

DON'T REJECT GOD'S LAW

5 I will sing for my beloved a song about his vineyard. My beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. ²He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress. Then he looked for it to produce a crop of good grapes, but it only produced wild grapes. ³Now you inhabitants of Jerusalem and you men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴What more could have been done for my vineyard that I have left undone? When I expected it to produce good grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? ⁵Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard. I will remove its [protective] hedge, and it will be devoured by wild animals. I will tear down its wall, and it will be trampled [under foot]. ⁶I will make it a wasteland, it shall be neither pruned nor cultivated; briars and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain upon it. ⁷The vineyard of Jehovah of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his choice plant. He looked for justice, but he found oppression; he expected righteousness, but [he heard the] cries of distress.

⁸Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field, until there is no space left and you live alone in the land! ⁹Jehovah of hosts has spoken in my ear, Surely, many houses will become desolate—even great and beautiful mansions—[they will be left] without occupants; ¹⁰because a ten-acre vineyard will produce only ten gallons of wine, and ten bushels of seed [will produce only] one bushel of grain. ¹¹Woe to those who get up early in the morning so that they may run for their strong drink, those who stay up late at night until they are inflamed with wine! ¹²They have harps and lyres at their banquets, tambourines and flutes and wine—but they disregard the work of Jehovah, nor do they consider what his hands have done. ¹³Therefore, because of their lack of understanding, my people will go into exile; their honorable men will be famished and the multitude of their common people will be parched with thirst. ¹⁴Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite and opens its mouth wide—into it will descend their nobles and the multitude of their common people, together with their brawlers and their revelers. ¹⁵The common man will be brought low and the man of importance will be humbled and the eyes of the arrogant will be humbled. ¹⁶But Jehovah of hosts will be exalted by his judgment, and God—the Holy One—will be sanctified by [his act of] righteousness. ¹⁷Then the lambs will graze just as [if they were] in their own pasture, and wandering sheep will eat among the ruins of the wealthy.

¹⁸Woe to those who pull iniquity along with cords of deceitfulness, and sin as if with cart ropes! ¹⁹Woe to those who say, Let [God] hurry, let him be quick to do his work, so that we may see it! Let that which the Holy One has determined to do come and occur, so that we may experience it! ²⁰Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! ²¹Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! ²²Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and champions at mixing strong drinks; ²³those who acquit the wicked for a bribe, and deny justice to the innocent! ²⁴Therefore, as tongues of fire lick up straw, and as dry grass sinks down in the flames, so their root will decay and their blossom will blow away like dust; because they have rejected the law of Jehovah of hosts and despised the word of the Holy One of

Israel. ²⁵Therefore, the anger of Jehovah burns against his people; his hand is raised against them and he strikes them down. The mountains shake, and the dead bodies are like filth in the streets. But even after all this, his anger is not pacified; his hand is still raised [against them]. ²⁶He will give a signal [calling] for the distant nations, he will whistle for those who dwell at the ends of the earth. With speed they shall come swiftly. ²⁷Not one of them is weary or stumbles, not one of them slumbers or sleeps; neither is the belt around their waist loosened nor the thongs of their sandals broken. ²⁸Their arrows are sharp, and all their bows are strung. The hoofs of their horses seem to be flint, and the wheels [of their chariots] are like a whirlwind. ²⁹Their roar is like that of the lioness, all of them roar like young lions. They roar as they seize their prey and carry it away—with no one to rescue. ³⁰On that day they shall roar against [my people] like the roaring of the sea. If someone looks upon the land he will only see darkness and distress; the light will be darkened by the clouds. (Isa. 5:1-30)

Introduction

“Stay away from the right side of the glacier,” the sign warned. Because of my stubborn will, I chose to ignore it.

