

# Five Rules for Christian Living

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There was a time in the development of the Church of Christ on Earth when the saints spoke very much of what they called rules for holy living. And various spiritual treasures were said to have accrued to those who adhered to these rules. They were not always the same. Each Christian had to work out his rules for himself. And many holy souls there have been who have left us in their writings, particularly in their autobiographies, these rules which they followed.

Now I have been dealing with that now these two Sundays. Last week I presented to you a set of five rules to govern our attitude toward five basic relationships on Earth. I only got as far as the first two and I promised that I would finish now, today. God has mercifully permitted me to live this week out and to begin at least to finish these rules.

I said that we were to do five things. First, our attitude toward all created things, that we were to venerate them because they are the flowing garments of the Deity. God cannot be seen with the naked eye, so God veils Himself in His creation. And walks forth and rides forth upon the wings of the wind with the garments trailing and we call those trailing garments, nature, His creation.

Then, our attitude toward all men, we are to honor them because they are made in the image of God. I think not too much emphasis can ever be placed upon the doctrine of the divine image as originally given. Just as you can have an inspired Bible as originally given and yet have translations that are so inaccurate and unscholarly and confuse that they give but an imperfect concept of the perfection of the original.

So, we, because of sin, personal sin, sins of nature and of conduct and our sin in Adam, we are but a grotesque, badly distorted and imperfect representation of what must have been meant by the original image of God. But for the sake of that image, we are to honor all men.

Then the next is all Christians. Our attitude toward them is that we are to love them because they are children of God.

Our attitude toward God, fourthly, we are to fear him in that he is the high and lofty one that inhabits eternity, the Ancient of Days dwelling in unapproachable light.

And then since we are here on earth, we are for the time being within the framework of human government, therefore we have certain attitudes that we must make or hold toward constituted authority, called the king here. And that is we are to honor them because they are ordained of God.

The first two I dealt with, venerate all created things and honor all men.

Now we come to, love the brotherhood, that is the brotherhood of the redeemed Christians. This cannot mean, cannot possibly mean, love the people of your denomination. Thus to interpret it is to violate it. It cannot mean love the members of your church. That is, it does mean that, but it cannot possibly stop there. And it does not certainly mean love the group that holds with you on some mute questions, such as baptism or interpretations of prophecy.

It means love the brotherhood of the redeemed. It means love the born-again brother who wears a robe on the hot days and preaches in it. It means love the man who is a careful addict to Lent and Holy Week, even though we of a more liberal interpretation of things smile at it and know that every Friday is Good Friday, and every Sunday is Easter. But he is in the brotherhood and therefore we are to love him.

It means to love every Christian, whoever there is a scrap of evidence that he is a Christian indeed. And our attitude therefore is expressed in these two words, really one word, love, love them. But I am forced to say here that that word love may mean a score of things and it does mean a score of things, depending upon who uses it and the association in which it is found.

Love is a chameleon word. It changes its color with the association. Wherever it is, it takes on the color of the persons who use it. And here it means a principle of goodwill and it means more but we will start there. Love all Christians means to hold toward them an attitude of complete goodwill, desiring always and only their highest welfare.

Now that is a kind of love, that is not all there is to it. But that is a kind of love, it is a principle of goodwill. I think that is too well known to need repeating. But this principle of goodwill is a strong thing, and it is a determining thing. And it is like a set of steel rails that keeps the Christian on the track, the right track with the regard to his brethren. And it means that as long as he is on that track and is loving the brotherhood, he cannot possibly wish to any Christian anything but good.

And then it means more than that. If we make love only a principle, then we rob it of all its enjoyable qualities. Because love is more than that, it is an emotional heat as well, a heat that desires to be nearer its object.

For instance, the Scripture says, draw nigh to me and I will draw nigh to you. Why is God saying to us, draw nigh? Obviously because He wants us near him. And we are always being exhorted to come to Him, to live with Him, to stay by Him, to be where He is and to let Him be where we are.

And why did God go looking for Adam in the cool of the day, back yonder in the tragic circumstances that surrounded the fall of man? It was because God wanted to be where Adam is. And love may be detected by the fact that it desires to be near its object. And if it does not desire to be near its object, then it may be some kind of an ethical principle, a negative ethical principle that does not wish anybody any harm. But it is not love in the biblical sense of the term.

