

**Shepherdology 101 Outline**

- I. **Fundamental 1: Jesus, Our Lord**
- II. **Fundamental 2: Jesus’ Word, Our Effective Guide**
- III. **Fundamental 3: Jesus, Our Model Shepherd**
- IV. **The Need for Shepherds**
- V. **The Development of Elders**
- VI. **Ten Key Passages**
- VII. **Essential Function**
- VIII. **Specific Responsibilities**

| <b>Essential Function</b>  | <b>Tools of the Trade</b>                                       |
|--|---|
| Elder: Man of seasoned character and maturity  | Guard: Alert to the condition of his flock                      |
| Overseer: One who understands his people and is watching out for them  | Teach: Brings the Word to bear                                  |
| Shepherd: One who feeds, cares for, and protects the flock   | Illustrate: Demonstrates a positive example                     |
| Leader: One who governs by assessing and identifying what is best  | Help: Provides practical assistance                             |
| Equipping: One who trains and outfits others for growth and effective ministry                                 | Intercede: Prays for key needs                                  |
| Manage / Care for: One who is attentive to others in order to actively promote what is in their best interests | Show Hospitality: Uses personal resources to serve others’ good |

The two lists in the table above seem quite daunting. But Peter and the writer of Hebrews can supply us with a powerful word of encouragement. In his counsel to Elders, Peter exhorts them to *Oversee/Shepherd* the flock in a certain manner: *Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God* (1 Peter 5:2). Peter wants elders to shepherd the flock voluntarily, literally, “according to God.” He means by this that shepherds should do what they do as a response to a calling from God. He could say, “Shepherd the flock because you are convinced this is God’s will for you.”

For those who do, the author of Hebrews says something profound: *Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip (katartizō, καταρτίζω) you in every good thing to do His will* (Hebrews 13:20-21). God is the ultimate equipper, as evidenced by His capacity to raise our great Shepherd. (Now that's equipping!) He is clearly capable, then, to supply everything we need to do His will as shepherds.

Everything in the table above is what Jesus asks good shepherds to do. And to all who say "yes" to Him, He will supply everything needed to do so well. Shepherd God's flock because you are convinced this is God's call for you and, through His help, your flock will flourish.

Before we jump into the next section, complete the self-check on the following page. This is not a quiz that will be graded. It is simply an exercise to help you clarify your thinking before we begin the next section.

## Self Check: The Law

Please circle T or F to indicate whether you believe the relevant statement is true or false. Feel free to write comments where necessary to clarify your answer.

- T/F According to the Bible, it is not possible to do what the Mosaic Law requires.
- T/F The Mosaic Law was given to Israel solely for the purpose of demonstrating their sinfulness and need for salvation.
- T/F In the Old Testament, salvation was based on doing what the Law requires.
- T/F *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes* (Romans 10:4). This passage from Romans teaches that Jesus has nullified the law for believers.
- T/F The ceremonial law is no longer relevant to New Testament believers, but the moral law is.
- T/F Paul says, *"For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace"* (Romans 6:14). This passage teaches that the law has no use or value for those who have been saved by grace.
- T/F Legalism, which is clearly condemned in the Bible, is a practice by which one person applies "do's and don'ts" to another.

In our next major section, we will consider the twenty-six qualifications of an elder/overseer/shepherd.

- IX. Qualifications of an Elder / Shepherd
- A. Applicability – How do we use them?
  - B. Specific Qualifications – 26 Keys in 7 groups
  - C. Key Questions – What about?
  - D. Basis – How realistic is this list?

Before we launch into a study of these qualities, let's address a timely question. The qualifications of an elder (found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9) constitute a role specific vice-and-virtue list. These lists identify qualities that are condemned (7) and commended (19).

**Question: Isn't the use of a list like this an abandonment of grace and resort to legalism?** This is a question of profound and growing importance in our specific ministry context. The writers of the New Testament know what we're talking about. Here is Paul's description of what he wanted Timothy to be prepared for.

*I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths (2 Timothy 4:1-4).*

Paul wants Timothy to deploy an all-season ministry toolkit that includes preaching, reproof, rebuke, and exhortation. This truth driven ministry will require patience and a clear and comprehensive curriculum. But times are coming that make this kind of ministry essential. Men will be drawn toward fictions (myths) that make them feel good about (ear tickles) following selfish desires. They will "follow" such "influencers."

Jude saw something similar threatening the church via a group of "self-shepherds." *These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves [shepherding themselves]; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted (Jude 12).*

A little earlier in his letter, Jude revealed some of what made this trend so disturbing: *Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed,*

*those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ (Jude 3–4).*

Jude is very concerned about an “unnoticed” group of self-shepherds who are doing significant damage among the church. The fact that they are unnoticed indicates that this is an inside job! The core heresy is captured in verse 4. These self-shepherds are teaching that God’s grace frees us to live on our own terms. They are gaining traction as they teach this: “God loves me without concern about who I choose to be or what I choose to do.” Are you hearing this message in the contemporary church? Jude and Paul told us it was coming.

This is a denial of **Fundamental One: Jesus is Lord** which we considered in lesson two.

If this were not bad enough, our ultimate enemy is also working a plan that has a similar aim: *But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ (2 Corinthians. 11:3).*

Paul is genuinely concerned about a mind-set that Satan is promoting. He targets our thinking, just as he sought to mess with Eve’s mind. His aim is captured by the two words “simplicity” and “purity.” Goal number one is an attack on a singular devotion to Jesus. He wants followers of Jesus to add some other allegiances to the mix. He wants to make something simple complicated. Think of this as “Jesus Plus.” Goal number two is to encourage impurity, a devotion to Jesus that is comfortable with moral compromise. This latter objective is exactly what Jude and Paul were concerned with. We should be too!

