannot. It is a lie!" It greatly frustrated his boss that he could not do this for her. So this seemingly simple thing was very difficult for both the young man and his boss.

So, what produces this "salt" and this "light?" It is a certain type of person God is talking about here. I have taken the liberty to compile a list of attributes, based on the Beatitudes, which the "people of light" do possess.

Matthew 5:3 Blessed (or happy) *are* the humble of mind and attitude who will come under the instruction of God...

They are thankful to God for the honor of His calling. They realize and understand that they are the weak of the world (I Corinthians 1:26-27).

Matthew 5:4 Blessed *are* those that mourn over their lack of ability to perfectly obey God...

They stumble and they trip and they see their stumbling, but they always long to do better.

Matthew 5:5 Blessed *are* the meek, or the gentle and the patient, who do not hold any resentment toward others...

They are not mean-spirited, but work to bear their trials as did Christ.

Matthew 5:6 Blessed *are* those who see the goal that God has set in front of them and truly long to learn from Him and obey Him...

They have a great thirst for God's knowledge. They are not haphazard about their calling—it is not "ho-hum."

Matthew 5:7 Blessed *are* those who extend kindness and mercy to others when errors have been committed against them...

They see and feel the hurt and suffering that others go through and long to see it corrected. They have empathy, compassion, and thoughtfulness.

Matthew 5:8 Blessed *are* those who work toward having their minds, motives, and principles pure in a world that markets impurity...

They desire more than to just physically do things correctly. They long as much as possible, while in this flesh, to be as holy as they possibly can and struggle to achieve it.

Matthew 5:9 Blessed *are* the peacemakers...

They labor to prevent contention and strife. They pray for God to heal a situation when words are fruitless. They strive to have peace in the home, the workplace and anywhere else they go. They are peacemakers. They do not want to cause people to be upset or to cause problems.

Matthew 5:10 Blessed *are* those who stand their ground for righteousness' sake as friends of God—even though they are being chased or persecuted by others over their beliefs...

Matthew 5:11 Blessed are those whom men shall reproach and call vile, mean-spirited names because they understand and keep the truth of God.

These never quit because they long to please God with their lives.

Matthew 5:12 Even though it is difficult in this life, rejoice; for great *is* your reward in heaven. Remember those who went before you and were tried in like manner.

We can read of such faithful "lights" in Hebrews 11. Hebrews 12:1 calls these a "Gread cloud of witnesses!"

When we exhibit these qualities and characteristics we become the salt of the earth and lights of the world that cannot be hidden. We should reflect them in the things that we do and in the way that we live as we come in contact with the people of this world. We should be known as a different type of person in a world that is so vile and in so much trouble.

Will the day come when men will glorify the stand we have taken? You had better believe it will!

I Peter 2:9 But you *are* a chosen generation, [again, we are being referred to as being specially picked by God] a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

This shows that we have been called from the way that we used to live into a wonderful new existence in the truth. Again, God, through Peter, describes us as a "chosen generation," or better put, His own special people—out of the entire world! We are a purchased people. We are a people who are now His special possession and we are very much valued. We are a peculiar people in that we, because of our calling and unique way of living, are unlike the rest of the world. This does not mean that we are better in any way than the rest of the world. But it does mean that we reflect God and His teaching. We are working at obedience. And so we become special.

What should we be doing, as His people, to praise Him? One commentary suggests that the entire creation existing in its harmony praises God. It reflects all that God has done in the creation. It is a marvelous thing to behold! We can conclude that as we live in harmony with one another we are praising God. And as we love our neighbor as ourselves we are praising God. And as we live according to God's laws we are praising God.

As the saying goes; imitation is the sincerest form of flattery—or in this case—praise. And as we imitate God, we praise Him. This is what it is all about. It is not just words. It is not simply saying, "Father, I praise you." While that is not wrong to say, it is actually in living as He and Jesus Christ live that we praise God and please Them greatly.