My wilderness recreation class from Selkirk College in British Columbia was on a field trip, camped in a cabin at Kokanee Glacier Provincial Park. The morning of October 1, 1976, we were to head back to our bus and return to the college. While the rest of the class slept, two of my classmates and I made our way up the rocky terrain to the forbidden area of the glacier. Two hours later, realizing that the rest of the class would soon be awake and returning to the bus, we began our descent down the mountain. In the lead, I inched across a patch of ice 25 feet wide, trying to make it to the safety of a rocky area on the other side. Suddenly, I slipped and fell two thousand feet. My body catapulted down the mountainside, scraping violently over ice and rocks. When I regained consciousness three weeks later, I had lost forty pounds. My body was horribly cut and scraped, my skull was fractured in two places, and I had a brainstem injury. “Stay away from the right side of the glacier,” the sign warned. But I chose to ignore it.

Because he chose to ignore that sign, Ron Homenuke paid the consequence. You cannot defy the natural laws of God’s creation and get away with it. Neither can you defy God’s moral law and get away with it—even if you bear the LORD’s name and claim to be one of His people. This is what the Old Testament people of Israel tragically came to discover: those who reject God’s law will find themselves incurring His anger and forfeiting His blessing.

Note: this passage is not speaking about sincere Christian people who are seeking to serve Christ and keep His commandments, but are well aware of their sins and shortcomings. On the contrary, this passage is warning us of the consequence of rejecting the law of God as the moral standard for our lives.

I. Don't Reject God's Law, ...By Practicing What is Contrary to His Law (Isa. 5:8-23)

Verses 8-10 are addressing the sin of greed and covetousness:

Woe to those who add house to house and join field to field, until there is no space left and you live alone in the land! ⁹Jehovah of hosts has spoken in my ear, Surely, many houses will become desolate—even great and beautiful mansions—they will be left without occupants; ¹⁰because a ten-acre vineyard will produce only ten gallons of wine, and ten bushels of seed will produce only one bushel of grain. (Isa. 5:8-10)

What is being described in verse 8 is a real estate monopoly; buying up all the properties until you own the entire neighborhood.

As Christians, we must consider such questions as these: What characterizes my life? Do I have a Christ-centered, eternity-oriented outlook and contentment with regard to the things of this present world? Or do I have a seemingly insatiable appetite for more things, more influence, more control? Do I think that if I had more money, a more comfortable home, a more prestigious job, it would finally make me happy and satisfied? Does my desire for more things ever cause me to violate the other commandments of God, such as honesty, compassion and justice? Which of these two things occupies my mind and directs my life: the lust for more money, possessions and power; or the desire for a deeper relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ?

In verse 9 the LORD reveals to Isaiah what is about to happen: the beautiful homes of the wealthy landowners will be left empty; they will become like old, abandoned farm houses. All this shall be the consequence of the crop failure and the resulting economic collapse that the LORD shall bring about as an act of judgment (vs. 10.) (Note: The Hebrew measurements along with the U.S. equivalents are as follows: a bath equals approximately 10-10½ gallons; a homer equals approximately 10½ bushels; and an ephaph equals approximately one bushel.)

Let us bear in mind the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and live accordingly: *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money"* (Matt.6:24.)

Verses 11-17 are addressing the sin of moral wantonness or debauchery—a life of moral corruption:

Woe to those who get up early in the morning so that they may run for their strong drink, those who stay up late at night until they are inflamed with wine! ¹²They have harps and lyres at their banquets, tambourines and flutes and

wine—but they disregard the work of Jehovah, nor do they consider what his hands have done. ¹³Therefore, because of their lack of understanding, my people will go into exile; their honorable men will be famished and the multitude of their common people will be parched with thirst. ¹⁴Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite and opens its mouth wide—into it will descend their nobles and the multitude of their common people, together with their brawlers and their revelers. ¹⁵The common man will be brought low and the man of importance will be humbled and the eyes of the arrogant will be humbled. ¹⁶But Jehovah of hosts will be exalted by his judgment, and God—the Holy One—will be sanctified by his act of righteousness. ¹⁷Then the lambs will graze just as if they were in their own pasture, and wandering sheep will eat among the ruins of the wealthy. (Isa. 5:11-17)

Verses 11-12a are describing a people who are devoted to the pursuit of their own pleasures, especially the pleasures derived from immoral conduct. But, as verse 12b declares, these people are oblivious to what God is doing in the land. His judgment is descending upon the nation and they are not even aware of it, so engrossed are they in the pursuit of their own immoral pleasures.