The notion that **God’s grace frees us to live on our own terms** is gaining traction. Many minds are being led astray to believe: “God loves me without concern about who I choose to be or what I choose to do.”

So before we introduce vices and virtues pertinent to elders, I want to address the legitimacy of doing so for all believers. Here is what I aim to prove: **There are clear and objective moral standards to which all believers are accountable.** To be sure, some are gender, age, and role specific. But for all, they are non-negotiable. Here is an outline of what we will examine to affirm the need for and benefit of having and using a definitive vice/virtue compass.

## THE NECESSITY OF A VICE/VIRTUE COMPASS

- A. The Use of Nomos (Νόμος)
- B. The Nature of the Mosaic Law
- C. The Mechanics of Moral Transformation
- D. Vice and Virtue Lists in the New Testament

### A. The Use of *Nomos* (Νόμος)

Claim: The concept of law (accountability to a defined list of do's and don'ts) is consistently presented in the NT in a negative light.

**Answer: Not true! *Nomos* can be either positive or negative, depending on which of six different meanings is used.**

The Greek word *nomos* is used 194 times in the New Testament. It is translated "law" in all but one instance. There are some other related NT words, like commandments (ἐντολή, *entole*) and ordinances (δικαιώμα, *dikaioma*), but *nomos* is at the center. This word is used six different ways.

#### 1. An Operating Principle

*Nomos* can be used in some contexts to refer to an operating principle or force. Depending on what this force is connected to, it can be good or bad.

In this passage, *nomos* refers to the operation of a negative influence. Despite his inner desire to do good, Paul has encountered within himself a contrary force. *I find then the **principle** that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good* (Romans 7:21).

A few verses later, Paul echoes this sentiment but draws encouragement from the fact that this force is opposed by another, a mind in service to the *nomos* of God: *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the **law** of God, but on the other, with my flesh the **law** of sin* (Romans 7:25).

The force of an operating principle that is life in Christ Jesus liberates and overpowers the force of sin and death: *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death* (Romans 8:2).

## 2. The Universal Moral Law of God

*Nomos* can be used in a very general sense of “rights and wrongs.” It does not refer to the Mosaic Law, per se, but a universal moral standard. There is an interesting play on words in 1 Timothy 1:9. Paul refers to law using the word *nomos*. Then he identifies a certain class of individuals as “lawless.” The word he uses is an adjective in which an alpha-privative is added to *nomos*. (Think of the words “moral” and “amoral.”) In other words, law is for the unlawful. Moral standards of right and wrong are profoundly relevant to those who live without standards: *Realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers* (1 Timothy 1:9).

Paul is talking to saints in Rome, presumably among whom Jesus would be a minority. His reference to law concerns the doing of what is right: *Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law* (Romans 13:10).

I find it helpful to refer to this as “big law.” Think of this as the universal law of God that is relevant to all people. The Law of Moses was a particular expression of “big law” relevant to Israel in 15th c. BC.

## 3. The Mosaic Law

*Nomos* can be used of the specific set of commands and ordinances given to Israel through Moses. Note that the NASB distinguishes this use of *nomos* (as well as uses 4-6) by capitalizing the word “Law.” Also note that this word is used in the singular to refer to the Law (not Laws) of Moses: *“Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?”* (John 7:19).

## 4. The Pentateuch

*Nomos* can be used to describe a literary unit of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch. The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms were titles assigned to the three primary units of the Old Testament: *Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled”* (Luke 24:44).

## 5. The Old Testament

In the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus connected what was about to happen to Him to an Old Testament prophecy. He indicated that the relevant word is found in the *nomos*: “*But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, ‘THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE’*” (John 15:25). Jesus is referencing Psalms 35:19; 69:4. In so doing, He uses *nomos* to refer to the Old Testament.

## 6. A Misuse of Law

“Legalism,” according to the Bible is a misuse of the law, particularly the Mosaic Law, as a means to earn God’s favor. There is no Greek word for this English word, “legalism.” So the New Testament, Paul particularly, uses *nomos* to refer to legalism. In such cases, *nomos* will often be linked with other terms that make this usage clear.

For example, Paul declares: *By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin* (Romans 3:20). In this context, Paul uses *nomos* (joined to the word “works”) in connection with justification. The use of *nomos* toward such a purpose will resort in failure.

Later in Romans, Paul contrasts being “under law” with being “under grace.” *For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not **under law** but under grace* (Romans 6:14). He is using *nomos* to refer to the use of law as a means of being saved as an alternative to using grace. Only the latter breaks the mastery of sin. By implication, attempting to use the law to break bondage to sin is a fool’s errand.

In Galatians, Paul poses a hypothetical. He uses *nomos* as a means by which to earn or acquire righteousness. If such were possible, then the substitutionary death of Jesus was unnecessary. *I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through **the Law**, then Christ died needlessly* (Galatians 2:21).

In such cases, *nomos* represents the misuse of the Law as a means of earning God’s favor. Although previous uses represent something good, this use concerns something bad.

**Conclusion:** When *nomos* is presented in a negative light, it represents a misuse of law as a means of being saved. Only grace can save. But this is not a warrant for those who have been given saving grace to sin. No way!



*For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!* (Romans 6:14–15).

Law provides an incredible benefit when used as a moral compass, as a guide for practical holiness. Commandment keeping is of profound importance to saints: *What matters is the keeping of the commandments of God* (1 Corinthians 7:19). **But law can only regulate and define sin, it cannot transform the sinner.** It is a diagnostic tool, not a cure!

## B. **The Nature of the Mosaic Law**

Claim: The Mosaic Law stands in opposition to grace.