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It was we who once had lived in darkness and ignorance of sin. We once lived in foolishness. It is by God's calling that we have been brought into this wonderful light. It is by God's calling we have been brought into His truth. This light and truth is the opposite of darkness. We are to live in this light!

I Peter 2:10 Which in time past *were* not a people, but *are* now the people of God: [again, a special calling] which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

It is in Ephesians 2:1-3, we are reminded that we had lived in the mindset of this world for years. We had no part with God until, by His great mercy deliberately shown to us, individually, we were called out of this world to become His children. Again, this describes a special calling.

I Peter 2:11 Dearly beloved, I beseech *you* as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

Now here we are referred to as pilgrims—and not as citizens of any particular nation. It says in Philippians 3:20-21 that our citizenship is in heaven. We have been given a special citizenship! And because of that we should not allow ourselves to be encumbered with the things of this world. And if we decide to relax and become entangled again—no matter how much intelligence we have, no matter how much wisdom, no matter how much whatever—fraternization with this world and its way of life will destroy us in the end. You cannot mix the two ways of life!

I Peter 2:12 Having your conversation [conduct] honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by *your* good works [notice that—by our good works—how we live, how we conduct ourselves; are our works good and right?—by our good works], which they shall behold [why, because you follow God's instructions and His commandments], glorify God in the day of visitation.

We must be conscious of how important it is to have our conduct correct in the sight of those with whom we live and deal. We must represent God correctly even if we are persecuted for it. When the day comes that God deals with them they will remember the stand that we took. They will remember the lessons that we taught them by that stand. And they will then glorify God and remember that somebody was here to uphold God's

way of life.

To continue with our theme, God expects those who take His Name to honor it greatly.

Exodus 20:7 You shall not take the name of the LOORD your God in vain; for the LOORD will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain.

This is a simple, straightforward commandment. It is an interesting scripture because in the past there was not a great deal of emphasis given to it. This was for those people who would use such euphemisms as "gosh," "golly," or "gee" when one would hit their thumb with a hammer. One might even take Christ's name in vain at such times. Out on the golf course is another venue where we might have heard some comment and curse—taking Christ's Name in vain—when the ball was hit where it should not have gone.

This commandment encompasses much more than this. It is so serious for us! It speaks of nothing less than our taking on the Family Name of God! Though Jesus Christ will forgive those who have taken His Name in vain, He will not hold us guiltless if we say we are the Father's and we do not work willingly to live as He does. He is dead serious about this!

Today many of us, young and old, comment on how the standards of this country have dropped and fallen apart. Indeed, Satan has set up a peer group in this society of rebellious, loose entertainers that picture "the good life." All freedom from authority and from the square standards of right and wrong as lived by our parents is what they push on us. And they would like nothing more than to "free" us from God's way of living, as well. This is just totally anathema to them.

We have publications such as "Playboy" which tell us to do whatever is right in our own eyes—it is okay! And even the title, "Playboy," leads us to believe that character, ethics, right morals, and modesty are "old-fashioned" and no longer worth anything.

The result has been catastrophic! There have been huge numbers of out-of-wedlock pregnancies, massive numbers of abortions, upward spiraling of STD infections and AIDS cases worldwide, and an unbelievable breakdown of home and family life. No longer do we see men and women sitting down and really committing themselves to each other and to raising a family. And we have not even touched upon school shootings, corporate crime, domestic violence, homosexual marriages, lawbreaking, and pedophilia.

Some will say, "Well, those things were also occurring in the 'old days.'" That may be so—but at least they were shameful then! And that is something that is woefully missing today! We are not ashamed of what we do. We do not feel guilty. These things have just become "normal."

There were once standards that families expected their children to live up to and, for the most part, the children tried to honor the family and the family name. This is what God is talking about in Exodus 20:7 and Deuteronomy 5:11 when He tells us not to take His Name in vain.

