

Loving His Commandments

Part One
Psalm 119:127

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
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Part One
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Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold (Psalm 119:127).

A Question for Jesus

People often wonder what they would ask Jesus if given the opportunity. What would you ask Him? Would it be about UFO's or why is there suffering in the world? Perhaps you would ask Him why there is so much bickering among Christians or theologians or why evil people prosper. The thing about questions like those, however, is that they don't really make a difference in your actual life.

One day a religious lawyer approached Jesus and asked Him a question. The question this man asked makes all the difference in the world when it comes to your actual life. I would say that this particular question would have to rank pretty high on anyone's list. He asked, "**Which is the greatest commandment in the law**" (Matthew 20:36). In other words, "According to God, what is the most important thing that a person should actually do?"

To this Jesus gave the well-known answer,

Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'
38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'
40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40).

The Love Criteria

So the most important thing a person can do is love God and love his neighbor. Let's ask another question: What are the criteria by which we determine whether or not we indeed love God and our neighbor? How do

I know if what I have done, or will do, is an act of love?

Adorned with Law

There is a portion of Jesus' quotation that is often neglected. We see it in verse 40.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:40).

The way a door hangs on its hinges or articles hang on a nail, the law of God is somehow hanging on the command to love God and love our neighbor.

It's as if the love of God is the Christmas tree and the laws of God are the ornaments. Or the love of God is the body and the law is the clothing with which we adorn ourselves. I certainly cannot say I am well-dressed if I am not wearing any clothes, nor can I say that the tree is trimmed if there are no ornaments. I therefore should not say that I am loving God or my neighbor without adorning my behavior with the law of God.

As we embark upon our study and devotions regarding the law of God, a good way to look at this is to view these laws as the behaviors which constitute love. The first four commandments are how we are to love God and the next six are how we are to love each other. We are not suggesting love is accomplished with mere externalism. But we would be foolish to think the external behavior is not some accurate reflection of the internal sentiment and conviction.

Law – Burden or Blessing?

Viewing the law of God as the criterion for love may help diffuse our natural difficulty with the entire subject before us. For many the word 'law' (or more specifically 'the law of God') evokes a very negative response. The law of God and its role in the life of the Christian is very misunderstood. The law has become something that many Christians feel burdened by, even though we are told by John that the law of God is not burdensome (1 John 5:3).

James gives us some insight on the way Christians should view the

law of God.

But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does (James 1:25).

The law of God liberates and blesses. Let us seek to share the disposition toward the law that David had when he penned,

The law of Your mouth is better to me Than thousands of coins of gold and silver (Psalm 119:72).

Let it be our prayer that this becomes our attitude toward the law of God?

Liberated From What?

James calls the law of God the “**perfect law of liberty**”. This brings up the question, ‘from what does the law liberate us?’ Liberty means freedom. If we have been liberated we have been set free. In what respect does the law accomplish this? Ultimately we must acknowledge that, as we have learned, it frees us from improper views on how to love. Along with this, however, the law of God frees us from a great many things. You can add to the list, but among the things the law of God frees us from are:

Legalism and Manipulation

The law of God frees Christians from legalism and manipulation. Christians know they should behave differently from the world. When the Holy Spirit enters a person they will seek to walk in the statutes of God (Ezekiel. 36:27). In other words, we will seek to love God and our neighbors. Apart from God’s law, however, we do not know specifically¹ of what our behavior should consist. This opens up many Christians to

¹ I use the term ‘specifically’ because some people, at this point, will refer to the law of God written upon our hearts (Romans 2:15). But we must keep in mind that the law of God written upon our hearts will in no way be inconsistent with His written law. And since we have a sin nature, it is only the written law that we can know to be the flawless word of God.

guilt-trips and manipulation through legalism² (man-made misinterpretations of God's law). Paul writes Timothy,

For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 3:6,7).