Answer: **Not true! The Mosaic Law complements grace.** When properly understood, the Mosaic Law was not given to Israel as an alternative to grace. Grace and law are not opposites. Salvation by grace and salvation by works of the law (legalism) **are** opposites. But the Law of Moses was never intended to show Israel how to be saved by using works. It showed the saved how to live. The following twelve principles will help make this clear.

### 1. The Mosaic Law is based on grace.

God did not give Israel the law so that they could earn His favor. God gave the law to a people to whom He had already shown His favor so that they might live accordingly.

Think about the implications if God gave Israel the law as a futile means by which to earn His favor. What kind of God gives a gift to someone for the purpose of promoting failure! Trojan horse? This doesn't sound like a good gift giver!

*Then God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me..."* (Exodus 20:1–3).

Before introducing the Ten Commandments, God cites His gracious act on Israel's behalf. He brought them out of Egypt. This was an act of pure grace. This grace is the basis for giving Israel the Ten Commandments.

Even before Israel came to Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, they were the recipients of amazing grace at the Red Sea. Moses recounts how God intervened and how His deliverance prompted Israel to believe in God: *Thus the*

*LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. When Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses.” (Exodus 14:30–31).*

In the Song of Moses sung after the Red Sea deliverance, Moses recounts: *“In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed; In Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation” (Exodus 15:13).*

Moses later adds that this redeeming grace was grounded in His love for Israel and commitment to keep a promise: *“But because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 7:8).*

God did not give Israel the law so that they could earn His favor. He gave the law to a people to whom He had already shown His favor so that they might know how to live.

2. The Mosaic Law expresses God’s holiness.

God declares that His holiness is what informs the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law translates the holiness of God into terms of human existence relevant to an Israelite living at the time of Moses. *“For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44–45); “Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy’” (Leviticus 19:2); “You shall consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 20:7)*

Anyone who is interested in the holiness of God should find the Mosaic Law profoundly beneficial. It takes something that is spiritual and abstract and makes it practical and accessible.

Paul invites the saints to live in a way that demonstrates ongoing progress in “perfecting holiness:” *Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 7:1).* Having a rule book that specifies what God’s holiness looks like in practice would be of great value. This is the benefit the Law of Moses gave to Israel.

3. The Mosaic Law is casuistic.

The Mosaic Law may include numerous statutes and judgments. But it is essentially one law (*torah*). Moses does not call it “the laws” but “the law:” *“Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?”* (Deuteronomy 4:8).

Jesus speaks of the Mosaic Law in the singular, as well: *“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law (nomos) until all is accomplished”* (Matthew 5:18).

Why is it called the “law” and not the “laws?” The answer lies in understanding that the Mosaic Law is a casuistry. I am using this term to refer to a legal hierarchy in which a single commandment is expanded and particularized by additional laws. When Jesus was asked about the “greatest commandment,” His answer clarifies the casuistic nature of the Mosaic Law:

*“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets”* (Matthew 22:36–40).

The core command at the center of the Mosaic Law is this: *LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND*. From this one command comes another: *YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF*. Think of these two commands as the center from which all the other commands radiate. The Ten Commandments are grounded in the two and can be arranged into two corresponding groups.

### **Love the Lord Set**

*“You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work,*

*you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:3-11).*

### **Love Your Neighbor Set**

*“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance” (Exodus 20:12–18).*

The various commands and statutes particularize the 10 commandments. Here are two examples:

*“When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, so that you will not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone falls from it” (Deuteronomy 22:8).*

Because the Mosaic Law is casuistic, a failure to build a parapet (something like a guardrail for a flat roofed dwelling where the roof area is used like a deck or patio) could result in someone’s death which would break the sixth commandment which, in turn, breaks the love-your-neighbor command.

Some passages are not easy to connect to the hierarchy because we lack an understanding of the cultural context: *“You are not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother” (Exodus 23:19).* But for an Israelite at the time of Moses, this would have been clear.

Because of its casuistic nature, the many specific prohibitions of the Mosaic Law all connect to one law. To break the Law in one particular is to break the whole: *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all (James 2:10).*

#### **4. Jesus is the ultimate embodiment of the Law.**

Paul makes a profound statement about Jesus in Romans 10:4. Here is the context: Despite being a people with a zeal for God, the Jews rejected Jesus. How

did this happen? Answer: They did not understand the holiness of God and the inability of men to become holy through their own efforts. Jesus, however, was the perfect embodiment of the law, the supreme illustration of God's holiness in human flesh. Any good student of the Mosaic Law should have seen in Jesus the exact image of what it describes. As such, Jesus was eminently qualified to serve as the perfect sacrifice and substitute for unholy men. Everyone who believes in the Holy One is saved. So when Paul says Christ is the "end" of the Law, he declares Jesus as its consummate fulfillment. He is the living embodiment of the Law, a perfect demonstration of God's holiness.

*Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the **end (telos / goal)** of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Romans 10:1–4).*

Luke 22:37 uses *telos* in a way that is similar to Romans 10:4 where it is rendered by the word "fulfillment:" *"For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, 'AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS'; for that which refers to Me has its **fulfillment**" (Luke 22:37).*

Some propose that Paul's statement in Romans 10:4 (that Jesus is the end of the law) means Jesus abrogated the law. Mark uses *telos* in a way that might support this view: *"If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished!" (Mark 3:26).* But seeing such a meaning for *telos* in Romans 10:4 simply does not square with what Jesus elsewhere says of Himself in relation to the Law:

*"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17–19).*

Jesus does not view His earthly ministry as the termination or abrogation of the Law but its fulfillment, even down to the smallest detail. Yes, there will come a time when the redeemed are made holy, and for those who are holy, the Law as a definition of holiness will no longer be needed. "In the new heaven and earth 'the law' as a written book will no longer be necessary. In fact, the written

Bible—Old and New Testament—will have become superfluous. Until that time arrives, however, nothing whatever will remain lacking as to fulfillment. God’s program with respect to Christ, the church, mankind in general, and the universe, will be carried out in full (Isa. 40:8).<sup>1</sup>

But this side of heaven, every jot and tittle of the law has value that Jesus respects and protects. Anyone who understands the Law is well qualified to see in Jesus the perfect human expression of God’s holiness.