Now let us see the value that God places on honoring the wishes of a patriarch. In chapter 35 of the book of Jeremiah we are going to learn something quite interesting about the Rechabites.

Jeremiah 35:1-2 The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LOORD in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, saying, Go unto the house of the Rechabites, and speak unto them, and bring them into the house of the LOORD, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink.

He was sort of "sandbagging" the Jews here; he was going to teach them a lesson by this.

Jeremiah 35:3-5 Then I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habaziniah, and his brethren, and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites; and I brought them into the house of the LOORD, into the chamber of the sons of Hanan, the son of Igdaliah, a man of God, which was by the chamber of the princes, which was above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the door: And I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them, Drink you wine.

It is interesting to note here that God had been watching over the Rechabites for over 200 years. That is almost as long as the United States has been a nation! And this family faithfully obeyed—generation after generation—the request and standards set down for them by their ancestor, Jonadab. God was about to use their obedience as a living witness for ancient Judah, and for us today.

Now in verse 5 we find them in the room there—the chamber. The pressure is on! All

the priests and leaders are around them and they stand up for what they believe. They are asked to drink wine and they respond simply, yet firmly, "We will drink no wine."

Jeremiah 35:6-16 But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, You shall drink no wine, *neither you*, nor your sons for ever: Neither shall you build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have *any*: but all your days you shall dwell in tents; that you may live many days in the land where you *be* strangers. Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he has charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters; Nor to build houses for us to dwell in: neither have we vineyard, nor field, nor seed: But we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us. But it came to pass, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up into the land, that we said, Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans, and for fear of the army of the Syrians: so we dwell at Jerusalem. Then came the word of the LOORD unto Jeremiah, saying, Thus says the LOORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will you not receive instruction to hearken to my words, says the LOORD? The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment [for over 200 years]: notwithstanding I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but you hearkened not unto me [the point here is to listen—and obey!]. I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending *them*, saying, Return you now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and you shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers: but you have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me. Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them; but this people has not hearkened unto me

Here is the lesson—it is the doing with which God is concerned! Now in verses 18 and 19 we see that God rewards the Rechabites.

Jeremiah 35:18-19 And Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus says the LOORD of hosts, the God of Israel; because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he has commanded you: Therefore thus says

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the LOORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever.

God was so pleased. He had observed the family of the Rechabites for over 200 years and saw that they had obeyed their forefathers. Judah, on the other hand, had received prophet, after prophet, after prophet and would not even listen.

The lesson for us today is clear. We are not to be that way! We are to listen and we are to obey! Faithfulness without compromise is what God wants from all those whom He has called.

In the past, God sent His prophets to warn the people and most were killed. Even when they listened with the ears the heart never really heard—it was never changed.

Ezekiel 33:30-33 Also, you son of man, the children of your people still are talking against you [about you] by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that comes forth from the LOORD. And they come unto you as the people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear your words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, *but* their heart goes after their covetousness. And, lo, you *are* unto them as a very lovely song of one that has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear your words, but they do them not. And when this comes to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet has been among them.

So even as far back as the time of Ezekiel, people would listen, but they would not obey. It cannot be that way with us. We are called by God the Father to represent Him and His work. Our obedience must come from out of the heart!

The apostle Paul puts this in a way I hope we can understand:

II Corinthians 3:1 Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you, or *letters* of commendation from you?

Do we have to carry paperwork to prove who we are?

II Corinthians 3:2 You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:

How were they read? By their conduct!

II Corinthians 3:3 *Forasmuch as you are* manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

The law was written in their hearts—and they were governed by it!

It was customary for ministers in Paul's time to carry an introductory letter of commendation. Paul asserts that for him to carry an epistle (a letter) showing his qualifications was not necessary. The reason being, he states, is that the most complimentary letter he could possibly have was the members of the Church themselves!