As Christians, we must consider such questions as these: Do I only live for the weekend? Do I view my work-week as a necessary evil whose only purpose is to earn money to fund my weekend carousing? Do I make it a practice to go out and get drunk on the weekend, and do I go out looking for promiscuous sex or other immoral escapades? Am I so pre-occupied with entertainment (in the form of movies or sports) and immediate sensual gratification that I am oblivious to where the society is headed and the judgment that lays in store for it? Or have I already reached the point where I do not really care what is going to happen? (that is the point of total hedonism: Live for today, and to hell we go tomorrow!)

In verse 13 the approaching judgment of God upon the land is actually viewed as an already accomplished fact (the verbs occur in the past tense): "*because of their lack of understanding, my people have gone into exile.*" Furthermore, the judgment is viewed as an event that takes the people completely by surprise—such is the significance of the phrase "*lack of knowledge.*" The people are so pre-occupied with their own hedonistic pursuits that they have no understanding of what has happened to them and their nation. But, as verse 16 indicates, when the judgment does come, it will vindicate the LORD as being indeed a righteous Judge.

Let us bear in mind the words of the apostle Paul, and live accordingly:

Do you not realize that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You do not belong to yourself; ²⁰you were bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God with your body. (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

Verses 18-19 are addressing the sins of self-deception and contemptuous defiance of God:

Woe to those who pull iniquity along with cords of deceitfulness, and sin as if with cart ropes! ¹⁹Woe to those who say, Let God hurry, let him be quick to do his work, so that we may see it! Let that which the Holy One has determined to do come and occur, so that we may experience it! (Isa. 5:18-19)

Verse 18 presents the picture of men strenuously dragging their sins unto themselves, and pulling their sins along "*with cords of deceitfulness.*" As they engage in their sinful conduct they entertain self-deceiving misconceptions about God and about sin; namely, that God does not care if they engage in sin, because of His love He will not punish them.

As Christians, we must consider such questions as these: What misconceptions do I entertain about God that allow me to continue practicing my favorite sin? Do I view God as being too far away to see, or as being too weak to act? Do I entertain the mistaken notion that God does not expect me to be holy and obedient? Do I have the mistaken conception that because God is love He will tolerate my sins and not enact His judgment against me? Do I have the idea that God threatens a lot, but He seldom does anything? Or do I just try not to think about God and the day of accountability?

Let us take to heart the Word of God and may our lives be fashioned according to His Word:

But to the wicked, God says, ...¹⁷You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you. ¹⁸When you see a thief, you join with him; you throw in your lot with adulterers. ¹⁹You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit. ²⁰You speak continually against your brother and slander your own mother's son. ²¹These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face. ²²Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue. (Psl. 50:16-22)

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. (Gal. 6:7-8)

Verse 20 is addressing the sin of perverting the truth:

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! (Isa. 5:20)

The most elementary and fundamental moral precepts—the black and white of ethics and morality—are being turned upside down, with the result being that perversity is honored and righteousness is abased.

As Christians, we must consider such questions as these: Do I recognize cohabitation outside the bonds of marriage as being immoral? Do I recognize homosexuality to be a violation of God's moral law and as something that is totally contrary to God's creation of male and female? Or do I accept the perverted view that such practices are merely "alternative lifestyles" and as such ought to be accepted?

Let us bear in mind the Word of God: *"Jehovah ... comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his truth"* (Psl. 96:13.)

Verse 21 is addressing the sin of ungodly arrogance:

Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! (Isa. 5:21)

Here is an arrogance that causes a man to forsake the fear of God as a monitor upon his behavior and as a guardian over his decisions; man's own wisdom and reason are made to be the standards for ethical decisions, rather than the moral law of God. Consider Proverbs 3:5-7, *"Trust in Jehovah with all your heart, and do not rely upon your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths. ⁷Do not be wise in own eyes; fear Jehovah, and depart from evil."* Note that trust in the LORD and fear of the LORD are set in contrast to relying upon one's own understanding and being wise in one's own eyes.

