

## **Jewish Perspective on Biblical Ethics**

### **2 Sam. 7:11c-17**

#### Introduction:

1. David had determined to build a house for the Lord. But the Lord said, in effect, "Did I ask you to build Me a house? No, I will build you a house."
  - a. David spoke of a physical house. God spoke of building a family.
  - b. This is evident in the promises made to David in this passage.
    - 1) God said, "I will raise up your descendent."
    - 2) "I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me."
2. There were ethical implications associated with this relationship.
  - a. God said, "When he commits iniquity, I will correct him."
  - b. "But My lovingkindness shall not depart from him."
3. In this lesson we continue our study on biblical ethics, that system of right and wrong that finds its origin in the holiness of God (1 Pet. 1:14-16). It is a system of right and wrong based upon who we are as the people of God.
4. In this lesson we will focus attention on the Jewish perspective of right and wrong as revealed in the O.T.

#### Discussion:

- I. The kingdom of God in the O.T. was not primarily a political system. It was not brought into existence by a military power, nor by democratic legislation. It was less like a governmental system and more like a family (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Chron. 17:10; Isa. 43:6; Hos. 1:10; 1 Pet. 1:14).
  - A. The Lord would establish a house for David. He would be a father to him.
  - B. The people of Israel that God created for Himself were His sons and daughters (Isa. 43:6-7).
  - C. Peter spoke to the Christians of the first century saying, "As obedient children do not be conformed to the former lusts, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves in all your behavior."
  - D. The kingdom of God involved a personal relationship between the king and his subjects.
    1. The king was competent to rule with justice, wisdom and righteous judgments.
    2. Sometimes he was called on to respond with wisdom in the immediacy of the moment. This was the case in 1 Kings 3:16ff when two harlots came to Solomon. They both had a baby. One of them lay on her baby and he died. A dispute arose for she wanted to take the other woman's child. The king said, "Take a sword and divide him," and the real mother was revealed, because she had rather let the other one have him than that he be killed.
    3. 1 Kings 3:28 says, "The people feared the king, because they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice." Note that it is the "wisdom of God" in him. Right and wrong found its foundation "in the wisdom of God."
  - E. The citizens in the kingdom, the sons and daughters of God, were to respond with complete trust and loyalty.

II. In God's kingdom He is the final authority on matters of right and wrong and total obedience is given by the citizens all because of their confidence in the King to do right.

- A. The O.T. word "torah" carries the idea, as does the N.T. word "nomos." Both are translated "law" in the English.
  - 1. But for us "law" is something imposed on us. This is NOT the Jewish perspective.
  - 2. The ancient concept was that "torah" was a body of instruction regarding man's place in God's world involving duties to God and to neighbor.
  - 3. Men were thus given divine guidance as to the right way in which a person should behave as a subject in the heavenly kingdom/in the family of God. It was not something imposed from without on an unwilling citizen/child, but graciously received, in humility, as insight beyond mere human ability.
- B. Thus Isa. 2:3f says, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths. For the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem and He will judge between the nations." Peace is the result.
- C. Jeremiah said, "I know, O Lord, that a man's way is not in himself, nor is it in man who walks to direct his own steps. Correct me, O Lord, but with justice; not with Your anger, or You will bring me to nothing" (10:23-24).
- D. This perspective is reflected in the Psalms.
  - 1. Psa. 19:7-11.
  - 2. Psa. 119:97-104.
- E. If you want to find wisdom and the best life, listen to the Lord!
- F. If you want to know how to live, the Law of the Lord is **the** instruction manual.
- G. We need to stop thinking of the Law of the Lord as something imposed on us and accept it as coming from a gracious Father who is trying to help us experience happiness. When we understand this it gives us a message to communicate to a world suffering in ignorance.

III. This perspective is also evidenced in the Jewish "Shema" and Jewish "halakah."

- A. What is the "Shema?"
  - 1. The "Shema" is stated in Deut. 6:4-9. Cf. Deut. 11:13-21; Num. 15:37-41.
  - 2. The quotation of this text was the centerpiece of the morning and evening prayer services in the Jewish household.
- B. In rabbinic thought it is a declaration of allegiance to God.
  - 1. As the rabbis called it "accepting the authority of the kingship of God," literally it referred to accepting "the yoke of the kingship of heaven."
  - 2. They were to remember all the commandments of the Lord to do them and NOT follow after their own heart, but to do the commandments of God and be holy to Him (Num. 15:39-40).
  - 3. Reciting the "shema" twice a day was a daily affirmation of allegiance to God and to the covenant obligations that allegiance entailed. "Love the Lord with all heart, soul and might," i.e. without reservation. It involved one's own internal commitment:

“these words shall be on your heart.” It involved family commitment: “you shall teach them diligently to your sons.” It involved public commitment: “you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and on your forehead.”

C. What is “halakah”?

1. “Halakah” has come to refer today to the collective body of written and oral Jewish religious laws.
2. The word comes from the Hebrew word that means to walk. Literally it means to “walk the royal road, to walk the King’s highway.”
3. Note the following passages:
  - a. Jethro counseled Moses to “teach the people the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work which they are to do” (Ex. 18:20).
  - b. God told Moses when he gave the people manna, “I will test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction” (Ex. 16:4).
  - c. After the rehearsal of the Ten Commandments in Deut. 5 and the people committed to doing what the Lord said, Moses said, “You shall walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you will possess” (33).
  - d. “They did not keep the covenant of God and refused to walk in His law; they forgot His deeds and His miracles that He had shown them” (Psa. 78:10-11). Note “covenant,” “refused to walk,” “forgot His deeds.”
  - e. Psa. 119:1, 3, 35: “How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.” “They also do no unrighteousness; they walk in His ways.” “Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it.”

IV. What is the significance of all this?

- A. We need to see the law of God as instruction given for our benefit. The ethical principles involve wisdom that give life, happiness, satisfaction. They are more desirable than gold!
- B. These principles define who we are as the people of God. No other people have this kind of information.
- C. Being a member of the kingdom of God takes on new meaning. It means that you have the information necessary to have life and have it abundantly. Biblical ethics is not about restricting freedom but about giving life, bringing about justice and establishing peace.
- D. N.T. language takes on new meaning . . .
  1. “Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Eph. 4:1). “Walk no longer just as the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God . . .” (Eph. 4:17ff).
  2. “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14ff).
- E. Evangelism is not about proclaiming restrictive ethical principles, but about teaching what God has done to bring life, health and happiness to a suffering and dying world.

It is about teaching faith in a God who is worthy of our trust.

Conclusion:

1. Would you enter His kingdom? Would you enter into His family?
2. Would you place your trust in His wisdom and not your own?
3. Would you "Trust and Obey?" no. 326 (Hymns for Worship)