



Gospel / life

Toward A Spirituality Of Freedom

New Creation Teaching Ministry: Tuesday Night Studies 2011, Seacliff Anglican Church

Study 25: The Burnt Offering & Life In God's World (3) - Integrity

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph. 5:1)

Walking in love, i.e. loving our brothers and sisters, is the outcome of seeking to be like our Father God, knowing that we are His beloved children. God is love, and so those who are caught by His love and who long to be like him, will love. This action of love to others is also an action of sacrificial love towards God, who is pleased by what is done. To love our neighbour is to love God; to love God is to love our neighbour. John also makes this point very clear in his first letter. There is a deep, unbreakable connection between a life devoted to God and a life lived in service of others. Jesus taught that the whole of the will of God for us is summed up in two commands: to love God with all we have and are, and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Integrity

For people to have integrity means that they have consistency between who they are, what they value and how they act. They are “what you see is what you get” kind of people. Christian integrity is essentially consistency between who we are as God's children by His grace, the things that we value, and the way we live our lives in this world. Integrity is an essential part of living life devoted to the Lord. The opposite to integrity is hypocrisy, where there is a break between who we are, what we value and how we act, and where that break is concealed by a kind of play-acting or pretence, a sham integrity.

Our integrity as human beings is demanded, as well as given, by the fact that we are in the image of God, and that we are redeemed to Him through His grace enacted in the dying and rising of Jesus Christ. There is no inconsistency in the Godhead; so there is to be none in us. “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth... (1John 1:5-6)” And so with us there is no essential inconsistency when we express the image of God. Any lack of integrity is going against the grain of what God has done in us by creation and by redemption.

God's integrity is that He is light and love. To walk in the light is to walk in the fullness of sincere love. As Paul says in Romans 12:9f, “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection...” Integrity is not a matter of individualised rightness; it is a matter of how we are

related to others. There is no integrity apart from love which is prompted by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. “By the grace of God, I am what I am (1Cor. 15:10).”

You Shall Love Your Neighbour As Yourself (Lev. 19:18b)

In the book of Leviticus, chapter 19 deals with a range of commands that have to do with our relationship with God and with others. In some ways, it seems to be an odd farrago of commands, but the chapter can be broken into smaller units, each ending with “I am the LORD”. When we do that we can see that each unit has a consistency within itself.

Lev. 19:1 Being holy as God the LORD is holy

Lev. 19:2-8 Religious duties—keeping the commands: honouring father and mother; keeping the Sabbath; no idolatry; ensuring that the peace offerings are eaten in a timely manner and not profaned.

Lev. 19:9-18 Neighbourliness—refusing greed and caring for the poor; honesty and integrity in all dealings; no exploitation or using of others; no injustice in the courts; love your neighbour.

Lev. 19:19-36 Other miscellaneous duties for holiness—no mixing what should not be mixed; no pagan practices; no consulting the dead; honour the elderly; loving the immigrant and refugee; fair trading.

Lev. 19:36b-37 Summary statement.

Much of the material about neighbourliness in the middle section (Leviticus 19:9-18) is taken up in the New Testament, especially in Romans 12 and 3, and Ephesians 4 and 5. In all the commands there are all related to the matter of integrity. This provides us with a starting point to examine this walk of light and love. We will look at this section in Leviticus, and then link it with key sections of the passages in Romans and Ephesians already mentioned.

(i) Kindness to the poor (Lev. 19:9-10)

The farmer in Israel was forbidden greediness. When reaping the crop, they were to leave room for some crop to be left for “gleaners”, those who came after to gather up that which had been missed in the harvest. The gleaners were normally the poor from Israel or sojourners, i.e. refugees temporarily residing in Israel perhaps due to famine or war in their home place. So, the farmer was not to reap right up to the fence line, nor was he to go back and find what he had missed.

(ii) Honesty in all dealings (Lev. 19:11-12)

Stealing, fraud (stealing by pretence), lying, and taking false oaths in God’s name were all prohibited to the LORD’s people. There was a range of behaviours from the outrightly improper to those actions that might be justified as “not breaking the letter of the law.” However, deception was at the heart of these later actions and this wasn’t appropriate to the people of God. The truth is the truth only when it is the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

(iii) No exploitation of others (Lev. 19:13-14)

When a person had worked for a wage, it was incumbent on the beneficiary of that work to pay at the end of that day, not keeping the wage until the morning. The worker was not to be treated as though paying him were doing him a favour. When a

person was somehow disabled, that disability was not to be exploited nor the person mocked because of it.