As Christians, we must consider such questions as these: Do I believe that man living in society has the right and the ability to make his own laws as he may see fit, without any reference to God's moral law? Do I think that man's will can actually become law, and man's own desire can become the standard of good and evil? Do I personally live as though I were independent of God and not accountable to God; and, as much as possible, do I make my own will the law for my life?

Let us bear in mind the Word of God:

The law of Jehovah is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of Jehovah are trustworthy, making wise the simple. ⁸The precepts of Jehovah are right, giving joy to the heart. The commandment of Jehovah is radiant, giving light to the eyes. ⁹The fear of Jehovah is clean, enduring forever. The ordinances of Jehovah are sure, and altogether righteous. ¹⁰They are more precious than gold, even more than much pure gold. They are sweeter than honey, even honey right from the comb. ¹¹Furthermore, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. (Psl. 19:7-11)

Verses 22-23 are addressing the sin of injustice:

Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and champions at mixing strong drinks; ²³those who acquit the wicked for a bribe, and deny justice to the innocent! (Isa. 5:22-23)

The judges and leaders of the nation have not built a reputation for commitment to justice and for personal integrity; on the contrary, they have a reputation for their ability to out drink any challenger! Furthermore, the judges themselves are condemned by God for acquitting the wicked in exchange for a bribe and of depriving the righteous of the justice due him.

As Christians, we must consider such questions as these: What do I admire in a leader, his power and influence, or his integrity and commitment to justice? If I had to choose between a candidate who could improve my economic well-being without regard to justice, and one who was committed to justice before God, which one would I choose? Would I ever seek to gain “personal political favors” from a political leader? Would I ever offer him a bribe or “pull strings” to help my business or to get my son or daughter out of a legal jam?

Let us take seriously the Word of God:

These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; ¹⁷do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all these things, declares Jehovah. (Zech. 8:16-17)

Verses 24-25 reveal the impending consequence of the sins previously addressed:

Therefore, as tongues of fire lick up straw, and as dry grass sinks down in the flames, so their root will decay and their blossom will blow away like dust, because they have rejected the law of Jehovah of hosts and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. (Isa. 5:24-25)

Because of the sins specified in verses 8-23, the anger of the LORD shall be kindled into flame and it shall totally consume the sinful nation. When the love of God is abused and taken for granted, when the righteousness of God is ignored and rejected, when the warnings of God go unheeded and even scorned, there finally comes a day when the holy wrath of God is expressed in all of its fullness.

Let us be careful not to reject the law of God by practicing what is contrary to that holy law (as was the case of Old Testament Israel.)

II. Don't Reject God's Law, ...Rather, Let Us Become What God Expects Us to Be (Isa. 5:1-7)

In verses 1-7 Isaiah assumes the role of a popular folk singer and sings a ballad about the LORD's vineyard—as verse 7 indicates, the vineyard represents the nation of Israel, the people of God.

The LORD “planted His vineyard” and He looked for the fruit of righteousness and justice. He took the greatest care to insure that His vineyard would produce good fruit: *“He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress ... ⁴What more could have been done for my vineyard that I have left undone?”* (Isa. 5:2,4.)

In the same way, the LORD assures us that He has provided us with all the spiritual resources we need to bear the fruit of righteousness in our lives: *“His divine power has given us everything pertaining to life and godliness”* (2 Pet. 1:3a)

Let us not reject the law of God; rather, let us become what the LORD expects us to be:

It is by grace that you have been saved through faith—and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹it is not of works, therefore no one can boast. ¹⁰We are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared in advance in order for us to walk in them. (Eph. 2:8-10)

Conclusion

Living in the Western world in the opening decades of the twenty-first century, we must be very much aware of the fact that we are living in the midst of a society that has rejected the law of God, and stands in jeopardy of having the anger of the LORD incited against it. We must also be very aware of the fact that if we who bear the name of the LORD imitate the society in its rejection of His law, the holy anger of the LORD will be directed against us as well.

Let us be careful not to reject the law of God, by practicing what is contrary to that holy law. On the contrary, as Christians, let us, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, become what our heavenly Father expects us to be:

... become blameless and pure, children of God without blemish, in the midst of a perverse and depraved generation, among whom you shine like stars in the universe, ¹⁶firmly holding the word of life. (Phil. 2:15b-16a)