5. The Mosaic Law can confirm our sinfulness and thereby point us to Christ, but this is not its sole, or even primary, function.

For Paul, the Mosaic Law provided a benefit, albeit one with adverse side-effects. The Mosaic Law is a moral compass that identifies the path of holiness. Like a sonogram for the soul, it reveals unholiness. For the man who needs to understand that he has a sin problem, this can be a great first step toward seeking a cure.

The adverse side-effect of the Law is that it can prod sin into a more active state. It is as if rules jolt the sin force within us to life. This is definitely not good. But it can serve a good purpose by helping us to see how profound is our need for help. The Law helps men say, “I have a serious problem that needs to be fixed.”

*What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “YOU SHALL NOT COVET.” But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead (Romans 7:7–8).*

As a sin catalyst, the Law can actually help direct us to Christ. The Law can help us see our problem for what it is and thereby prepare us for the solution found in Jesus: *Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith (Galatians 3:24).*

The Mosaic Law was not given to Israel solely for the purpose of exposing sin and provoking it to a more active state. But for the unsaved, the Law could help them to vividly see their need for a Savior.

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<sup>1</sup>Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew (Vol. 9, p. 292). Baker Book House.

6. To obey the Law is not impossible.

Yes, it is not possible for someone to perfectly obey the Law (this side of heaven). But it is possible for redeemed people to both obey the law (albeit imperfectly) and seek forgiveness for moments when they don't. The Law was given to Israel as a road map for redeemed people by which they can do what is right and recover when they do wrong.

*“Then the LORD your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the LORD will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers; if you obey the LORD your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul. For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it” (Deuteronomy 30:9–14).*

Zacharias and Elizabeth “walked blamelessly” in the commandments. This means they did what was right according to the Law and addressed issues according to the Law when they didn't.

*In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord (Luke 1:5–6).*

7. The Mosaic Law cannot solve the defect of a sinful heart.

The Law provides an incredible benefit when used as a moral compass, as a guide for practical holiness. But the Law can only regulate and define sin, it cannot transform the sinner's heart. It is a diagnostic tool, not a cure! Toward this specific end, Law is of zero value. In this sense, the law is useless: *For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God (Hebrews 7:18–19).*

The heart of the problem is the heart! What fills a man's heart is what will be expressed in his words and deeds.

*"For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart"* (Luke 6:44–45).

*"But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders"* (Matthew 15:18–19).

The Law cannot perform a heart transplant. For one with a new heart, the Law provides invaluable guidance. But heart change must be sought elsewhere.

8. Salvation equips saints to obey the law and live a righteousness that is defined by it.

Paul is very clear in his statement that keeping the commandments of God is of profound importance for us: *Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but **what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God*** (1 Corinthians 7:19).

But how is it possible for us to keep the commandments? Paul answers this question by explaining what it means to walk by the Spirit. When Jesus died in the place of sinners, he made it possible for the demands of the Law to be met by those who walk according to the Spirit. Here is Paul's summary: *For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit* (Romans 8:3–4).

In other words, those who come to Christ are set free from the law of sin and death. They are transformed at the heart level such that they desire and are able to live in a way that pleases God. They are empowered to walk in a way that satisfies the Law as they walk according to the Spirit.

Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament and commended to believers! Here is one such place: *Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU*



*SHALL NOT COVET,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:8–10).*

Law cannot change a heart. But Jesus can! And all who trust Him as their Savior receive a new heart that is capable of producing words and deeds that demonstrate holiness as expressed in God’s law.

9. Jesus goes beyond affirming the value of the law to discerning its deeper applicability.

Jesus did not dismiss the Law. He actually took it a step further and extended the casuistry of the Ten Commandments into particulars that the experts of His day overlooked.

*“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell” (Matthew 5:21–22).*

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27–28).*

10. Jesus did not condemn the religious leaders for teaching others to obey the Law but for doing so hypocritically, superficially, and in a way that hindered others.

Jesus had little good to say of the Jewish religious leaders. But this condemnation should not be construed as a dismissal of the Law. Jesus actually affirmed the importance of what they taught about the Law. But He condemned them for the hypocrisy of failing to personally model what they taught.

*Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them” (Matthew 23:1–3).*

11. Jesus commands us to keep and teach the law.

Jesus explicitly taught His followers to do what the whole Law requires: *“In everything, therefore, treat [present, imperative] people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets”* (Matthew 7:12); *“And just as you want people to treat you, treat [present, imperative] them in the same way”* (Luke 6:31).

Further, Jesus charges His followers to teach as well as keep the commandments. Even setting aside one small commandment and teaching others to do the same is a serious breach of Jesus intent: *“Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 5:19). Greatness in the kingdom of God is linked to keeping and teaching all of God’s commandments.

12. Salvation in the Old Testament (as in the New) is not based on merit but grace by faith.

No one can earn salvation by keeping the law. Salvation is always and only a matter of grace by faith! Abraham was not saved by merit but by believing. *So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS* (Galatians 3:5–6).

Old Testament saints saw in forward-looking illustrations what we can see clearly by looking back, that the means by which we are saved involves the death of God’s Son. In the Tabernacle / Temple, they caught a preview of how God would effect their salvation. But their salvation was based upon the same core belief, that God is the one who saves us and that not of ourselves. They trusted God (who will save them through Christ) just as we are trusting God (who has saved us through Christ).