They were doing the best they could to change. They were working diligently to obey God and to live as He lives. The very lives of the men and the women reflected Paul's qualifications as a minister of Jesus Christ. He goes on to say that the epistle for all to see was no human document recorded in ink or on paper. Nor was it something engraved on a tablet of stone. This epistle was written on the human heart and the author was Jesus Christ Himself! And it was a letter that could not be read in print, but by the actions of those whom God called.

How are we to be read today as God's epistles in whatever location or circumstance we find ourselves? As babes in Christ our human thinking said, "Hey, I will go next door and I will tell my neighbors all about God. And that will work out just fine. They will be really appreciative of me."

So we go next door and say, "You know, I see you go to church on Sunday, but you really should be keeping the Sabbath." That did not work. Or, "Do you know who Israel is in the Bible? Let me tell you." Or, "You know that the nation of Israel in the Middle East is really Judah?" That is a good one. Or, "Let me tell you where the other tribes of Israel are today." Or, "The laws from the Old Testament are not Jewish; they are straight from God Himself!" Or, "Do you know who the God of the Old Testament is?" Or—I am certain there are many more instances we can recall. If we have ever tried any of these, we know the result—our friends and neighbors look at us like we just fell off the pumpkin

truck!

We are to be "read" in a different fashion. Not to be redundant, but we are read by the example we set. In whatever circumstance we find ourselves, we are to live the right way—God's way. All of us in one way or another demonstrate who we are by our conduct and our speech. Because of this we should look at Paul's instructions to the Colossians:

Colossians 4:5-6 Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech *be* always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer every man.

The phrase, "walk in wisdom," means much more than having a keen or brilliant mind. In all circumstances, we approach our neighbors—those outside the Church—in uprightness and honesty. We relate to them according to the strictest principles of integrity and ethics. And we reflect what we believe by our conduct.

Those of the world consciously or unconsciously judge another's religion—not based on doctrine, not from booklets, not from preaching—but by the conduct of the individual with whom they are dealing. That is a true principle! Is he honest? Is he trustworthy? Can I count on what he tells me? One that walks in this manner establishes a reputation that represents God properly whether he has his own business, works for an employer, or is just a good neighbor.

In short, we can know scripture. We can spew memory verses that might reveal the plan of God to our neighbors. But if we do not LIVE it—our conduct will be a contradiction and an hypocrisy to all who come to know us!

Colossians 4:6 Let your speech *be* always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer every man.

That is a tall order! Just as James said—if we can control the tongue, we are a perfect man. I know that I have not arrived there. And I know, too, that so many of us have not either.

Our conversations should reflect that we are governed by God. And "governed" is the important word—the operative word! This is revealed by the topics of our conversation and by what language we use. In other words, we do not participate in the telling of off-

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color jokes or gossip. We should always work to speak of wholesome things.

One of our men, a plant superintendent, did something rather unusual. He was working with one of his employees and this man was cursing up a storm and it was bothering him. But he did not go and tell this employee to "repent." He simply said, "Would you mind not cursing?" The man assented, but asked, "Why?" The plant superintendent said, "I am on a 'self-improvement program' and I am trying to cut that type of thing out." The man said okay. They kept on working and very soon the employee said, "You know, I think I should go on a 'self-improvement program,' too."

In other words, these things were said tactfully and kindly. I was impressed! When we talk to somebody we should be cheerful, knowledgeable, tactful, and pleasant. We should be wise as to what we believe—not answering more than what is asked. That is really important. Leave them a little bit hungry so they will want to come back for more.

Other areas in which our character is reflected are family, marriage, and the like. Close to fifty percent of marriages today end in divorce. How many of those that stay married—or are even living together—are said to be happy? It is that difficult! The pressures of making a living place a great strain on the marriage, family, and society. In many cases both husband and wife are working to make ends meet.

