

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 12, December, 2000

“Love - The Fulfillment of the Law”

by Sharon K. Griffie

Matthew 19:16-22 (NIV) - *Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.” “Which ones?” the man inquired. Jesus replied, “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother and love your neighbor as yourself.” “All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?” Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.*

In these few verses of scripture we learn a powerful lesson from the rich young man’s conversation with Jesus. If we want to follow Jesus, there isn’t one part of our life we can selfishly keep back for ourselves, thinking that Jesus wouldn’t interfere in that part. If there is anything worldly standing between us and Jesus, we are lacking in complete devotion to Him. The test of devotion to Jesus is not the same for everyone. Just because Jesus told this young man to sell all he had and give it to the poor, doesn’t mean we all have to sell what we own and give it to the poor. It just so happened that Jesus knew this man was wealthy and that he loved his riches more than he loved God.

If we are to love God perfectly, as He loves us, nothing in this world is to be more important to us than him. No amount of money can buy the love of God. If that were the case, Jesus would have asked the wealthy young man to give him the money to support his ministry of preaching the gospel. As with all ministries, Jesus had expenses to meet as he traveled around with His disciples spreading the Word of God. But, Jesus did not want the young man’s money, he wanted the one thing he would not give Him - his love. Without his love, which was the missing link, it

didn’t matter that he kept the other commandments.

James 2:10-11 (NIV) - *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.*

In this scripture passage James is laying down an important principle about the law of God. The law is not a series of detached rules, where one is given credit for the rules that are kept and debits for the rules that are broken. No way. Since God’s standard is nothing short of perfect righteousness, he wouldn’t think of grading us on a sliding scale. On the contrary, it is God’s will that we keep the whole law.

When we fail to keep even one part of the law of God, we have stumbled and fall short of the standard. We have become guilty of being a transgressor of the whole law. We’re not guilty in the sense of having violated every commandment, but we are guilty in the sense of having violated what holds the whole law together in perfect unity - love. When we violate what love stands for, we violate our whole relationship with God.

Jesus knew the rich young man’s motives from the beginning. He was only pretending to love Jesus. His questions revealed his shallowness. He said to Jesus, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” That was his first mistake and stumbling point. He thought he could do good works to earn eternal life.

Jesus answered him by saying, “If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.” The young man responded, “Which ones?” That was his second mistake. He stumbled by thinking he could gain eternal life by obeying only those commandments which were minimally required.

Half-hearted love never fulfills the high standard of God’s perfect love. A person who loves God too little, will stumble. When someone stumbles

in following even one commandment, that is the one the devil can and will use to gain a foothold in that person's life. For some inmates, prison has become a revolving door of disappointments, heartache, and stumbling.

As one prison inmate put it, "I can't believe Satan had me in the same position as I was the last time I got out of prison. I saw myself shutting the blinds, locking the doors...getting ready to do another line or another hit. In my head I knew it was wrong, but I thought God would cut me some slack! But, now that I sit here on my bunk, I know that I couldn't fool him. When I think of all the people God has brought into my life and the many opportunities I had to advance in life, but because I thought of myself, here I am rotting in prison by myself again."

This inmate, like many others, thought God would bless him (cut him some slack) in his rebellion. God is not going to bless rebellion. God blesses righteousness (Matthew 5:6). What I stated earlier bears repeating, "When we violate what love stands for, we violate our whole relationship with God." When we rebel against God's love, we miss opportunities to have a personal and meaningful relationship with Him. We also miss out on the joy of keeping his commandments. Jesus clearly taught, to love him is to keep his commandments.

John 14:23-24 (NIV)- *Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching..."*

If on the other hand, all we ever do is to constantly struggle to keep the commandments, out of some sort of duty or obligation to a distant, impersonal God, we will find excuses every time to keep on sinning; "I don't know what went wrong...I really was trying to do what was right...I don't understand...I thought I was being a better person...etc." If we really do not love God with perfect love, then self will win out.

The litmus test for keeping the whole law of God, hangs on two great commandments born out of Love for God.

Matthew 22:35-40 (NIV) - *One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question:*

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Romans 13:9-10 (NIV) - *The commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not covet, and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*



Questions for personal or group study:

1. How much devotion (loving response) does God require of us? (see Matthew 22:37)
2. Will God cut us some slack if we go to church every week and only do drugs once in a while, like when we get together with friends? (see Luke 17:1-3)
3. Most of the laws established in this country were either based on a law of God (expressed in scripture), or in response to some unloving act committed by one member of society upon another. Can you love God, and love your neighbor as God desires us to do, and at the same time deliberately break the laws of society? (see Romans 13:1-2)
4. Can any of us say that we are innocent of breaking any law? What provision does God make for us when we break a law? (see John 3:16)