

September 28th, 2008 “The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 17”

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Luke 11:52

“Destruction awaits you experts on the law! You have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves did not enter and you have hindered those who tried to enter.”

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

In our last lesson, I made a theological argument to show the difference between the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. My point was that the things of this world with which we deal are actually just copies of the true things that are in heaven. This earthly life is analogous to eternal life in the same way that high school football is analogous to the NFL, or that a Barbie “dress up” doll is analogous to a runway model. Thus, many of the tenets in the Law of Moses represent copies of the true law of God. They are not permanent, but are only substitutes for that which is permanent. **Hebrews 10:1** tells us:

1 For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

The Biblical argument is that every condition in this physical world is temporary. It is then logical that the letter of the Law of God will change as the temporary conditions addressed by the law change. An example of a law that has become obsolete is recorded in **Leviticus 4:27-30**:

27 ‘If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally by doing something against any of the commandments of the LORD in anything which ought not to be done, and is guilty, 28 or if his sin which he has committed comes to his knowledge, then he shall bring as his offering a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed. 29 And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and kill the sin offering at the place of the burnt offering.

30 Then the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger, put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour all the remaining blood at the base of the altar.

The Law of Moses proscribed the shedding of animal blood as the atonement for sin. God’s original deterrent for sin was the imposition of the death penalty. **Genesis 2:15-17** records:

15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep

it.

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;

17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

When the man and the woman sinned and became aware of their nakedness, they hid by covering themselves with fig leaves. God changed their covering, as **Genesis 3:21-23** records:

21 Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.

22 Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—

23 therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken.

God killed an animal to provide those first tunics of skin to provide a covering because of the sins of man. This set the pattern for using animals as a sacrifice for sin. As **Romans 6:23** tells us:

23 For the wages of sin is death,

And when sin is committed, the wages must be paid; there must be a death to atone for sin, which is why **Hebrews 9:22** tells us:

22 And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission [meaning the act of pardoning sin or offence].

When the death that occurs to atone for the sin is not the death of the one that actually committed the sin, the death is called a sacrifice, which is the destruction of something for the sake or benefit of something else. As we read in **Leviticus 4**, God set up a system in the Law of Moses in which sinful men could sacrifice their animals to die for their sins, and the Jews sacrificed animals by the millions, shedding animal blood on the altar at Jerusalem for their atonement.

But, on the Cross of Calvary, Jesus Christ shed His own precious blood to provide the true, permanent sacrifice for sin, actually paying the penalty that we owe for the sins that we have committed. Jesus’ sacrifice provides us forgiveness of sin, not just in this life, but in our eternal life as well. The animal sacrifices were simply a temporary symbol to prepare the Jews for the true sacrifice for their sin by Jesus Christ. **Hebrews 10:4** tells us:

4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

When my son first started driving regularly on his own, he drove his mother’s old four-wheel drive truck that probably would have allowed him to come out on top in almost any accident that he might have. My rule for him, however, was that he could not have any passengers in his vehicle, because I knew, from my research, that teen-agers distracting one another while they are driving is the number one cause of accidents among that age range. Now that Paul is an adult, and an experienced driver, he drives with other people in his car, carries on conversations with his mother as he drives, and works, talking business with his peers on his cell phone as he drives.

The purpose of the rule that I gave Paul as a teenager was not to keep Paul from ever having anyone in his car with him while he was driving, but to make it more likely that he would

keep his attention on the road while he was an inexperienced driver. Now that Paul has become a skilled driver, it is no longer necessary for him to drive alone. My law was always intended to be temporary, to only be effect until Paul obtained enough practice driving to become an experienced driver.