My neighbor is a high school principal whose school is in a very bad part of town. There are a lot of Hispanic students and families in the area. He has seen many immigrant families move into the area from Guatemala. He said that when they arrive in this country they are such a joy to see. The children respect the father and honor the mother—just a wonderful family environment. But within about one year's time, with both the father and the mother working to provide for their family in California, the kids end up in the gangs and the whole house is in disarray. Every facet of this society is headed toward destruction!

Increasing infidelity, changing of marriage partners, and loose morals continue to reflect the moral bankruptcy and poor character of our social environment. This results in an all-out attack against the foundation of commitment, love, and faithfulness upon which God calls His children to build. And we are supposed to be building holy, righteous character to shine as lights in this world.

We have responsibility placed upon us in so many areas. I do not think we stop to realize it. We sometimes take our lives for granted, but yes, we have a responsibility to live correctly.

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Ephesians 5:20-21 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Now the words, "submitting yourselves one to another," show equality between husband and wife. But husbands and wives have different roles, duties, and functions within the marriage. They have different responsibilities. This is how God set it up! Submitting to the roles given us brings order and harmony to the home. Here we see wives deeply respected because they respect their husbands and the order which God has established.

I Corinthians 11:3 But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman *is* the man; and the head of Christ *is* God.

This is the order God set. It is not complicated.

Ephesians 5:22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

The wife knows that in obeying the lawful request of her husband she is, in turn, being obedient to God. Many times we do not stop to consider that. Husbands and wives must realize that their marriage is to typify, as much as possible, the marriage of Jesus Christ to the Church. And pursuing obedience to this command, the husband and wife work to make their marriage positive, harmonious, and loving. This may not always be the case—with unconverted mates and such—but that is the ideal.

Ephesians 5:24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church.

Just as the one word, "submit," sums up the responsibilities of the wife, so here, the one word, "love," sums up the duties of the husband. He is to have true, outgoing love for his wife. He is to be truly delighted that he has her for his wife and thankful for all that she does in the home. It is to be a love of the same type that Christ has for the Church—He gives Himself for it! With the husband's authority comes the responsibility of sacrificing himself for his wife and family. He makes the best decisions he can for the home.

When many young couples first get married the man is in charge and this power goes to his head. But he learns after a while. He must learn to make the best and most responsible decisions he can for the home. And he is to be the best example he can be for his family in diligence, honesty, Bible study, and prayer.

The apostle Peter, in I Peter 3:7, teaches us that we are to realize the husband and wife are joint heirs to the Kingdom of God. Even though the wife may be weaker physically, mentally she is not. They are joint heirs working toward the Kingdom of God—with the children—all going toward the same goal. That sets us apart right off the bat.

Ephesians 6:1-4 Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor your father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) that it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth. And, you fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

In today's society we have rebellious children resulting in unwanted pregnancies, low grades, drug use, gang activity, and even campus shootings, which shock everybody!

Paul gives two sets of instruction in these four verses. Children are to listen to their parents. Even though parents cannot program their own computer children are still to listen to their parents and appreciate all that is being done for them! Too often we take for granted our home and somebody supplying our food. And God says for children to stop and consider from where all this comes. Think about the care and the love your family has for you. Children, of whatever age, are to be obedient, showing love and respect to their parents and to the family name.

Parents have a responsibility here, too. They are to care for their children with wisdom and intelligence. Children are gifts of God. Parents are kind and patient. And they are firm when needed. They always love their children, respect them, and understand what the children have to face daily in the schools. The child's life is not always so easy. Teach them the practical and wonderful future God has in store for them. The parents should do the best they can to always set the right example for their children.

And everybody in the family should be appreciative of each other in their every effort. A family like that is going to be an example to the world around them. They will be an epistle of God's way that the world cannot help but notice. Perhaps no one will ever come up to you and say, "What makes your family so different?" But who knows? They may even try to imitate you.

The last specific area I would like to go into is the workplace:

Ephesians 6:5-6 Servants, be obedient to them that are *your* masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;

That is hard in this society: to step up to the plate and do more than is expected.