There are two ways to attempt to be saved, one works perfectly, the other always fails. We can attempt to be saved by earning God’s favor and in this we will fail. Or we can despair of earning God’s favor, abandon ourselves to His grace, and trust in Him to save us. Such faith will not be disappointed. Even the Old Testament is quite clear about this.

*“Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; / And you who have no money come, buy and eat. / Come, buy wine and milk / Without money and without cost. / Why do you spend money for what is not bread, / And your wages for*

*what does not satisfy? / Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, / And delight yourself in abundance. / Incline your ear and come to Me. / Listen, that you may live; / And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, / According to the faithful mercies shown to David (Isaiah 55:1–3).*

**Summary:** If God gave the Law to Israel as a means by which to earn salvation (a purpose for which it is not suited), then this casts aspersion on the very character of God. It makes Him out to be some cosmic trickster who toys with men and women by giving them a “gift” that condemns them. This is not the good God we know who gives good gifts.

God gave the Law to Israel as a helpful guide for holy living. For those who have experienced God’s grace by trusting Him (as Israel did in the tenth Egyptian plague and on numerous other occasions), the Law outlines ways that gratitude for God’s grace can be expressed.

Grace and law are not opposites. But salvation by grace and salvation by works of the law (legalism) are most definitely opposites. The Law of Moses is intended to show the saved how to live.

**Conclusion:** The Law is a good gift. It translates the very holiness of God into something we can understand. It is like a compass that guides us in a path that demonstrates God’s holiness.

For people who have been saved by grace, such a “pocket guide to holiness” answers to our deep yearning to live in a way that pleases the One who has shown us such amazing grace. He saved us. So we WANT to please Him. And His Law shows us precisely how!

The bottom line is that God intends saints and shepherds to align how they live and what they say to his holiness. Salvation through grace does not oppose this.

Some might argue that Jesus’ prohibition against judging (Matthew 7:1) condemns the application of moral standards between persons. But the command – *Do not judge so that you will not be judged* – is not a blanket dismissal of making moral judgements. It is a call for consistency: It directs a man (or woman) not to judge someone else using a standard that they themselves are violating. Jesus does not want us to judge someone else according to a standard that we are unwilling to have applied to ourselves – it won’t turn out well if we do.

The verses that follow make it clear that self-judgment prepares us for clear-sighted moral evaluation of others. Logs first, specks second: *“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of*

*measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:1–5).*

Jesus elsewhere condemns judgment based on appearances and commends judgment employing righteousness as its standard: *"Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment"* (John 7:24).

Taken together these two passages extol the value of exercising moral judgment but doing so using two principles: (1) Make sure that your own conduct aligns with what you would convey to someone else. (2) Make sure that your moral compass is informed by what God actually says is right and wrong.

Please remember that legalism is NOT the use of "do's and don'ts." Legalism is the misuse of God's law as a means to earn His favor. But for those who have been saved by grace, we need and WANT do's and don'ts that are God's do's and don'ts! We apply them to ourselves and use them to provide holy counsel to others.

I am astounded that our Christian sub-culture is abandoning the idea of devotion informed by God's holiness for some sort of pluralistic moral relativism. (I can understand the world doing this, but God's children?)

Jude warned us about just such persons who work among us: *ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ* (Jude 4).

**Right and wrong that is defined by God's holiness (law of God) matters profoundly for saints and for shepherds.**

The doing of what is right clearly identifies those who truly know Jesus: *By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him* (1 John 2:3–4). This applies to both shepherds and sheep. Show your love for Jesus by your devotion to holiness.

**Self Check:** Go back to page 3 and review your answers. Based on what we have studied so far, are there any answers you would change? Make changes and explain your reasons.

**Evaluation:** I have copied below an article from a nationally recognized pastor who addresses the topic of how we should relate to the Ten Commandments. In light of what we have studied, how would you evaluate this article?

## Why Do Christians Want to Post the 10 Commandments and Not the Sermon on the Mount?

You've heard the story before: A group of Christians puts up a monument of the Ten Commandments in a public space or on government property. Someone says it violates the separation of church and state. The Christians say taking it down would violate their freedom of speech. There's some back and forth in court and both sides say some not-so-great things about the other. Rinse and repeat.

But how many times have you seen Christians trying to post the text of the sermon on the mount in a public place? Or the all-encompassing commandment Jesus gave us?

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” —John 13:34

The one commandment! Doesn't have the same ring to it, does it? But if we're going to create a monument to stand as a testament to our faith, shouldn't it at least be a monument of something that actually applies to us? Hear me out.

The Ten Commandments are from the old covenant. The Ten Commandments played a significant role in God's creation of the nation of Israel. It gave them moral guidelines and helped separate this new nation from their neighbors. This was part of the formal agreement (or covenant) God created with his people, but Jesus' death and resurrection signaled the end of that covenant and all the rules and regulations associated with it.

Jesus didn't issue his new command as an additional commandment to the existing list of commands. He didn't say, “Here's the 614th law.” Jesus issued his new commandment as a replacement for everything in the existing list. Including the big ten. Just as his new covenant replaced the old covenant, Jesus' new commandment replaced all the old commandments.

Participants in the new covenant (that's Christians) are not required to obey any of the commandments found in the first part of their Bibles. Participants in the new covenant are expected to obey the single command Jesus issued as part of his new covenant: as I have loved you, so you must love one another.

The new covenant replaced the old one. The covenant established by Jesus retired the covenant God established with the nation of Israel. This is why most Christians don't mind a little bacon with their eggs. It's why you can't get either at Chick-fil-A on Sunday. (If we were still taking our marching orders from the old covenant, they would be closed on Saturday.)

Thanks to the new covenant, we aren't required to sacrifice animals to stay on speaking terms with God. Skim through Leviticus and you'll discover a whole lot of things we aren't required to do. We need to stop mixing the old with the new. The church has a terrible habit of selectively rebranding aspects of the old covenant and smuggling them into the new.

