

14. Be nice

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Luci Swindoll, the sister of pastor Chuck Swindoll of Stonebriar Community Church, Frisco, TX, once said, “Be nice,” as a cure for just about all the problems mankind faces with one another. Actually, it is not a bad advice. Yes, we can dissect her two word comment in many different theological ways, but I don’t think that it is necessary.

If we are nice to one another, we would have a whole lot less conflicts, arguments, fights, even wars. Of course, her comment was based on what the Bible teaches us:
Leviticus 19:18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

Because the Lord knew that we humans would not be nice to one another, let alone love one another, He made the law and spoke to the Israelites through their leader Moses and to us through our Lord Jesus.

Chapter 22 through 24 cover many different areas of the lives of the Israelites who were about to enter into the Promised Land as a nation. The Lord wanted them to learn to extend lovingkindness to each other like He had done to them. I believe that we can apply the same principles into our lives as well.

A. BE NICE TO YOUR NEIGHBORS

Deuteronomy 22:1-4 “You shall not see your brother’s ox or his sheep going astray, and hide yourself from them; you shall certainly bring them back to your brother. 2 And if your brother is not near you, or if you do not know him, then you shall bring it to your own house, and it shall remain with you until your brother seeks it; then you shall restore it to him. 3 You shall do the same with his donkey, and so shall you do with his garment; with any lost thing of your brother’s, which he has lost and you have found, you shall do likewise; you must not hide yourself. 4 “You shall not see your brother’s donkey or his ox fall down along the road, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely help him lift them up again.

There were few fences and walls on Jewish farmland, so it would be easy for livestock to wander away. They were told by the Lord not to say, “Finders, keepers; losers, weepers.” Rather they ought to show their kindness to fellow Israelis.

A neighbor isn’t only someone who lives adjacent to you. He is anybody in need whom you can help. In His Parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10, Jesus teaches us this definition of ‘neighbor.’

You may have heard about a rape and murder incident in Queens, New York, almost 47 years ago, on the night of March 13, 1964. The victim’s name was Catherine Susan Genovese. She was killed at the entrance of her apartment. She was stabbed and rapped by Winston Moseley who left her to die. That was bad, but the worst part was that thirty-eight people around her neighborhood heard and saw her screaming for help, but because they didn’t want to get involved and didn’t bother to call police. Think about it, 38 neighbors heard and saw her screaming for help, didn’t do a thing until she died.

If the Lord is concerned about finding and restoring lost animals, how much more would our Lord be concerned about the lost sinners who have strayed away? We should be the same. We should care enough to tell others about the eternal life in Christ Jesus.

B. MAN AND WOMAN AS IS

Deuteronomy 22:5 "A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the Lord your God."

To begin with, this law doesn't focus only on clothing. Some have taken this command to be the "proof-text" against women wearing pants and some Christian groups command that women wear only dresses.

The dramatic rise in cross-dressing, transvestitism, and "gender-bender" behavior in our culture is a shocking trampling of this command, and will reap a bitter harvest in more perversion and more gender confusion in our culture. Of course, the media are on their feet to cheer them for this perversion. It is an abomination to the Lord who created them as they are.

By divine wisdom, man and woman were made for each other but were made to be different from each other. Many nations in the ancient world approved and practiced homosexuality, even in their religion, but God prohibited it in Israel and made it a capital crime.

Blurring this sexual distinction brings confusion and a direct contempt to God's way which is abomination.

C. MAKE TASSELS

Deuteronomy 22:12 "You shall make tassels on the four corners of the clothing with which you cover yourself."

A symbolic meaning is given to these tassels in Numbers 15:37-41, namely that they are a reminder to Israel to keep God's law.

Numbers 15:37-41 Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 38 "Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. 39 And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, 40 and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. 41 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord your God."

Like most good commands of God, men have the capability to twist and corrupt this command. In Jesus' day, He had to condemn the Pharisees in Matthew 23, saying they enlarge the borders of their garments. In other words, they made the tasseled portion of their garments larger and more prominent to show off how spiritual they were.

D. SEXUAL MORALITY

Sex has become one of the most discussed subjects of modern times. The Victorians Period pretended it did not exist; the modern people pretend that nothing else exists. If you think that I am joking, watch TV one evening – from TV commercials to regular prime time programs and late night programs, they are all about sex.

God created sex and has every right to control the way we use it. If we obey Him, it will bring enrichment and enjoyment. One of the basic rules is that sex must not be experienced outside of the bonds of marriage.

From v13 through 21, Moses talks about accusation regarding the virginity of one's wife. The sexual purity of women was important in Israel in order to maintain the integrity of the family line and therefore the integrity of the tribes. The legitimacy of a man's sons guaranteed the protection of the family name and the family property.