And then it is an emotional heat which will overlook flaws and weaknesses. Even God says that He knows our frame and He remembers that we are dust. There may be on

earth a saint. I say there may be on earth a saint somewhere. No, I won't even go that far. But it's conceivable that we could imagine there being somewhere on earth a saint that could walk straight into the presence of God and fellowship with Him without embarrassment and know that God saw no fault in him. But I have never met one. And if ever I met one who said it was true of him, I would know that I hadn't met one. We have never seen one, never heard of one.

Saint Augustine and all the rest knew that their right to fellowship the most holy God was purchased by the blood of Jesus. And it was only through the blood of the everlasting covenant that they dared enter and that they fellowshiped God.

So that God is forced to overlook certain flaws in us. He's bound to do it, otherwise he'd have no friends among the sons of men. Even Abraham, his friend, he had to overlook flaws and weaknesses in that friend, so that love will overlook weaknesses.

No homely daughter was ever known to be homely by her mother or her father because love covers up homeliness. And no woman ever yet married a homely man. And no man ever yet married a homely woman, though strangely enough there are lots of homely men and women who are married. The reason is that the emotional glow that came upon them completely hid from each other what everybody else knew.

Now God never yet saw anybody that didn't look good to Him. He never looked on a face that wasn't sweet. He never heard a voice that wasn't soft. Never, because God's great blazing heat of love disguises the harshness of our voices and the homeliness of our faces and the flaws of our characters and hides them from Himself, knowing that He, by grace and through the blood of the Lamb, is in process, for they are in process of perfection.

There will be a day when He'll look at them unembarrassed and they look in His face unembarrassed and His nature will be on their foreheads, and they will fellowship God as the angels. But that time is not now. We can fellowship with God as the angels, but always God must wink at the fact that we are but dust. And love always does that.

And extending that now to the brethren, love naturally overlooks faults and blemishes in our brethren, in those who are true Christian brethren. And then, love also is an emotional heat that will lead to sacrifice and suffering on the part of the one who feels it for the person that they love.

When we sacrifice and suffer, we need go no further back than the cross or even before the cross when our Lord Jesus Christ, for the joy that was set before Him and for the completion of the work that He had come to do, allowed Himself to be mistreated and maligned and cursed and called a devil. He suffered, not that He had to do it, but He suffered.

I remember hearing a great preacher, one of the greatest ever to touch American shores when he was going in the days of his great preaching, Paul Rader. I remember his preaching on the text, He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter. He took that verb brought and said what brought him. And then he raced speedily over the powers of earth and the things that could bring and compel and showed that none of them could

have brought Him. And then said what brought Him and answered it, love brought Him. And nothing else could bring him. Love brought Him out with a constraining power that He couldn't resist and didn't want to resist.

And so, love will lead people to do things that nothing else in the wide world will lead them to do. And then continue to do it and want to do it. And wonder why they are wanting to do it. And then it will go so far as to give its life for its object. It would be a cliché for me to remind you that there are tens of thousands of mothers who have given their lives for their children. And not only mothers but fathers too. And Jesus Christ said that we were friends, who laid down His life for His brethren; greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

Now this love is the attitude we are to take toward our Christian brethren, we are to hold it toward them all the time. And it's never to be varied. And it's a love that is impossible to feel toward the person out of Christ. Because it is a love given particularly to God's children. Because they are God's children. He that loveth Him that beget love also them that are begotten of Him.

Now the next is, fear God. Now this is that astonished reverence of which the great Faber writes. And it may grade up from its basic elements the terror of the guilty soul before a holy God. It may grade up from there to the fascinated rapture of the worshipping saint.

I don't want to be dealing in superlatives. I used to deal in superlatives altogether. I doubt whether up until I was well on into my ministry I ever modified anything. Or put in anywhere a qualifying phrase. Everything was emphatically what it was without a qualifier. But I have long learned that that isn't a wise way to look at the world or anything else for that matter. And there are very few unqualified things.

But I'd like to say that I believe that I can testify that the reverential fear of God mixed with love and fascination and astonishment and admiration, and devotion is the most enjoyable thing and the most purifying emotion a human soul can know. Without it I could not exist long a Christian.

I guess there are persons who without any spiritual experience are strong enough simply to live by ethics. I remember Benjamin Franklin. He was a deist and no Christian at all, never was. Whitfield prayed for him and told him he was praying for him, but he said, I guess it did no good because I'm not saved yet. That was when he wrote his autobiography.