The blended model began as early as the second century when church leaders essentially kidnapped the Jewish Scriptures and claimed them as their own. In the fourth century, following the legalization of Christian worship under Constantine, church officials began leveraging old covenant concepts to validate the creation of an imperial form of church.

During this same period, the church began doing to pagans what pagans had done to the church. By the eleventh century, the church offered "get out of hell free" cards to anyone who would join a crusade. By the fifteenth century, the church was at war with itself over theology. Entire villages were razed in the name of a version of Christian theology. Over and over, Christianity was weaponized in Jesus' name.

Wherever and whenever the old was blended with the new, unchristian behavior and attitudes ensued.

The modern church suffers from its own version of mix-and-match theology and practice. We have an incessant habit of reaching back into old covenant concepts, teachings, sayings, and narratives to support our own teachings, sayings, and narratives.

The justifications Christians have used since the fourth century to mistreat people find their roots in old covenant practices and values. Imagine trying to leverage the Sermon on the Mount to start an inquisition, launch a crusade, or incite a pogrom against Jews. But reach back into the old covenant, and there's plenty to work with.

The early church moved past the old covenant—why haven't we?

It took the early church more than twenty years to officially disengage from the old covenant. This is entirely understandable. First-century church leaders were Jewish. The old covenant was more than a religious framework. It had been a way of life from childhood. But thanks to the clarity of Paul, the experience of Peter, and the leadership of James, the church eventually abandoned the old for the new Jesus came to inaugurate.

These early church leaders understood something we've forgotten—or have missed entirely.

While Jesus was foreshadowed in the old covenant, he did not come to extend it. He came to fulfill it, put a bow on it, and establish something entirely new. The "new" Jesus unleashed made the faith of first-century believers formidable. Their apologetic was irrefutable. Their courage, unquestionable. And the results were remarkable.

Dear Christian reader: Why? Why? Why would we even be tempted to reach back beyond the cross to borrow from a covenant that was temporary and inferior to the covenant established for us at Calvary?

The author of Hebrews says it best. Jesus was the “guarantor of a better covenant” (Hebrews 7:22). Later he writes, “the new covenant is established on better promises.”

Besides, you weren’t included in the old covenant to begin with! So why are we fighting to build monuments to it?

## End of Article

### C. The Mechanics of Moral Transformation

Our relationship with God in Christ is intended to change us for the better. Toward this end, God outfits us with everything needed—*His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness* (2 Peter 1:3).

Note that the provision of every transformative resource in the book does not make change automatic. We have to work at it. *Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ* (2 Peter 1:5–8). By “applying all diligence,” it is possible for those who truly know Jesus to demonstrate the fruit of that knowledge by a profound transformation. And with the passing of time, they will continue to make even further progress.

Looking at a list of vice and virtue lists in the New Testament (see below) can be quite sobering. How would anyone not come up short when evaluated against such a daunting list. Fair question! And yet the very existence of these lists and their commendation to the church for use as a practical evaluative tool tells us that becoming better people in ways that are listed is not a pipe dream. It is possible.

How is this possible? Here is the truth: Apart from Christ, there would be no such men. But when Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave, He set in motion a grand plan by which men (and women) of the worst sort could become the best of people. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 takes my breath away. Note Paul’s before and after summary of the Corinthians: *Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God* (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

This is a profoundly encouraging passage. From it, we learn that we need not be defined by our past. Words that aptly described who we were may no longer describe who we have become! In Christ, it is possible for a man who was a “reviler” to become something, **someone**, totally different.

Jesus has made it possible for people defined by their sin to become men and women whose prior labels have no bearing on who they have become. Salvation in Jesus and the work of His Spirit does this: We are justified; we are washed; we are sanctified.

The foundation for this transformative work was laid at the cross. But we are not immediately and fully transformed in the moment we come to Jesus. Transformation is a process. God will use circumstances to transform us. As we respond well, we will become “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2–3). God’s word provides essential guidance and outfits us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17). The encouragement of fellow believers will also help (Hebrews 3:13; 10:23–25) as will prayer (Ephesians 6:18).

But in the center of these resources stands our difference maker: *So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure* (Philippians 2:12–13). God works inside of us to give us the desire (“to will”) and the ability (“to work”) to put our faith to work. We do so out of a desperate longing to please him. We work out our faith not so that we can earn His favor but because we are in such awe that we have already received it.

God is at work in all those who follow Jesus, giving them the willpower and ability to do the supernatural, to become like Jesus. John would say, *No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God* (1 John 3:9). Those who are born of God receive the breathtaking capacity to break the sin habit.

Granted, we are still in process. But we know where this process is heading: *Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure* (1 John 3:2–3). All those whose hope is fixed on Jesus’ return are even now being transformed. A day is coming when we will someday look just like Him. Can’t wait!

Lists of do’s and don’ts (that come from God’s word) are a perfect benefit for saints who desire to be transformed. Such lists identify key growth targets.



After surgery, I have done rehab. My specialist gave me a list of exercises and objectives to guide me in how to make progress. Think of coming to Christ as heart surgery in which we are given a new heart. Think of vice and virtue lists as rehab objectives. These lists specify a range of spiritual recovery and improvement goals that we need to work at. A new heart makes it possible to improve. These lists show us specific ways we can improve.

#### D. **Vice and Virtue Lists in the New Testament**

Based on what we have observed above, we can see that an objective list of do's and don'ts can be a good thing. The Law of Moses is such a thing and, when used as a moral compass by those who have been saved by grace, helps to illuminate the path of holy living. We have also observed that salvation through faith in Christ accomplishes what the Law could not. It gives men a new heart capable of producing holiness.

But not all lists of "do's and don'ts" are created equal. There are lists from God – these are good. There are lists purely from men – these are not good. In the two parallel passages found below, we can make several observations about such lists.