This is not a principle merely applied to women but anyone who wants to obey God while finding himself ignorant of God's law. Instead of being led by God's truth, we're led by various impulses. Some will actually interpret these impulses as the Spirit of God.

Common forms of legalism might involve things like going to the movies or dancing or drinking wine – things that are not necessarily unbiblical. It could go, as with one gentleman I know, to the point where the pastor has you mowing his lawn in the name of the Lord.

I remember, as a young Christian, a conversation I had with a man who was very influential in leading me to the Lord. He told me in no uncertain terms that it was God's will for me to go to a popular youth conference. I didn't go and felt very guilty about it. My impulses told me to go to the conference. My mentor told me to go to the conference. Looking back on it now, and what I know about this particular conference, I'm glad I didn't go.

Knowing the law of God frees Christians from the guilt manipulators and legalists. If you know the law of God you know what is righteous in His sight. If you don't know the law of God you are fodder for any high energy individual who calls himself a Christian, especially a Christian leader, who wants something from you. Or even a well-meaning friend who might give poor or ungodly counsel. The Westminster Confession of Faith says it nicely in XX,2:

God alone is Lord of the conscience, (James 4:12, Rom. 14:4) and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in any thing, contrary to His Word; or beside

² The term 'legalism' may not be completely accurate. In its classic sense, legalism is a teaching that involves salvation by works. In this sense I am using it (as is common these days) as a sort of man-made code of ethics apart from, but perhaps similar to, the teachings of Scriptures.

it, if matters of faith, or worship. (Acts 4:19, Acts 5:29, 1 Cor. 7:23, Matt. 23:8–10, 2 Cor. 1:24, Matt. 15:9) So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: (Col. 2:20, 22–23, Gal. 1:10, Gal. 2:4–5, Gal. 5:1) and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also. (Rom. 10:17, Rom. 14:23, Isa. 8:20, Acts 17:11, John 4:22, Hos. 5:11, Rev. 13:12, 16–17, Jer. 8:9)

Consequences

Knowing and seeking to keep God's law frees us from consequences. One of the great misunderstandings of grace is that there are no consequences for the violation of God's law. Fortunately when Christians stand before God on judgment day we will not be judged according to our works³ because of Christ's atoning work on the cross. But this doesn't mean that in this life there are no consequences for sin⁴.

There are consequences for sin and we all know it. No genuine Christian thinks that he can lie, cheat and steal without it somehow effecting his life. We know that doing these things will result in terrible damage in our lives. Conversely, if we obey the law of God it will result in blessings. Remember again what James writes,

But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does (James 1:25).

The WCF, XIX, 6 teaches:

It (the law) is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin: (James 2:11, Ps. 119:101, 104, 128) and the threatenings of it serve to shew what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof

³ Our works will be judged, but we won't (1 Corinthians 3:14).

⁴ 'Sin' is defined by John as disobeying God's law (1 John. 3:4). Some suggest that sin is merely unbelief. This is incorrect. Unbelief is sin but sin is not unbelief. We know, for example, that God is love but love is certainly not God.

threatened in the law. (Ezra 9:13–14, Ps. 89:30–34) The promises of it, in like manner, shew them God’s approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof: (Lev. 26:1–14, 2 Cor. 6:16, Eph. 6:2–3, Ps. 37:11, Matt. 5:5, Ps. 19:11) although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works. (Gal. 2:16, Luke 17:10) So as, a man’s doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law; and not under grace. (Rom. 6:12, 14, 1 Pet. 3:8–12, Ps. 34:12–16, Heb. 12:28–29)

Knowing and seeking to obey the law of God liberates us from the reality that our sin will find us out (Numbers 32:23). The idea that there are no consequences for sin is a popular, yet tragic, miss-perception for today’s Christian who doesn’t completely understand the nature of God’s grace. David had his sins washed away, but there were still some very real consequences for his adulterous and murderess affair with Bathsheba. Read of the judgment on David from 2 Samuel.

Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon.

Then he lists the consequences.

Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ “Thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. ‘For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.’ So David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. “However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child

also who is born to you shall surely die.” Then Nathan departed to his house (2 Samuel 12:9-15).

Although we cannot assume that God always works exactly the way he did with David⁵, we do see here an example of God judging⁶ a man under grace⁷ who had violated His law.

Bondage

Hear, O earth! Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people – The fruit of their thoughts, Because they have not heeded My words, Nor My law, but rejected it (Jeremiah 6:19).

The law of God liberates from bondage. The United States is at a very interesting place in history. We can actually see what happens to a people who at one time had respect for God’s law but no longer do. The calamity that we see in our nation is a calamity that God promises to those who reject His law. At times the offenses and the judgments are the same thing.

Within the borders of the United States we are witnessing a blatant lack of respect for human life; whether it be abortion, euthanasia, gang violence, children killing parents, parents killing children, etc. Sexual promiscuity is ruining households and creating diseases for which there is no cure. We have a national debt in the trillions and the church of Christ, instead of being viewed as light, salt and a place of beauty, wisdom and substance, has become an object of ridicule. All of these sins and judgments are warned of in Scripture.

A cursory reading of Deuteronomy 28 reveals what happens to a people who reject the law of God. Although we haven’t reached that level of calamity, the fire is clearly at our feet. The prophets in the Old Testament would be crying for God’s people to repent. Repenting involves both trusting in Christ and obeying His law. Repenting involves loving

⁵ For example, Job went through horrible trials and yet was considered blameless and upright, fearing God and shunning evil (Job 1:1).

⁶ Not eternal judgment.

⁷ Some think that David was under law and not grace. This comes from a misunderstanding of the old covenant which was a covenant of grace, not works. Read Psalm 51 and see if you don’t come to the conclusion that David was a man under grace?

God and loving our neighbor.

Pride

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet (Romans 7:7).

The law liberates us from pride, or an undue love of self. It was the law of God that humbled Paul and made him realize that he was a sinner. At one point Paul thought he was a law-keeper (Philippians 3:6). A truthful study of God's law will relieve any honest person of that sort of self-delusion. We are all clearly law-breakers.

If we seek to remove the law of God from the equation of Christian living, we will not so acutely perceive our need for Christ. Seeking to obey God's law keeps us desperate for Christ. If we lessen or water down God's law we can become self-confident. The Westminster Larger Catechism #95:

Of what use is the moral law to all men?

Question 95 Westminster Larger Catechism Question 95
The moral law is of use to all men, to inform them of the holy nature and the will of God, (Lev. 11:44-45, Lev. 20:7-8, Rom. 7:12) and of their duty, binding them to walk accordingly; (Micah 6:8, James 2:10-11) to convince them of their disability to keep it, and of the sinful pollution of their nature, hearts, and lives: (Ps. 19:11-12, Rom. 3:20, Rom. 7:7) to humble them in the sense of their sin and misery, (Rom. 3:9,23) and thereby help them to a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, (Gal. 3:21-22) and of the perfection of his obedience.

When we dispose of the law, our need for Christ will not appear as desperate as it truly is. The law must be ever before us and we must continually seek to walk in it; in doing so we will maintain a keener perception of our need for Christ.

The law must also be brought before the unbeliever (as with Paul)

that they might see their need for a Savior. In this respect the law works in conjunction with the gospel to bring salvation (or liberation from damnation). As the Psalmist writes,

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul (Psalm 19:7).

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What is the greatest thing people can do? How do we know specifically (pages 2, 3)?
2. How do you feel when you think of God's law? How does the Bible describe God's law (pages 3, 4)?
3. How does the law of God liberate us from guilt manipulation and legalism (pages 4, 5)?
4. Are there consequences for disobeying the law of God? Explain (pages 6-8).
5. Discuss the law's relationship with our own pride (page 9).