We read the letter of God's law that instructed the Jews to sacrifice an animal when they sinned, but, just like my law to my son, this particular law was designed to be temporary, until Jesus Christ, the actual sacrifice for sin, died on the Cross and sent the Holy Spirit as a permanent reminder of His sacrifice to those that believe in Him. The Apostle Paul describes the change in the law caused by the ministry of the Holy Spirit to us, in **Romans 8:2-5**:

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus [that is, the spirit of the law] has made me free from the law of sin and death [that is, the letter of the law].

3 For what the [letter of the] law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,

4 that the righteous requirement of the law [that is, the spirit of the law] might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

5 For those who live according to the flesh [that is, the letter of the law] set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit [of the law], the things of the Spirit.

Whenever we examine a tenet of the law, we must determine the spiritual principle that the law is meant to reinforce in our minds, and then make sure that the letter of the law still reinforces that principle. Fortunately, the Lord has provided us a great hint by dividing His Word into two sections, the Old Testament, which focuses on the Law of Moses, and the New Testament, which focuses on Christ. **Galatians 3:24-25** describes:

24 Therefore the law [of Moses] was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Romans 10:4 says:

4 For Christ is the end of the law [of Moses] for righteousness to everyone who believes.

The Jewish legal experts did not acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, so Jesus told them, in **Luke 11:52**:

“Destruction awaits you experts on the law! You have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves did not enter and you have hindered those who tried to enter.”

What does this mean? When Jesus Christ came on the scene to personally atone for the sins of man, bringing the Jewish leaders the information that their temporary positions as administrators of the animal sacrifices was being phased out in favor of Himself as the true sacrifice for sin, the leaders were so invested in their temporary, ceremonial positions that they refused to recognize the work of God. The Jewish leaders would not acknowledge the divinity of Jesus' miracles, although they were so powerful that any objective person would know that they were divine. The Jewish leaders disregarded the divine purpose of the Law of Moses, using the letter of the Law as a defense mechanism to protect their personal turf.

Their attempts to protect their leadership status by their self-serving interpretation of the Law caused them to lead those that followed them down the path to destruction. People often

follow the example of those that teach the law rather than taking the time to analyze the law themselves, therefore, it is destructive when a teacher of the law does not follow it. In **Matthew 23:1-3**:

**1 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples,
2 saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.
3 Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.**

A peer of mine in the dance crowd called me about a problem that he was having. He related an episode to me about a woman of his acquaintance that asked him to dance with her at a dance venue. She was in a twenty-year marriage. She lived in another town, and, while they were dancing, she invited him to the dance venue in her town for an event that her dance club was sponsoring. After the conversation, the young man went back to his table, the fellows that watched their interaction from the table speculated that the woman was trying to get his attention for more than dancing. The young man accepted her invitation and verified, when he went to the dance, that their evaluation was correct.

“Reverend Curtis”, the young man exclaimed, “I don’t know what is happening to married people these days, but something has to be done about it. People are getting divorces like there is no tomorrow, including most of the church people that I know. Marriage counseling doesn’t seem to help, because the people that I know that get divorces have been to marriage counseling, and they get divorces anyway. But something has to be done. I know that you and your wife have been married for a long time, and that you dance together like you intend to stay married. Maybe you can do something, because something has to be done. Pretty soon, everyone will be divorced, and what about the kids? I’m trying to stay married in order to raise my daughter, but something has to be done about divorce situation.”

“Well”, I explained to the young man, “one of the major problems of our culture is that divorce is now considered an acceptable solution to marital problems, rather than a shameful failure to keep one’s commitments. Were it considered a shame to divorce, people would try harder and be more successful at solving marital problems, but in our culture, divorce is often recommended rather than reviled. The reason that so many marriage counselors fail to help people to stay married is that the counselors don’t really believe in marriage because they are themselves divorced, and it is simply natural for divorced people to counsel others to divorce in order to affirm their own decision to do so. Most people, even those that are counselors, have a difficult time wholeheartedly counseling someone to hang in there when they themselves have quit.