Some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus disturbed by the behavior of Jesus' disciples. The religious leaders had a very particular set of instructions about hand washing, cleansing of containers, and other matters pertinent to food acquisition and consumption. They wanted to know why Jesus' followers were not in compliance.

Jesus' answer to the religious leaders was shocking. They were offended. Why? Because Jesus charged them with elevating a man-made list of do's and don'ts while dismissing God's list. Their hand washing rules illustrated the problem. But this was just one sample of something damning. They invalidated the word of God by their tradition which they had developed and passed from one generation to another.

It must have been more than jarring for these leaders (who viewed themselves as the epitome of righteousness) to hear Jesus say: *"BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN." Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men*" (Mark 7:7–8). Their list of do's and don'ts was derived from men, not God. They actually used clever (in the eyes of men) ways to break provisions of the Law by doing something selfish that was packaged to appear spiritual.

As the invention of men, their list was also contaminated by flawed logic. Their protocol focused on food consumption while ignoring the heart problem. Sin is not produced by what a man eats (what goes into him) but what comes out of him (from his heart).

Jesus then provided a list of vices that represent expressions of the defiled heart. This list, unlike the man-made list of the religious leaders, outlines exactly what Jesus considers essential for a well-calibrated moral compass.

Listen to what Jesus says about His list and man-lists.

### **Matthew**

*Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said,*

*“Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” And He answered and said to them, “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,’ and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH.’ But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,” he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ **And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition.** You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’ ”*

### **Mark**

*The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)*

*The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?” And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’ Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER’; and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH’; but you say, ‘If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that*

After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, "Hear and understand. It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man." Then the disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?" But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit." Peter said to Him, "Explain the parable to us." Jesus said, "Are you still lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. **For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man**" (Matthew 15:1–20).

would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; **thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.**"

After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. **For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man**" (Mark 7:1–23).

Jesus met with His inner-circle to process the interchange between the religious leaders and Himself as recorded in Mark 7:17-23. Jesus' words are simple and clear. Food is ingested and then eliminated. It doesn't touch the soul. Perfectly plain! Any questions? The disciples assumed that what we eat alienates us from God. Alienation is a heart problem and runs much deeper than getting our rituals just right.

The disciples are commanded to latch onto the principle, "out is the problem." What comes out of a man's mouth is a window into his heart. Food just passes through the digestive tract and is eliminated. But words tell us about someone's heart condition. Nothing you ever eat will contaminate your heart.

Jesus identifies the real problem. The list of vices in Matthew 15:19 roughly approximates the 10 commandments. Their breach has its point of origin in the heart; words are the vehicle through which evil's operation is made evident.

In Mark 7:21-22, the list is much expanded to twelve elements: *And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness"* (Mark 7:20-22). "Out of the heart proceed the evil thoughts" is a summary phrase. The heart schemes and deliberates to produce what is evil. Then this evil is delineated in two series of six. The first six are in the plural and probably describe actions. The second six are in the singular and probably describe the "heart conditions" which animate these actions.

To be fair, the Pharisees were not dis-interested in evil thoughts, fornications, *et. al.* Their failure lay in thinking they could "tamp down" these vices with food mandates while overlooking the need for a new heart. Poignant is Jesus' quote of Isaiah in this context: *And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, But their heart is far away from Me' "* (Mark 7:6). The religious leaders (and the people who follow them) have a major heart problem and all their food vituperation is much ado over nothing and, even worse, a distraction from seeing what really matters.

We have noted in the preceding section how salvation solves the heart problem. And this new heart will be in agreement with Jesus' definition of right and wrong.

I find it interesting that such a list (and others like it) are little appreciated in our modern Christian circles. When is the last time I heard a sermon on such a catalog of sins? Why has it been so long? Is our moral compass so weak or poorly calibrated that such a list is perceived to have little relevance to our lives?

Note: Jesus declares that the dietary provisions of the Law were not part of “big law,” but culturally specific applications of the Ten to the circumstances of a certain people, at a certain time and place. Whatever their vital connection to God’s holiness at the time of Moses, that connection does not exist at the time of Jesus. Elsewhere, Jesus affirms the Law, so this is not about some wholesale dismissal, but something of a “new vantage point.”

There are numerous other lists of vices and virtues in the New Testament. These lists provide clear and objective moral standards for those who have been saved. These are not intended to provide guidance in how to merit salvation. They are designed to show those who have been saved by grace through faith how to live holy lives from gratitude toward the One who saved them. Here are some of these vice lists:

1. God Gave Them Over List

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them (Romans 1:18–32).*

2. Day Behavior List

*Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy (Romans 13:13).*

3. So Called Brother List

*I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one (1 Corinthians 5:9–11).*

4. No Entry List

*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9–10).*

5. Disappointments List

*For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances (2 Corinthians 12:20).*

6. Deeds of the Flesh List

*Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19–21).*

7. Given Over List

*And they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness (Ephesians 4:19).*

8. Proper Saints List

*But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God (Ephesians 5:3–5).*

9. Lay Aside List

*Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices (Colossians 3:5–9).*

10. Exhortation List

*For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit (1 Thessalonians 2:3).*

11. Will of God List

*For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3–7).*

12. Law Target Group List

*Realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching (1 Timothy 1:9–10).*

13. For Profit List

*He is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain (1 Timothy 6:4–5).*

14. Last Days List

*For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these (2 Timothy 3:2–5).*

15. Before List

*For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another (Titus 3:3).*

16. Word Gamers List

*But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man after a first and second warning (Titus 3:9–10).*



17. Past Time List

*For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries (1 Peter 4:3).*

18. Lake of Fire List

*“But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8).*

19. Outsider List

*“Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying” (Revelation 22:15).*

20. Age, Role and Gender Lists

In his letter to Titus (chapter 2), Paul provides a robust series of lists that speak to many different groups. These lists include both vices and virtues.