But Benjamin Franklin drew what we call now graphs or a chart, a square, and then he divided that into many little squares and on those little squares he wrote virtues. Honesty, faithfulness, charity. I guess there were a dozen or maybe 25 of these virtues, I remember in his chart. And he had that worked into a calendar somehow or other.

And when he would violate one of these virtues, he'd write that down and they're in the square. And when he had gone a day or a month or a year without having broken any of his self-imposed commandments why then he considered that he was pretty well along. He had no spiritual experience, no sense of the divine, no mystic overtone, no worship,

no reverence, no fear of God before his eyes, according to his own testimony and yet he lived like that.

All I can say is more power to you Ben, because I don't belong to that breed of man. I can only keep right by keeping the fear of God on my soul and the fascinated rapture of worship. Apart from that I don't know any rules at all.

Now it may, I say, grade up from the trembling and hiding of the guilty man to the ecstasy of the saint. But this fear of God is a missing quality in the Church today and its absence is a portent and a sign. There are those who are trying very desperately bad to reintroduce the fear of God into the Church and they're doing it by threatening man and by pointing to physical dangers that assail us.

May I repeat what I think I must have said somewhere back down the weeks as we dealt with all this? May I repeat that the fear of God never can be induced by fear of danger? That the fear of God can never be induced by threats of punishment. It is totally impossible to induce the biblical fear of God by threatening a man. You can scare a man white, and you can make him do right.

Any thief will behave in the presence of the policeman, but the fear of God is another thing altogether. It has absolutely no relation, or if so, a remote ancient relation with the fear that comes as a threat of danger. You see, my friend, a great many repentances spring up out of fear of punishment. And as soon as the danger is removed, the repentance is removed along with it.

As the old Omar Khayyam said somewhere that he had repented so many times, but when spring came, rose in hand, he tore his garments of repentance and said, was I sober when I swore that I would obey God?

In an hour of fear, or in a threat of danger, or the apprehension of punishment, it's one thing to be morally afraid, that's one thing. But it's quite something else to know the fear of God.

When the Bible says there's no fear of God before their eyes, it doesn't mean that they're not scared of punishment. It's not accusing them of being cowards. Or is he saying that they are so brave that they have no fear? He is saying there's no fear of God before their eyes. There may be fear of the corner policeman. There may be fear of death. There may even be fear of hell. But that's not the fear of God.

The astonished reverence, the breathless adoration, the awesome fascination, the lofty admiration of the attributes of God, the sense of hushed reverence, breathless silence, when we know that God is near. That's the fear of God. And it hovers like the cloud over Israel. It lies upon us like a sweet invisible mantle. It conditions our inner emotional life. It gives meaning to every text of Scripture. It makes every Sunday and every Wednesday and every Saturday and every Monday a holy day. It makes every spot of ground a holy ground, this fear of God. But this is what we do not have today.

There's a great deal of preaching that is using as its fulcrum to get leverage on man, using the fear of communism or the fear of the collapse of civilization or the fear of

invasion from some other planet by the mysterious saucers. This fear is upon man, and it is upon man. And Jesus even said, men's hearts shall be failing them because of fear of things that are coming on the earth, but that's not fear of God. The fear of God is a spiritual thing and can only be brought by the presence of God. When the Holy Ghost came at Pentecost, there was great fear upon all people, yet they weren't afraid of anything.

The child of God that is made perfect in love has no fear because perfect love casts out fear, and yet he is the man of all men who most fears God. For the fear of God is not to be afraid of God. It is to be so awestruck in His presence that we bite our tongues, and we say, silence becometh my soul before thee, O God, my Help and my Redeemer.

Now this accompanies a person. So far as I know, John wasn't much afraid of anything except when he ran away from Jesus when he was arrested. He was scared and ran. He was afraid of the officers and afraid of getting chucked into jail or maybe crucified. So he ran away. That was the fear of punishment, the fear of danger.

But when he saw a man standing with a white robe and girded round the breast with a golden girdle and with feet like under burnished brass and with a sword proceeding from His mouth and His hair as white as snow and His face shining like the sun in His strength, the awe and reverence and fascination and fear concentrated in his life so completely that it knocked him unconscious. And this Holy Priest of the Most High God whom he later found was Jesus Christ who had the keys of death and hell. He had to come and lift him up and bring life back into him.