American media, movie, and music industry which are controlled by satan encourage our teenagers to think that keeping their virginity is out-dated, stupid, and totally uncool. They also make teens think that the sooner they get rid of their virginity, the cooler they are going to be. Though it is a lie straight from hell, just about everyone buys it. But they never tell teens about STDs, AIDS and pregnancy for girls that come with pre-marital sex.

In v22, he handles the adultery topic. As a practical matter, this death penalty was rarely carried out, as is the case in most of these situation where capital punishment is commanded. This is because any capital crime required two or three witnesses, and the witnesses had to be so sure of what they saw that they were willing to "cast the first stone" – that is, initiate the execution.

According to their law, the adulterer and adulteress both should die. I am sure that you all remember the incident when the Jewish religious rulers brought a woman who got caught in the act of adultery in John 8. Whatever happened to the adulterer? Of course, it was nothing more than a trap to catch Jesus off guard. I wouldn't be surprised if the very man who was the adulterer was standing in the back of this hypocritical religious crowd and watching what Jesus would do with the woman.

E. WHO IS IN, WHO IS NOT

Deuteronomy 23:2-5 "One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the Lord. 3 "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the Lord forever, 4 because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. 5 Nevertheless the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam, but the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you.

It was a privilege to be a member of the Jewish nation and share in the blessings of God's covenant. The word 'congregation' may refer to the worshipping assembly and not the nation as a whole.

Gentiles could live within the confines of Israel's territory but that didn't give them the right to share in the feasts and other religious events. Gentiles who submitted to circumcision and confessed Jehovah as the true and living God could become proselytes, but some of them still were excluded for various reasons. The Lord has the right to determine who shall enter His holy nation.

It is difficult to define exactly what is meant by the term of illegitimate birth. Some Jewish commentators defined this as someone who was born of an incestuous rela-

tionship between Jews; others said it refers to those born of mixed marriages between the people of Israel and their pagan neighbors as in Nehemiah 13:23.

I am sure that you all remember how the Jewish religious leaders accused Jesus as an illegitimate when they were confronted and couldn't make their way out? They were accusing and insulting Him as an offspring of a loose woman Mary and a pagan Roman soldier.

F. DON'T MAKE A VOW THAT YOU WILL NOT KEEP

Deuteronomy 23:21-23 "When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. 22 But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. 23 That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth.

Our God is a faithful God who keeps His promises no matter what. He wants all of us to do the same as we carry His name as His children according to the teaching of our Lord Jesus.

Matthew 5:37 But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

But, in context of the rest of Scripture, we see that Jesus was not forbidding oaths, as much as telling us that we should be so filled with integrity in our words and deeds that an oath is unnecessary.

As you remember that Jesus answered under oath in a court in Matthew 26, and God Himself swears oaths in Hebrews 3 and 6.

It is more important for us to keep our promises with our Lord. Because a vow before the Lord is no small thing. In many circles today, the breaking of an oath is just another common business practice – but before God, it is simply sin.

As far as I know, there is no place in the Bible that we should make a vow to the Lord to get something out of Him. We choose to do the things that Jesus tells us to do because they are His commandments and our obedience to please Him.

Vows are never required by God; many times it is better not to make a vow with the Lord. Those who do not know the Lord and His Word tend to make a vow with the idea of making a deal with Him.

G. LAW CONCERNING DIVORCE

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, 2 when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife, 3 if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, 4 then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

The original idea of marriage that started in the Garden of Eden between Adam and Eve, there was no divorce mentioned.

Marriage is fundamentally a physical union – becoming one flesh, so only a physical reason can dissolve it. There are two such reasons: the death of one spouse and adultery. The adulterous man and woman were killed in the OT, leaving the innocent spouses free to remarry.

Divorce was never to be seen as a preferred or easy option. The Hebrew word translated divorce has as its root the idea of “a hewing off, a cutting apart” – it is the amputation of that which is one flesh.

In our Lord’s day, the rabbinical school of Hillel took a very broad liberal view and interpreted “uncleanness” to mean “anything that displeased the husband.” But the school of Rabbi Shammai took the narrow view that “uncleanness” meant some kind of sexual sin.

Too many separations and divorces are the result of built-up emotions, festering wounds, and thoughtless words that could have been avoided if the spouses had been honest with each other, talked things over, and sought the Lord’s help earlier in the problem. Even to the latter time, if both spouses want to obey what the Lord says in the Bible, the marriage can be healed and flourish with abundance of committed love for one another. With God, all things are possible.

H. APPLICATIONS

- 1) We should care enough to tell others about the eternal life in Christ Jesus.
- 2) Blurring this sexual distinction brings confusion and a direct contempt to God’s way which is abomination.
- 3) Don’t make a vow to the Lord. Just obey what the Bible teaches us.
- 4) Cultivating marriage is not by emotion, but commitment to one another and total obedience to the Lord.