**Titus:** *“But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.*

**Older Men:** *Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance.*

**Older Women:** *Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage*

**Young Women:** *the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.*

**Young Men:** *Likewise urge the young men to be sensible;*

**Titus:** *in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.*

**Bondslaves:** *Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.*

**All Men and Women:** *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.*

**Titus:** *These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.” (Titus 2:1–15).*

21. Elder Lists

Here is a detailed list of all the qualifications of an elder. This list includes both vices (7) and virtues (19).

|                                     | Translation of Term or Phrase                              | Summary of Quality   |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Above Reproach</b>               |  |  |
| 1                                   | ● “above reproach”<br>( <i>anepilemptos, ἀνεπίλημπος</i> ) | No criticism fits with what is known of the man.           |
| 2                                   | ▶ “above reproach”<br>( <i>anegkletos, ἀνέγκλητος</i> )    | He is well-spoken of by all who know him.                  |
| <b>Exemplary Husband and Father</b> |  |  |
| 3                                   | ● “husband of one wife”                                    | He is singularly devoted to his wife.                      |
| 4                                   | ● “manages his own household well”                         | He attentively promotes the true good of his household.    |
| 5                                   | ● “keeping his children under control with all dignity”    | His children positively respond to his winsome leadership. |

|                          |  |   |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| 6                        | ▶ “having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion” | His children trust Jesus, live righteously, and follow authority.                                       |
| <b>Healthy Inner Man</b> |  |   |
| 7                        | ▶ “devout”   | He is dedicated to God and seeks to please Him.   |
| 8                        | ▶ “loving what is good”  | The doing of what God values animates him.  |
| 9                        | ◐ “free from the love of money”  | He is not motivated by the desire to get rich.  |
| 10                       | ▶ “not fond of sordid gain”  | He is a man of integrity as it concerns financial matters.  |
| 11                       | ◐ “temperate”  | He is sober-minded and sensible, not rash or excessive.   |
| 12                       | ● “not addicted to wine”   | He does not have his senses dulled to what is around him.   |
| 13                       | ● “prudent”/“sensible”<br>( <i>sophron, σώφρων</i> )                     | His mind is a calm place where facts and wisdom hold sway.  |
| 14                       | ▶ “self-controlled”  | He is able to say “no” to personal desires and “yes” to doing what matters.                             |
| <b>Relational Asset</b>  |  |   |
| 15                       | ◐ “respectable”  | The way such a man lives invites respect and provokes interest.   |
| 16                       | ● “hospitable”   | He freely shares of his time and resources to promote the true good of others, including strangers.     |
| 17                       | ◐ “gentle”   | He makes it easier for others to respond positively to his counsel by his measured and gracious manner. |
| 18                       | ◐ “peaceable”  | He is a peace-maker – He doesn’t stir up a conflict, he defuses it.                                     |
| 19                       | ▶ “just”   | He effectively counsels others in how to do what is right.  |
| 20                       | ● “not pugnacious”   | He is not a bully who uses threats and power struggles to achieve his aims.                             |

|                     |  |   |
|---------------------|--|---|
| 21                  | ▶ “not self-willed”                    | He does not have to have his own way.   |
| 22                  | ▶ “not quick tempered”                 | He is not a reactionary using his rage to prevail over others.                  |
| <b>Growth Agent</b> |  |   |
| 23                  | ◐ “able to teach”                      | He capably explains what the Word says and calls people to live accordingly.    |
| 24                  | ▶ “holding fast the faithful word”     | His deep devotion to God’s Word drives how he uses it to help others.           |
| <b>Seasoned</b>     |  |   |
| 25                  | ◐ “not a new convert”                  | He has well spent significant time in the Lord growing in maturity.             |
| <b>Respected</b>    |  |   |
| 26                  | ◐ “good reputation with those outside” | The testimony of outsiders offers powerful evidence of who such a man truly is. |

Key:

- ◐ = term or phrase found only in 1 Timothy 3:1-7
- ▶ = term or phrase found only in Titus 1:6-9
- = term or phrase found in both

At the beginning of the lesson (on page 4), we posed the question: **Isn’t the use of a list like this an abandonment of grace and resort to legalism?**

Hopefully, you now understand that:

1. Using such a list as a means to earn salvation (which is legalism) is an effort doomed to failure.
2. Using such a list as a moral compass to guide holy living is eminently sensible.
3. The capacity to be transformed in ways that are informed by such a list is given us when we come to Christ through faith.
4. The motive for transformation is grace. Having been shown such incredible grace, we long to live in ways that please the Giver of Grace.
5. Only a list from the Giver of Grace can provide reliable guidance into what pleases Him.
6. We do well when we tell others (who have received God’s grace) how His lists show us how to please Him.

## Discussion Guide

Discussion Question: Go back to the “self-check” on page 3. In light of what we have just studied, what answers do you think you would change? Discuss your answers with your table group.

Discussion Question: Read the article on pages 21-23. Based on what we have studied, how would you evaluate this article? What did the author get right? Where is he wrong? Can you defend your answer based on a verse (or verses) in the notes?

Discussion Question: Have you ever been accused of judging someone? Has someone said, “What gives you the right to tell me what’s wrong with me?” What was this about? How would principles we have studied in this lesson relate to the conversation?

Discussion Question: What evidence do you see in our contemporary Christian world of what Jude warned? *For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.* Do you see “grace based licentiousness” being taught? How would tonight’s lesson speak to this teaching?

Discussion Question: Do you know someone who does not understand how grace and the law, rightly used, can work in a complementary way. If you had an opportunity, what would you tell this person to help them understand this concept?