(iv) No injustice (Lev. 19:15-16)

When a matter was brought for judgment, there was to be no injustice in any way, no favouritism, either for the poor or for the influential: the case was to be decided entirely on its merits. Moreover, slander was a matter of injustice—speaking against a person publicly was way of ensuring a pre-judgment of any case against him. (In the time that this applied to, issues were settled by the elders of the local town, where all the people involved were known.) Especially there was a need to refrain from this lest it come finally to be an element in a case involving the death penalty.

(v) Love your neighbour

No brother or sister was to be hated in the heart, i.e. secretly even though outwardly being civil to him or her. Doing this would undoubtedly lead to either grudge bearing or vengeance taking. Rather than neighbour was to be loved. And this love was to be expressed in frank reasoning with him or her. That is, the person offended was to go and to talk it out the offender. Loving the neighbour does not always mean that we will have an easy-going relationship with him or her! To not be open in this way, i.e. in exposing the concerns of the heart, ran the risk that the one who remained silent, hating the brother or sister in the heart, would “incur sin”. Quite possibly it means that the person who remains silent becomes complicit in any further wrong that the offender commits.

Romans 12-13 and Ephesians 4:17-6:9

Paul is very clear: let love be genuine (Rom. 12:9). There is to be no pretence or play-acting in Christian life. Our lives are to be governed by the reality of the new creation that has been worked in us through Jesus Christ, so that we are again in the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24).

Picking up some of the matters that we find in Leviticus 19, we see similar concerns dealt with in Paul’s epistles. In **Eph. 4:28** the concern about honesty and care of the poor are brought together. The person who was a thief, now being a new creation in the likeness of God, is no longer to steal. Rather he or she is to work hard, doing honest work, and all this is with the view that there will be something to share with anyone who has need. The grace of our Lord Jesus rescues us from an awful self-preoccupation into a life of love and service towards others. Likewise in **Rom. 12:13** Paul urges the Christian community to attend to the needs of the saints (i.e. their brothers and sisters in Christ) and to show hospitality. In context these needs and the necessity of hospitality arises because of tribulation and persecution.

Working hard and honestly is a needed virtue of God’s people. The rivalry of worker and boss is taken away by the Gospel. So, just as the boss is not to withhold payment to the worker, so the worker is not to be grudging in the work that is required. The New Testament exhortations to “slaves” outnumbers those to “bosses” probably because there were more within the church from the former group than the latter. In **Eph. 6:5-9** these two groups are addressed. Bosses (masters) are not to threaten or exploit their workers, but rather treat them well with a good will, knowing that the Lord Jesus is both master of both workers and bosses. Workers are called to work sincerely for their bosses, just as they would for Christ himself, not merely when being watched but rather consistently and from the heart. They were assured that this kind of service is rewarded by the Lord. This will mean today that students work hard

to get assignments done, readings read, etc, and that workers will be diligent at work, not wasting time.

This integrity is extended to our relationship with the governing authorities. We are urged to be subject to them, and not to be resistant to them (**Rom. 13:1-7**). (Of course where that government sets itself up as a god-like institution above the rule of God, we are right to resist at that point. The apostles themselves make that clear!) Part of this means that we are diligent in paying taxes. “Pay to all what is owed to them.”

Likewise, any other debts to others are, if possible, to be avoided, or if incurred, to be settle promptly. “Owe no one anything...” (**Rom. 13:8**).

The idea of exploitation of others also is negated by the exhortation that we love one another with brotherly affection and outdo one another in showing honour (**Rom. 12:10**). Moreover, we are to have sensitivity towards one another, where the joys and sorrows of each are shared by all. “Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep (**Rom. 12:15**). All in all we are to have a deep humility, not thinking too highly of ourselves, but rather thinking of ourselves with sober judgment (**Rom. 12:3**), certainly never looking down on another person as though we have some superiority we can claim. We are to ensure that we do not stand off from those considered lowly in the wider society, but be glad to be with, and to be seen to be with, them. We are to seek to live peaceably with all, so far as that is possible from our side. When wronged we are never to take revenge; even if persecuted we are to seek to do good, not letting good be overcome by evil, but rather overcoming evil by good (**Rom. 12:14-20**).

We are to speak the truth with our neighbour (**Eph. 4:25-26**), putting aside all falsehood. This is linked with being angry in a way that does not sin. It ties in with the loving of the neighbour and not hating him in your heart in Leviticus 19. The Christian community is to be marked by a realism of love, and by the courage in relationships to both address issues of concern and seek for reconciliation and not merely justice. “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (**Eph. 4:31-32**).”

In such ways we are imitators of God as His beloved children. In such ways we are holy just as He is holy. And this is our integrity, which is a fragrant and pleasing offering to God.