

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 5, February, 1999

“The Law of the Spirit of Life”

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John 8:4-11 (NIV) - *The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir" she said. "Then neither do I condemn you" Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."*

In Jesus' day, the scribes and Pharisees were considered to be the legal experts of the Mosaic law. They made obedience to the law the whole purpose of religious life. When a difficult legal question came up, it was routine practice for them to take the question to a Rabbi for a decision. In the eyes of the Jewish law adultery was a serious crime. It was so serious, in fact, that it was punishable by death. The scribes and Pharisees had approached Jesus for a decision to be made about stoning the woman caught in adultery.

There was a major difference between the teaching and practice of Jesus and that of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus placed a high premium on love and forgiveness (the spirit of the law). The scribes and Pharisees placed a high premium on hatred and condemnation (the letter of the law).

In their eagerness to follow the letter of the law, they were more interested in formal correctness of the law, than in giving the adulterous woman another chance. In direct opposition to the

teachings of Jesus, they were determined to keep their religious prominence. It would have been easier and even more enjoyable for them, to stone the woman to death, than to forgive her. Their approach was, "the law said it - carry it out!"

This self-righteous, condemning attitude, which the scribes and Pharisees held on to, was completely devoid of life. It left the sinner in a grim [merciless] state of hopelessness and despair. Because of abuses in how the Mosaic law was implemented, sinners fell into a trap of "sin-conscience." They could never rise above their thoughts of guilt, inferiority, and condemnation. Insisting on the strict adherence to the formal letter of the law, the religious rulers made a "tradition" out of killing all hope in a sinner's life. Jesus said to the Pharisees that their traditions had "made the commandment of God of none effect." (**Matthew 15:6 KJV**)

God sent Jesus to demonstrate that He is not a person who has an unforgiving heart. He is merciful and full of grace. His deepest desire is to forgive, not to condemn and hold people's sins against them.

Romans 8:10-11 (NIV) - *But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.*

When we find ourselves in an unforgiving situation with others, we are not in agreement with God. We become an ACCUSER, like Satan, when we hold things against people.

Revelation 12:10 (KJV) - *And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.*

When Jesus confronted the ACCUSERS of the adulterous woman, none of them could claim they were without sin. Consequently, no one would cast the first stone. One by one they left. Rather than condemn the woman, Jesus offered her forgiveness and the hope of a new life. Jesus said to her, "Go now and leave your life of sin."

It may seem like Jesus was being lenient on the woman, by letting her go with an easy forgiveness. Such was not the case. Jesus was actually making it "harder" on her. He was warning her to make the right choice this time; either go back to her old ways or reach out to the new way with him. His command was to go and live a sinless [righteous] life. To do this, not only was she to know the law, but she was to live it! In other words, her life was to exceed [be greater than] the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

In ministering to prisoners, the Lord brought it to my attention that there are many inmates who study their Bibles on a regular basis, but who still have not developed a personal relationship or had an encounter with Jesus Christ. These inmates might be well-read in Bible Scripture, can even quote the Bible up-one-side and down-the-other, yet they are seriously lacking in their understanding of the Spirit of God. Consequently they don't know how to apply the Word of God in their daily life.

I got a letter from an inmate who was telling me that things were not going too well for him. On Christmas Day he and another Christian brother were discussing the Bible, when a third inmate (who celled with them) got angry, took his Bible from him - and ripped it apart! A fight broke out! The angry young man then left, only to get into a fight with someone else! The inmate who wrote to me, said he forgave the person for ripping up his Bible, but he was still very distraught over the loss of his Bible. He said, "I'm so sad that my copy of His Word had to get tore up on His Son's Birthday."

When I sat down to write to him, I prayed for God's guidance, as I always do when I write words of counsel to inmates. I was concerned about the loss of a good leather-bound Bible, that this inmate used all the time in his studies.

As I was praying, the Lord opened my understanding so I could look at the situation from another angle - from His viewpoint. After all, the Spirit of Jesus was there and knew the sequence of events that took place on Christmas Day. Without reservation the Lord said, "That torn-up Bible wasn't the worse thing that happened on Christmas Day!" It was the torn-up life of that angry young man, that got the attention of our Lord. Here was a brother whose insides were in turmoil and he was filled with rage. Sitting around listening to his cellies interpret Bible verses, wasn't fixing what was causing the anger. The Bible verses weren't bringing him closer, but were actually taking him farther away from God. Why?

When the Holy Spirit revealed, through Paul, that the letter of the law will kill, but the spirit will bring life, that is exactly what he meant. God's Word is not to be used as a club to beat a sinner into submission. God sent His Word to heal, not to kill! It wasn't the Bible (the law) that died on the cross - it was *Jesus* who died on the cross for our sins! Jesus didn't just try His Word out to see if it would work. He put His Word on the line and hung His life in the balance. No matter how many Bibles get ripped up, God's Word cannot be destroyed. It is alive and will accomplish what it was sent to do. The spiritual truth which Jesus brought is designed for action.

Matthew 5:18-20 (KJV) - For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.