I don't know, but John might have lain there, maybe died there out of shock. And yet he wasn't afraid. He wasn't afraid in the sense that he feared punishment. No punishment was threatening. It was another kind of fear. It was godly fear. It was a holy thing, and John felt it. And this is what's missing in our terrible day. You can't induce it by soft organ music and light streaming through artistically designed windows.

Ah, brethren, the fear of God is a beautiful thing. For it is worship. It is love. It is veneration. It is a high moral happiness that God exists. It is a delight that God is, that's so great, that the soul feels that if God were not, it would cease to be. It could easily pray, O my God, continue to be as Thou art or let me die. It could easily pray, O my God, continue to be the God Thou art or annihilate me. I can't think of any other God but Thee. It is to be so personally and hopelessly in love with the person of God that the idea of a transfer of affection could never even remotely exist in the human mind. That's the fear of God.

And I say that it's missing in our terrible day. And because it's missing, we're sewing up the veil of the temple again. And artificially, they're trying artificially to induce some kind of worship. And to get people scared, we threaten them with atom bombs, cobalt bombs, and flying saucers. I think the devil in hell must laugh and God must grieve. For there's no fear of God before their eyes.

Lastly, honor the king. And here the reason for everything appears. See, everything is so logical, so well laid out in the kingdom of God. Every little plot of ground is like a beautifully laid out garden. No confusion, it's not a wilderness but a beautiful garden. It

is seen here that we venerate all things because they are God's creation. We honor all men because they were made in God's image. We love all Christians because they are God's children, and we are in the ties of kin, make us love Christians. And we fear God just because God is God. And we honor the king.

Now I must talk a minute on that and close. What does it mean, honor the king? I thought maybe the word honor all men and honor the king were two different words, but I find in the Greek they're the same word. Honor all men, honor the king. How can it be, that we are told to honor the king and then we are told to honor all men? That would include the king, therefore why waste words?

The answer is that there are two different degrees and kinds of honor. Honor is given for something, you see. There is some reason back of honor. Honor is bestowed not arbitrarily but for a cause. And the honor we give to men is given to them for the cause that they are men. The honor that we give to kings, those in authority, is an honor that's bestowed on them for the reason that they are rulers in a God-ordained society.

So, it's two different kinds of honor. It's honored on a different level. We give a king two honors. By a king, of course, I do not mean only a king called by that name. I mean any appointed, elected, or otherwise constituted authority. We honor the king first as a man.

We honor President Eisenhower. You can't look at his smiling picture without loving the man. We honor him because, first of all, he's a man. God made Eisenhower. I think He did a good job of it, myself. But He made him. And He made his brothers. And He made his parents. He made Eisenhower, all right? We honor Eisenhower because he's a man.

That is one degree of honor we give him, and that's the highest degree. And in the long run, that's the last honor and the highest honor we can give him. But because he is in the framework of constituted society, ordained of God, because he is our, not ruler, but leader, its chief executive, we honor him as such.

So, kings are honored, not because they intrinsically have anything any other person doesn't have. The little housewife, lovely little woman with the two pretty kids there in England, we honor the queen. But any mother in the wide world of any skin color, we honor also.

But we honor Queen Elizabeth because she happens to be head of a great commonwealth. So she gets two honors. We honor her as a woman. We honor her as a queen. We honor Governor Stratton as a man among men. We honor him as a governor, temporarily serving over us. So, we honor constituted authority because God ordained it to be so. I don't think there's much else to say. There we have it.

These are the five rules, and they're not a yoke on our neck. They're not a burden on our hearts. They are the kind words of God telling us how we are to live: Toward creation, veneration. Toward men, honor. Toward God, fear. Toward our Christian brethren, love. Toward established government, honor that eventuates in obedience.

Personally, I think that if we trusted God Almighty and the power of the inmoving Holy Ghost to fulfill this in us, we'd show an example of Christianity in the 20th century such as hasn't been seen for a long time.

Isn't it worth our praying then and yielding and surrendering? Isn't it worth our asking God at any cost to help us to so be in tune with His universe that the raindrop or the trembling leaf or the cry of the bird thrills us with a veneration for all God's world?

That the sound of a human voice, though speaking a language we don't understand, thrills us with the thought, here's a man once made in God's image. The sight of a Christian face, whether of our denomination or not, thrills us with the thought, here is one born of the Father, my own kinfolk. And the presence of the law reminds us of the goodness of God in organizing society for us and helping it to hold together so our houses are safe, and we can walk the streets with a relatively high degree of safety.

Amen. May God help us to live by these five rules.