

Fear God: More Moral-Ethical Implications

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward. Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer. To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.? (Ps 19:7-14)

This passage goes into greater depth in its poetic parallels than the lessons from the last few chapters. Apply similar poetic rhyme or parallel thought to the lesson and see how many clues you pick up regarding the character of the "fear of God" as expressed in this lesson. Often we are inclined to imply that the "law" in Scripture always refers to the Mosaic code. I believe in this case the assumption could be correct, but the reference could also be to the overarching character of any "law" that comes from God. However in many contexts Scripture refers to other laws. As example, see Ro 8:2 where Paul refers to two distinct laws in one verse, neither of which is the Mosaic code.

D. A. Carson offers insightful points to this passage. Notice the various ways that he draws instructive parallels to the text. Although he never mentions Hebrew poetry rhyme, his construction fully reflects this feature. At the same time he keeps our focus on the law of the Lord, he uses each line and each description to enlarge our respect for the wonder of God's law.

"The voice of the word: perfection. The Lord has not left us to the uncertainties of natural religion; he has spoken his word which has here six titles: *law* (7), 'instruction'; *statutes*/'testimony', what the Lord bears witness to as valid; *precepts* (8), applicable to the small details of life; *commands*, intended for obedience; *fear* (9), worthy of reverence; *ordinances*, authoritative decisions.

"It has nine qualities: *perfect* in every part and in its wholeness *trustworthy* (7), reliable; *right* (8), upright, of moral rectitude; *radiant*, 'pure', free from contaminant; *pure* (9), (*see* Ps 12:6), of purity acceptable to God; *enduring*, changeless; *sure ... righteous*, 'true ... right', corresponding to the objective norms of truth; *precious* (10), 'rightly desirable', full of intrinsic value; *sweeter*, full of true enjoyment.

"It has four results: *reviving* (7), (Ps 35:17; *cf.* Ru 4:15; La 1:16), restoring true life whether threatened by danger or diminished by sorrow; *simple* has the bad meaning of 'gullible/credulous' (Pr 7:7; 14:15; 22:3), lacking guiding moral principles, and the good meaning of 'teachable' (Ps 116:6; 119:30; Pr 1:4), *giving joy* (8), educating the emotions (*heart*); the *eyes* are the organs of desire, what is wanted out of life. The word of God instils true objectives, worthy values."¹⁷[1]

Carson defines "fear" in this lesson as "worthy of reverence." He maintains a high respect for the purity of God's law, as well as its applicability "to the small details of life." We live in a sad age in which many who profess faith in Christ and respect for the Bible as God's Word often simply dismiss large portions of Scripture that they dislike as not applicable to them. You often hear the refrain, "Well since the Bible says nothing whatever about this question, we are free to make up our own minds, and God doesn't care." Often this dismissal grows out of either a calculated dismissal of—or an inexcusable ignorance of Scripture. Often a reasonable study of Scripture will reveal significant Biblical teaching

on the question.

“Who can understand his errors?” David takes us right past our human inclination to emphasize the errors of other people. He drives the question home to our selves. How objective am I at looking, much less understanding, my personal faults? As soon as David states this question, he responds as each true believer should respond. He prays for God to *“cleanse thou me from secret faults.”* What are my “secret faults”? They are the faults that I intentionally try to hide, rationalize, or justify. If each of us made a list of our personal faults, our own sins, we would unconsciously or in willful rebellion omit some of our most treasured sinful habits from the list. David took down the sacrosanct fence from his life and prayed for God to shine the divine spotlight of His law right on those sins so that David might not only see them, but eliminate them from his life.

“Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.” David will not stop here. He works to apply God’s law to every nook and cranny of his mind and life. What is a presumptuous sin? The Hebrew word translated “presumptuous” refers to pride or an arrogant spirit. Here are some stimulating thoughts on the meaning and use of this word.

“zid is frequently used to refer to three specific aspects of pride. One is presumption. Because a person is proud he presumes too much in his favor, especially in the sense of authority. ”...The second aspect is rebellion or disobedience. Because the person is proud he asserts his own will to the point of rebelling against one in authority over him. ”...The third, closely related to the second, carries the additional element of willful decision. If a person so asserted himself and killed his neighbor, his own life was required as punishment.”^{18[2]}

Are we guilty of “presumptuous” sins? I fear so, but, like David and the nation of Israel, pride blinds us to the true personality of the sin involved. Rather than grieving our sin and repenting, we defend it, redefine it, and arrogantly defy any who suggest that it is a sin. Ah yes, we need to pray this prayer daily, for only God can protect us from our own pride and the trap of the presumptuous sin.

“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.” Our eyes and words serve as windows to our minds. What judges our thoughts and words? We prefer to keep that judgment to our selves and defend self against anyone who intrudes. David rose to the noble stature of a mature believer in God. He sought God’s approval of his conduct, so he worked to live so as to ensure God’s approval. Again, the common attitude of pride that attacks anyone who questions us with “I will answer to God and not to you” misses the point. Yes, we answer to God, but we gravely err if we think that we can flaunt our pride and prideful sins against God’s will as revealed in Scripture and receive any form of blessing from God. We cannot deceive Him. We cannot hide our true motives from Him.

The believer who truly fears God understands that he/she answer to God, but never forgets the demands such accountability imposes. The more we become sensitive to our accountability to God the more we will demonstrate a gracious spirit that responds with grace and deference to other believers. Study Php 2 as a model of this conduct. Our attitude is to follow Jesus’ Incarnate attitude. If I am arrogant and stubborn in my attitude toward my fellow-believer, it is likely that I am equally arrogant and rebellious toward God. May we use this lesson on the fear of God to grow more mature in our faith.