“Tell your friends that are having marital trouble and decide to seek marriage counseling, that it is important that they choose a marriage counselor that has been successful in marriage themselves, because is it extraordinary to find a counselor that has been divorced that will really work hard to help maintain someone else’s marriage. To keep the church from being weighed down by the divorce culture, God tells us, in the “a” portion of **1 Timothy 3:2**:

2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife.”

“But we have chosen to disobey God, and we are reaping that which we have sown.”

Religious leaders need to stay in line with the spirit of the Word of God. No one is perfect, but it is important for the church to be circumspect about leadership, because it is only

natural and very likely that the faults of the leader will become the faults of the congregation. That was certainly the case in Israel. Jesus said, in **Matthew 23:13**:

13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

Jesus explains some of the leaders’ specific faults in **Luke 11:42**:

But destruction awaits you, Pharisees! You give God a tenth of your mint and rue and other herbs, yet you disregard justice and love for God! You should have done the former without leaving the latter undone.

Jesus teaches us how we ought give gifts to the Lord in several passages of Scripture. **Matthew 5:23-24** tells us:

23 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Reconciliation with our brother before giving to God is a requirement for sincere giving because the way that we treat others is the foremost indication of our relationship to God. **1John 4:20-21** tells us:

20 If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

The Pharisees are in breach of this commandment because they hate Jesus Christ without a cause, so their gifts are null and void. Jesus also taught us about giving in **Mark 12:41-44**:

41 Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much.

42 Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans.

43 So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury;

44 for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.”

God honors gifts that are actually sacrificial, as in the case of the widow. Jesus did not say that the others did not put in gifts, but that the widow put in more. The Lord compares that which we do to that which He has done and His expectation is that we will grow spiritually to the point that we are willing to sacrifice ourselves just as He did. This is a case of the widow giving according to the spirit of the law, which is sacrificial, while the others gave according to the letter. Jesus’ further point about giving is taught in **Matthew 6:1-4**:

1 “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2 Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

3 But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand

is doing,

4 that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

People that give publicly often do so to impress others so that they might be thought of as spiritual; God's plan is that our giving ought not be to impress others, but known only to Him and to us so that our sacrificial giving experience will be, to us, an emulation of the sacrificial giving experience of Jesus Christ. Jesus' ultimate sacrifice was not given to earthly fanfare, but was a true sacrifice because it did not benefit Jesus in any way, but only advanced the Kingdom of God.

It is clear, from these three passages of Scripture, that just giving a gift is not the most important thing, but it is most important that the spirit with which we obey the law of God must be a sacrificial spirit, meaning that we must be able to put aside our own needs so that any benefit that comes from that which we do will go to others, and we must be able to put aside our desires to build up our own reputation so that any glory that comes from that which we do will go to God.

Jesus' teaching on giving is just one example to display the fact that the Jewish leaders are leading the people astray. Jesus goes on to tell the leaders, in **Luke 11:43-44**:

“Destruction awaits you, Pharisees! You love the most prominent seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted in the marketplaces. Destruction awaits you! You're like unmarked graves, which people walk over without realizing it.”

The Mosaic Law taught, in **Numbers 19:16**, that having contact with a grave would make a Jew unclean for seven days. Jesus called the Pharisees “unmarked graves”, defiling the people with their lives and teachings while keeping the people unaware of the danger. Jesus explains the reference to the synagogues and the marketplaces, in **Matthew 6:5-6**, which says: **5 “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.**

6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

The Jews have the same problem with recognition that they have with money. The Jewish leaders are not performing their religious responsibilities to build up the kingdom of God, but rather, for their own glory. As Jesus says, good works that lead to our recognition by men as the author of the works does not build up our reward in heaven. We accomplish everything beneficial by the power and grace of God, thus God is the one that is worthy to be praised. When we set ourselves up to be praised by our peers for the works that God has done, God is not pleased, and the temporary praise that we receive from men is all of the reward for which we are eligible. When we give glory to God for the works that He has done through us, He says to us, as **Matthew 25:21** records:

21 His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’

So, our position ought be that we are simply servants of God, and that which we do is for His glory. Jesus instructs us, in **Luke 17:10**:

10 So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.' "

The Pharisees were not the only ones whose feelings were hurt by Jesus' teaching. **Luke 11:46-48** records:

Then one of experts on the law answered, "Teacher, You also insult us when You say these things."

