

The Imperative of Respect

‘A young soldier on armed sentry duty for the first time had orders not to allow any car onto the military base unless it bore a special identification seal. The first car to pull up without the special seal was carrying a general. When the general testily told his driver to drive on through anyway, the sentry poked his head in the window and said politely, “I’m new at this, sir. Whom do I shoot first, you or the driver?”’

Let’s dissect this joke. The young soldier had been given an order. There were to be no exceptions. No special seal? No entry. Trying to run the gate called for gunfire. The general, apparently, had either forgotten the order, forgotten the seal, or just plain figured that he was above such petty protocol which only applied to underlings, though it didn’t specify any exceptions. The young soldier was respecting the law as he understood it, exactly as he’d been ordered. But before carrying out his orders, he went above and beyond what his orders required, and displayed great decency to politely and respectfully ask his superior officer a pertinent question. Which one should he execute first? Who wanted to die first, in other words.

What probably seemed self-evident to the general was that since he was a general, the order didn’t apply to him. But on the

other hand, how many people have impersonated generals or other personnel and illicitly gotten onto military bases or other secure installations to wreak havoc? The general, for whatever reasons, good or bad, was nevertheless not respecting the law, a properly-given and soon-to-be administered binding order. The soldier could not be held accountable for a criminal act of a double assault with a deadly weapon of the driver and the general, even possibly resulting in one or two deaths. The general was accountable, responsible for the injuries to, perhaps even loss of, both his own and his driver's lives. Such an outcome seems, perhaps, a bit inflexible. Even cruel. But the law's the law. If properly administered. And in this case, assuming the general or the driver could not produce the proper seal, and would not turn back from the gate, the sentry's orders would need to be carried out, and promptly. The safety of everyone else on the base would otherwise be in jeopardy, including his own. If he carried through and respected the law, he would have to shoot.

Now how often have we heard the phrase, "Ignorance of the law is no excuse"? Apply this axiom to God's law. Is there such a thing as ignorance of God's law? Really? Think about it. No, there's not. God's Son, Someone in a position to fully know!, has pronounced that the essence of God's law can be summed in two very short statements. Love God, and love one's neighbor as one's self. That's it! Did not Christ Jesus our Lord say, in Matthew 22:40: "The entire law and all the demands of the

prophets are based on these two commandments”? Thus there is no one without excuse. There is no one alive who does not innately know in their inmost being, if they are honest with themselves, that there is a God, and that, as created human beings, we should care for one another. Without being taught, children do not like to be hurt. They do not enjoy having their toys “stolen” from them. We know these things instinctively. They are part of what’s known as the natural law. But they can be disobeyed. Humans can refuse to observe them. And they do. All over the place and all the time.

Even though we just know that certain things are good and others are bad, many people truly have a contrary nature over and above the sinful, tendency-to-sin nature that we are all born with. Such ornery people essentially shut down their consciences by ignoring natural feelings of empathy toward other human beings and by just doing whatever they want, whenever they want. To some extent, this can describe all people at one time or other. Though we know what’s right, something within us just clamors to do the opposite. We want to do what we want, in whatever way we want, whenever we want, and it matters nothing how it affects other people. If other people get in our way, they better move and make way, or we’ll just plow over them, even killing them if necessary. Because they’re in our way, they have no value to us. Other people exist solely to serve us. If they cease to be useful in some way, then their reason for being is voided. At which point,

their only remaining value to us is to pleasure us in their pleadings for mercy, their pitiful cries in the face of death, their attempt to worship us imploring that they can still have value for us in some way, acknowledging our ultimate power over their lives. That “rush” of power surging through us as others prostrate themselves before us can, for many people, be so intoxicating that it truly goes to their heads, and they’re addicted to power, and money, which accrues more power, and adoration. Seems quite a few politicians, celebrities, “influencers”, TV and internet personalities, fit that bill quite nicely. Is there any room in such people for the virtue of respect? Or do they even know what respect means?

Yes, they know what respect means, half way. They know when they are being respected, or when not. But they’ve lost knowing how to be respectful of others, or how to give respect to others. In such a state, such people do not give respect to God. They may well give respect, such as they conceive of it, to false gods, demonic spiritual entities if they sense them, simply because such entities promise to give these people what they want. Including power and money, etc. So, this isn’t real respect at all. It is a way of behaving solely for the “benefit” it brings one’s self. Again, it’s all self centered, and self directed.

Consider now Elijah. One of the greatest prophets of all, he’s just become the second human being not to have physically died before being whisked up to heaven to be with God. Enoch, in Genesis 5:24, was the first, some 1,500 years earlier. And, as

if to prove a point, Elijah reappears, along with Moses, 850 years later, on Mt. Hermon's summit, for a short visit with Lord Jesus as He was transfigured into His glorious form as Peter, James and John watched. Furthermore, after his "rapture" into Heaven, Elijah himself appears in prophecies, which say that he, or at least his spirit, will precede Lord Jesus' coming, both the first time, and again before the Lord's second coming. In the Seder, the Passover meal, every year, an empty place setting is prepared for Elijah, for the ritual words say he will appear just before the Lord Jesus returns to earth the second time. The point is, Elijah, along with Moses, is one of the two greatest prophets of all time.

In II Kings 1-2, Elijah's final acts are recorded. Wicked King Ahab had died, finally, preceded in death by evil Queen Jezebel, no rest for her soul. New king, Ahaziah, suffered an accident, falling through a latticework from an upper story in his palace in Samaria. Seriously injured, seemingly near death, he wanted to know whether he would survive. So he sent messengers to inquire of the false god, baal-zebub, at that idol's temple. Before they arrived, Elijah was told of it by God, and he intercepted the messengers, asking them why the king had sought help from a demon god, instead of the real God, Who'd only a few years before proven to all that only He was God. Elijah informs them that the king will never leave his bed and will shortly die. Upon hearing this news, the king is enraged, particularly since it was Elijah that gave it. He issued a summons for Elijah to appear before

him, sending a captain with 50 soldiers to enforce it. Elijah stated that the Lord would prove, yet again, that God was with Elijah by sending fire from Heaven and killing that entire platoon. The whole scenario was repeated a second time. But the king, in his pride and arrogance, wouldn't let up. Prepared to sacrifice yet another platoon, he sent them anyway. This captain, though, approached Elijah with the utmost respect, with fear and trembling. This time, Holy Spirit directed him to go to the king. The same message was repeated, this time directly to the king's face, and the king promptly died, fully understanding the consequences of failing to properly respect God, His law, and His prophet.

The question before us, and all people, is how do we respect God? For many, it's not in the slightest. Their doom is as sure as was King Ahaziah's and his soldiers. Though we should mourn the everlasting loss of their souls, yet we should welcome such people's removal from office and power and influence in our land. When they are gone, the righteous will finally live in peace, despite the great turmoil that will surround us as these end times draw closer to the final Great Tribulation. But are we really paying God the respect that is His due? Are we presuming on His grace given to us in Christ Jesus? Are we awestruck when we approach Him in worship on Sundays? As Lord Jesus said, the law of God is summed up in two commandments: "Love God, and love one's neighbor". Are we truly loving God? Are we really respecting Him? And respecting all people, even our neighbors?