Ephesians 6:7 with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men:

When you have an irritable boss, taking the time to realize that you are actually working for Jesus Christ is a difficult thing.

Ephesians 6:8-9 knowing that whatsoever good thing any man does, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether *he be* bond or free. And, you masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.

Today we live in a society where many who are employed do not give their best effort to their employer. Many do not see the need to do a quality day's work. They do not see the resultant character and good qualities, which come from a right work ethic. These are good things!

I used to work in the office of a spice plant in San Francisco. The office was out in the plant itself and there was no ceiling or front on this office. I had a wardrobe that smelled absolutely wonderful! I smelled like cinnamon or chilies—everyday was a brand new experience! Anyway, we had this employee named Bill. He was known all over the San Francisco Bay area for being one of the best workers and supervisors anywhere. We had hired him away from somebody else. He was a wonderful employee. He did an honest day's work and then some. I still remember the fine example he set in the performance of his duties for our company. Bill had an exemplary work ethic.

Everything God asks us to do, and that applies to our being an employee, is for our own good. It is for our own personal development that we might take on the character of God. That is what this is for.

In this country today we do not have the master-slave relationship, as such. But most of us have employers. We have the employer-employee relationship. Or if we are self-employed we still have the customer whom we must satisfy.

Paul knew that slaves, because they were slaves, worked hard while the master was around. But when he was gone, they slacked off. There was this adversarial-type relationship. Paul is saying that this should not be so with us—for those whom God has called. They should be energetic, conscientious, planning and thinking "slaves"—employees. Christ's employees will be thinking, "How can I do my job better, more efficiently? How can I do the best for my company?"

Why? Because your example will be noted by those for whom you work. You will be an outstanding employee like Bill was. And very soon you will be secure in your job and, most likely, promotion will follow. You will gain a fine reputation in the field in which you are working. You will be a wonderful example to others. You will be working in a manner that correctly represents Jesus Christ. He will be greatly pleased with you. And you will be blessed now and at His return for your performance and for the example you have set.

King David had a way of asking questions that made one consider himself in terms of his relationship to God. In Psalm 15 he asks us to consider those qualities that we, who are epistles of God, must possess. This five-verse psalm gives us a yardstick by which to measure our progress toward the Kingdom of God. The Soncino Jewish Commentary states that these five verses summarize all 613 commandments found in the first five books of the Bible. And it is second in popularity only to the twenty-third psalm. Now David's question is this:

Psalm 15:1 LORD, who shall abide [or sojourn, or travel] in your tabernacle [the place of temporary residence]? Who shall dwell in your holy hill?

Who will walk with the Eternal God, to be accepted by Him in this life that we now live? What characteristics will be needed that God might walk with us and that we can walk with Him? And, who will finally dwell with Him forever as a resurrected member of the God Family?

Psalm 15:2 He that walks uprightly...

He is one who is wholeheartedly for God's way; one whose eyes are consistently set on

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God. He takes God's Word for the true rule of conduct which should be followed. His life, in a true sense and in all that he does, is one of walking toward the Kingdom of God by way of God's instruction. He searches out God's Word and he holds all of God's laws in the greatest of respect. And he works to obey them with all of his being.

Psalm 15:2 ...and works righteousness...

He understands that just knowing what to do is not doing it! He is a man that really works at overcoming. He realizes the great calling he has been privileged to receive. And he honors that calling by his obedience to it

Psalm 15:2 ...and speaks the truth in his heart.

He is not a hypocrite. He does not have a double standard. He is honest with himself and others. He worships God with complete openness and honesty for he knows that God sees the depths of his heart, every fiber of his being.

Psalm 15:3 *He that* backbites not with his tongue...

He is not a coward. He will face a man and not go behind his back. He will not gossip or say anything that might harm the character of another in any way. He will be a man who will always build up and never tear down.

Psalm 15:3 ...nor does evil to his neighbor...