[Jesus] replied, "Destruction awaits you experts on the law as well! You weigh people down with impossible burdens while you yourselves refuse to lift a finger to help.

Destruction awaits you because you build the tombs of the prophets whom your ancestors murdered! In this way you affirm and approve the actions of your ancestors—they murdered them, and you build their tombs.

God intended that observing rituals of the law be an exercise in devotion to focus the attention of Israel on serving Him, but God did not intend that His law be oppressive. The law becomes oppressive, however, when the focus of the law changes from serving God to serving man. God has all of the resources in the universe; He gives us resources and the ability to grow them, and then asks us to show our gratitude and love for Him by returning part of the resource to Him. When human leaders become the focus of our service, they generally do not supply resources, but take them, and men will take oppressively in order to increase their own kingdom. The leaders want to build up the treasury, not to build up the kingdom of God, but to build up their own kingdoms.

When corrupt religious leadership comes into power, God sends prophets to warn the people of their corruption. The general response of a corrupt leader to having the prophets' finger pointed at him is to silence the prophet. This is, of course, the reason for the persecution of the Old Testament prophets that predicted the overthrow of the corrupt Jewish nation, and also the human reason for the persecution of Jesus Christ. Jesus says, in **Luke 11:49-51**:

49 Therefore the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,'

50 that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation,

51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.

Jesus Christ and all of the prophets sent by God have come to the Nation of Israel with a benevolent purpose, that being to turn the people, including the leaders, back to God. David, the King of Israel, gave the example of a positive response to a prophet, after David impregnated Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, a soldier in the army of Israel. To cover up his crime, had Uriah killed in battle. **2 Samuel 11:26-12:23** records:

26 When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband.

27 And when her mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.

1 Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: "There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor.

2 The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds.

3 But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him.

4 And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him."

5 So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die!

6 And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity."

7 Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.

8 I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more!

9 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.

10 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.'

11 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.

12 For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.' "

13 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.

14 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."

15 Then Nathan departed to his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became ill.

16 David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground.

18 Then on the seventh day it came to pass that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead. For they said, "Indeed, while the child was alive, we spoke to him, and he would not heed our voice. How can we tell him that the child is dead? He may do some harm!"

19 When David saw that his servants were whispering, David perceived that the child was dead. Therefore David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" And they said, "He is dead."

20 So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate.

21 Then his servants said to him, “What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food.”

22 And he said, “While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?’

23 But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.”

David sinned, presenting an extremely poor example to Israel, but he had a repentant spirit, so much so that God said, in **Acts 13:22**

22 [God] raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.’

Romans 3:23 tells us:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

We will all have a day when we need the admonition of a prophet, as did David. It is our responsibility as a Christian to listen to and understand that which the prophet says, to apply the necessary law to our lives, and to perform the appropriate acts of repentance, so that we can be restored, as was David, by the Lord, who died that our sins might be forgiven. Yes, we will commit sins, we will have consequences from the Lord because of our sinfulness, and some consequences may last for the remainder of our lives on this side as was the case with David, but we can be encouraged by the realization that our consequences in this life will not affect the totality of our existence, because there is another land, where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary will be at rest.

Let us not become rebellious, become defensive, or try to dodge our responsibility to the Lord while seeking justification for our sin in the letter of the law while ignoring the spirit of the law as did the scribes and the Pharisees.

God loves us when we recognize the error of our ways and confess our sin. Let us not be defensive before Him, but let us live our lives according to the admonition of **1 John 1:8-9**:

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

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