

Delight in the Law



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asked, “So what do you do to make a living?”

I knew from experience not to begin with “I’m a preacher,” so I started with the generic “I’m in sales ... a product everyone needs ... doesn’t involve

big bucks ... offers the best life.” He guessed I was selling some kind of healthy life drug or fitness system, insurance or investment plan. I finally said I was talking about God’s love and how it could change a person’s life. He launched into a story of his childhood in a legalistic church where everybody played a game of happiness in church while they lived like devils in the real world. “No more church rules for me!” he said. I shared my own journey of faith shaped by God’s grace and blessings. We parted on a friendly note, but I don’t know the outcome of his life.

We are studying the key place of God’s law in our living. The Hebrew word for law (torah) comes from the verb (yarah) that means to throw something at an intended target. The Jews included the first five books of their Bible under the title Torah, identifying them as God’s instructions on how to live as his people. Keeping the law was never intended as an exercise in winning God’s love, but the evidence that you are one of God’s people. God’s laws hit you where you live, so you know how to live. This is why in the New Testament, Hebrews 4:12 reminds us, “Indeed, the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Now you understand that God’s law (torah) hits you in the heart where you make those ultimate decisions of life.

We move beyond the harsh narratives of Exodus, the complex laws of Deuteronomy and Leviticus, and hear the first words in the Old Testament hymnal: “Happy are those

who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers, but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night.” (1:1-2) There is no note of drudgery or fear for a child of God living out the law of God. Instead, there is a clear note of God’s blessings and companionship for those who love God and live in the shelter of his promises.

You, like me, probably learned that life is a matter of choices: you can do things the right way or the wrong way; honesty produces the best results; and wherever you are and whatever you are doing, do not forget you are your parents’ child. I never heard those words as a threat but as a reminder that my life should be shaped by love, integrity and good behavior. To “delight in the law of the Lord” is to remember God loves you and to live in the joy of that love.

Psalm 19:7 begins an expansive description of living by the delightful law of the Lord:

- The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul (19:7)
- The decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple (v. 7)
- The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart (v. 8)
- The fear (awe) of the Lord is pure, enduring forever (v. 9)

The ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether (v. 9) The laws are also described as “sweeter than honey,” more desirable than “fine gold” and keeping those laws bring “great reward” (vv. 10-11). Lavish praise for a code of laws! But when compared to the selfishness and immorality of the world without God, the torah offers a much better life. When we are honest enough to examine our motives each day and study the choices of our world apart from God’s grace, we should understand that the first psalm of praise is rightly focused on the power and beauty of God’s laws in our living.

The psalmist uses three metaphors for our living: First, life is like a

journey, “the path that sinners tread” (1:1), a reminder that we all make choices. Jesus warned us that there is always a wide and easy way that leads to destruction, but we are offered the choice of the narrow, less popular gate, that leads to life (Matthew 7:13-14). The second metaphor is of a tree that grows beside a river and offers a bountiful harvest (1:3). The third metaphor is that the wicked are like the chaff that is blown away in the harvest, leaving only the grain when the harvest of God’s grace is complete (1:4).

Nowhere in any of this is there a hint of earning God’s love, having a bigger mansion in heaven for points accrued, or being better than anyone else. The outcome of living as a child of God is in the joy of growing deeper in his love and sharing that love with others. Notice how the psalmist phrases his desire in this song of joy: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and redeemer” (19:14).

For all of us who believe we are God’s children by his loving choice, there must be a point at which we want nothing more than to behave like his children and share his love with others. In Israel’s times of suffering and loss they had chosen not to love God above all else and serve God. They had chosen pride, acted as though God owed them everything, and abandoned any attempt to share God with the outside world. We can make the same mistake.

The psalmist speaks of joy in living as God’s children. I have known people who boasted of their faith, but lived very selfish lives. I have known people who considered themselves saved because they belonged to “the true church.” The psalmist finds joy in God’s love and the hope of God’s grace. He sings of that faith and reminds us that the way we live for God in this world is a hymn of joy. To delight in the law of God is to live by his grace, to share his love and to base your daily choices on the wisdom of his law. “Happy are those who ... delight in the law of the Lord.”