He will always treat his neighbor with friendship and respect. He will never take any action that will cause his neighbor harm

Psalm 15:3 ...nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor.

He will never seek to discredit anyone in any way. He will never put another down in order to elevate himself. It takes quite a man to do this—or woman!

Psalm 15:4 In whose eyes a vile person [one who is against God's way] is condemned [despised];

There is no double standard, there is no neutral ground. This man judges a person's conduct by whether or not it is in conformance to God's way. He will not associate with any vile person no matter the popularity, position, or wealth of said person. He does not compromise in this area. This man truly hates sin!

Psalm 15:4 ...but he honors them that fear the Eternal.

He honors those that show reverence and respect to God by obeying His law. He associates with those who are striving for God's Kingdom. He holds them, no matter what their station, rich or poor, in the greatest of respect. The important thing to this man is godly character. He strives for it in himself and he appreciates and loves those that strive for it in themselves. He loves those who are faithful and obedient!

Psalm 15:4 ...*he that swears to his own hurt, and changes not.*

He is a man who, when he gives his word, will not go back on it even though he may incur loss. He knows that God wants truth and that backing down on his word will destroy godly character and disappoint God.

Psalm 15:5 *He that puts not out his money to usury...*

In the broad sense this is saying that he will not take advantage of anyone in difficult circumstances by profiting from their trials or difficulties. He is very open and honest in this way. He will always help those in trouble if he possibly can.

Psalm 15:5 ...nor takes reward [bribe] against the innocent.

This man will not pervert the truth for money, special favor, or for any person. The truth is the truth. He will be totally honest whether the people involved are rich and famous, or poor and unknown. This man is not a respecter of persons.

Psalm 15:5 [Then David says] He that does these *things* shall [stand] never be moved.

That is quite a list of things to live up to.

John 15:16 You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever you shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

This is the fruit that we must bring forth to the best of our ability. This is the fruit that we should form and that must remain in our character. And this is the fruit that will make us the epistle that God purposes we be.

Deuteronomy 4:5 Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LOORD my God commanded me, that you should do so in the land where you go to possess it.

This is something that we should do—not just know about.

Deuteronomy 4:6-8 Keep therefore and do *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people. For what nation *is there* so great, who *has* God so near unto them, as the LOORD our God *is* in all *things that* we call upon him *for*? And what nation *is there* so great, that has statutes and judgments as righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day...

And He says to take heed that we do not forget it—and be sure and train our children. Israel was to be the nation, and if you will, the "nation-epistle," of God. They were to be an epistle in the true sense. They were to have been the example to the rest of the world around them of a nation living according to God's law.

Isaiah 43:10-12 You *are* my witnesses, says the LOORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that you may know and believe me, and understand that I *am* he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, *even* I, *am* the LOORD; and beside me *there is* no savior. I have declared, and have saved, and I have shown, when *there was* no strange *god* among you: therefore you *are* my witnesses, says the LOORD, that I *am* God.

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Isaiah at this time was encouraging his people who were in the Babylonian captivity. His prophecies proclaimed the release that would soon come and that they must place their hope in God. Israel appears in these verses as God's witnesses of their very history as a people. No other nation could possibly have been a witness for God in such a manner and to such a degree.

They knew God and their history back to their captivity in Egypt. They had much to declare regarding the wonderful works of God that had been done on their behalf. Yet they failed to do so. Isaiah was telling them that they held the past in memory—in story—and as such they were witnesses to the power of God.

We, too, hold the truth of God as witnesses—in a calling that the rest of this world just does not yet have. Israel never did fulfill their calling. But we—as the Israel of God—have individually and collectively been given this job to accomplish. Though it is not our job to stand on street corners and warn the world of what is to come, it is our job to live our lives in a manner that will bring glory and honor to God the Father and Jesus Christ.

I know that none of us do this perfectly and we wonder, "How can I possibly do this? How can I even begin to accomplish what God asks of me?"

James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ

That is all we want, right there! Another way to state this would be, "James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." James, as well as Paul, described themselves as slaves of God. This was truly how they saw themselves in their relationship with God. This was the perspective from which they served and sacrificed. And this is how we must view ourselves with respect to God.

The Greek word for slavery is *doulos*, meaning one who is in a permanent position of servitude to another. His well-being is altogether consumed in the will of the other.

William Barclay comments in this manner:

Being a slave primarily implies absolute obedience. The slave has no rights of his own, he is the absolute possession of his master; and is bound to give the master unquestioning obedience.

Slavery implies absolute humility. Slavery is the word of a man who thinks

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not of his privileges, but of his duties; not of his rights, but of his obligations. It is the word of the man who has lost himself in the service of God.

It implies absolute loyalty. It is the word of the man who has no interests of his own, because what he does, he does for God. His own profit and his own preference do not enter into his calculations: his loyalty is to God.

Yet, at the back of it, this word implies a certain pride. So far from being a title of dishonor, it was a title by which the greatest ones of the Old Testament were known: Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Daniel, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

That is what we have to try our very best to become. In this country, for the most part, we view slaves as those under the whip and living in the worst of circumstances, but that was not always the case. Slaves would often carry the authority of their masters.

Consider the story of Joseph, who carried much authority as a slave. We know that Joseph was sold into captivity—slavery!

Genesis 39:1-6 And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmaelites, which had brought him down there. And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all *that* he had he put into his hand. And it came to pass from the time *that* he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field. And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was a goodly *person*, and well favored.

Then Potiphar's wife puts a move on Joseph—she tries to seduce him. Rebuffed, she then falsely accuses Joseph to her husband.

Genesis 39:20-23 And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the

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prison, a place where the king's prisoners *were* bound: and he was there in the prison. But the LOORD was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that *were* in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer *of it*. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing *that was* under his hand; because the LOORD was with him, and *that* which he did, the LOORD made *it* to prosper.

This is a slave we are talking about here—Joseph!

Now Pharaoh's cupbearer is returned to his position and the other man with whom Joseph had to do in the prison had his head lifted off—exactly like Joseph dreamed and interpreted.

Now you can imagine Joseph's heavy heart. He probably pleaded with this prisoner, "When you go back to the Pharaoh, tell him, please, about me. I am here wrongly. I was sold into captivity. Please tell him about this!" And the cupbearer forgets! Joseph is in prison two more years—a slave, but still having charge and authority over most all of the business there.

Genesis 40:14 But think on me when it shall be well with you, and show kindness, I pray you, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house:

Genesis 41:1,9 And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river—then spoke the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day...

"There is a man that can tell the future, he can interpret dreams," the cupbearer finally tells his Pharaoh. Joseph is brought before the Pharaoh.

Genesis 41:33-37 Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do *this*, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. And that food shall be for store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; that the land

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perish not through the famine. And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants.

Joseph's advice seems good and right to Pharaoh. And Joseph—a slave—is made second-in-command over all Egypt! Joseph was a slave in Potiphar's house and he was made overseer. He was a slave and prisoner in the jail and he became the authority. And finally God brought him from his position as slave to second-in-command in Egypt. He had great authority and only Pharaoh, himself, was greater.

The same thing happened to Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They were slaves who rose to great power. And as slaves they wielded the power of the king and all trembled at their commands.

We, too, are slaves of God the Father and Jesus Christ. We, too, are being taught obedience in preparation for positions of great authority in the Kingdom of God. We, too, will be given great power, which, of course, will be wielded under their authority!

We are called to live as brilliant, shining lights in a dark and deceitful world. We have been given the great responsibility, individually, to be an epistle of God. As we grow and develop the very divine nature, we give witness of a godly life that this world sorely needs to see. And they will see it even more completely in the future—when we are resurrected! So be the best epistle now that we can possibly be!