

# The Messenger

The Atlanta Church of Christ

*in Guinnett*

## Principles Trump Rules

By Danny Doble

**Elders**

Steve Galbreath  
Alan Rouse

**Evangelist**

Richard Alawaye

**Teacher**

Gary Roberson

**Women's Ministry & Welfare**

Sarah Alawaye  
Roxanne Galbreath  
Sherry Rouse

**Teens**

John and Marisabel  
Becker

**Deacons**

Peter Berry  
Steve Collier  
Danny Doble  
Danny Emmett  
Audie Flowers  
Bill Francis  
Patrick Freeman  
Glenn Hayes  
Kendall Knight  
Karl Lynn  
Russ McGarr  
Alvin Modest  
Jeff Mueller  
Todd Reynolds  
Dan Stehr  
Ken Watson

I had the privilege recently of speaking to the church about Jesus' use of the Old Testament Scriptures. One of the points I discussed was how the "experts in the law" emphasized the letter of the law and completely missed the spirit of the law. I am still studying this out, so I thought I would discuss this theme further in this article.



The so-called experts cared about rules and regulations, but not necessarily the principles behind such things. They were legalistic and religious, but did not have a heart for God. Jesus constantly condemned this brand of religion (Matthew 23:16-26).

He even quoted the very Old Testament Scriptures they claimed to honor:

*But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'* (Hosea 6:6)

*'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.'*

*They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.* (Isaiah 29:13)

The example that most convicted me is the exchange (Luke 10) that leads Jesus to say the parable of the Good Samaritan:

*On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' " "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

Even though this "expert" correctly answered the question from the Scriptures, he completely missed the heart.

(Continued on next page.)

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

9/11-13: Marriage Retreat "Always & Forever"  
Winshape Retreat in North Georgia – Speakers: Jim and Virginia Lefler (Chicago Church of Christ)

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE**

Unworthy Servants..... 3  
Teaching Children Self-Control ..... 4  
Deacon's Directory & Family Groups ... 4

# Principles Trump Rules

(Continued)

He correctly quotes Leviticus 19:18, yet he completely missed the context of the entire passage of that chapter in Leviticus, which commands, among other things: When you harvest your fields, leave some behind for the poor (v9-10). Do not steal/lie/deceive one another (v11). Do not hold overnight the wages of a hired hand (v13). Do not show favoritism or be unjust (v15). Do not slander (v16). Show respect for the elderly (v32). Love and do not mistreat ALIENS, for you were aliens in Egypt (v33).

Even if it wasn't obvious, this "expert" should have known from the context of the passage that the interpretation of the word "neighbor" was very broad, even including foreigners. However, he was more concerned with defining the term legalistically; he wanted a minimum checklist of people he needed to love to be able to claim obedience to the law. We see a similar example of this mentality with the rich young ruler, who wanted a checklist of rules for eternal life, but had no interest in the principle of complete surrender to the Lord, of serving Him as the only Master. This is precisely the type of religion that Jesus condemned.

In thinking about this, it hit me that we can be very much like this religious man than we would like to admit. Things have not changed that much. The world in which we live in wants quick fixes to everything. For example, we are sold easy ways out: pills, steroids, and crash diets to sculpt our bodies instead of discipline, hard work, self-control, consistent diet and exercise. This short-term thinking does not develop good habits and character that can maintain good health over the long term, and the same is true of religion. Rules and regulations are the lazy way out, where we should be putting in the time in our study of the Scriptures to understand principles, to understand the reasons for the rules. We should work on changing from the inside out, from the heart, and not from the outside in by following some cookbook of minimum ingredients that make us right with God. When we teach others, be it to make disciples or in encouraging one another, we should be careful not to make a cookbook like the Pharisees, but instead be the disciples of deep love and conviction that God seeks.

The checklist mentality is so easy and natural that we often don't even realize what we're doing, but we must watch for it. Our methods for evangelism can be an example of this. We have a set of Bible studies that we teach and prayers we pray. We

have expectations of sins they should confess, ideas they should profess, and actions they should perform. While some of these can be helpful guides, we should remember that each person is different and strive to emphasize the heart, the principles of faith and love.

When I was single, I had many rules to help keep myself out of trouble. I would never watch TV by myself or late at night. When dating Cynthia (now my wife), we were never in my or her apartment by ourselves, we did not stay out on a date past midnight, and I could name many other examples. Some of these rules I still follow. They have certainly helped me fight temptation, but it's easy to go overboard and hold ourselves to rules over principles. Just because the rule was helpful, I shouldn't condemn someone for being on a date that lasted until 1:00 AM.

I am now involved in a bi-weekly Bible study at my workplace that started precisely this way: a friend and I had been having regular conversations about different aspects of our faith in God, and we eventually decided we should dedicate some time to get together a bit more formally and invited some other coworkers to join. We have all been able to contribute to each other and challenge each other to think about what the Scriptures really mean for our lives, and I certainly feel that we know each other better as men through it. When we evaluate how we are doing as Christians (we should certainly do this periodically), instead of asking about whether or not we are doing certain daily tasks, we should compare ourselves to the greatest commandments of love for God and neighbor.

I could certainly keep going with personal examples of "rules trumping principles", but I'm sure you get the point. Think about your own Christianity; are you living a life of deep love for God and neighbor? Are you driven by deep conviction of the principles in your heart, or have you drifted into religiosity? Most of us have probably been in both places at different times. I pray that our discipleship will be one of hearts that draw near to God and go beyond mere human rules.

Matthew 22:37-40 *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

# Unworthy Servants

By Alan Rouse

Christians have long wrestled with the relationship between our deeds and our salvation. Do our deeds save us? Or does salvation cause us to do good deeds? Can we be saved without the deeds? Do our actions have any bearing, either good or bad, on whether we will be saved?

These questions are as old as Christianity itself. Paul wrote extensively about these issues in Romans and Galatians. James addressed them in chapter two of his letter. Fifteen hundred years later, Martin Luther and John Calvin took issue with the Catholic church over related questions. Today, Christian theology is divided into Calvinist and Armenian/Wesleyan camps over these very matters.

Jesus taught a short parable in Luke 17 that sheds light on the question:

*Luke 17:7-10 "Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"*

Jesus used a familiar metaphor to describe how a servant of God should view himself and his service. The servant was expected to perform certain duties in the field, then to prepare his master's supper, and to wait until his master was finished before he could begin his own supper.

The servant in Jesus' parable had to do some things. Before, during, and after doing all those things, he was still his master's servant. He could not eat his own supper until after he had done what was expected. Fulfilling his duties did not earn him any special rights.

Jesus taught that, after doing everything, we should say, "We are unworthy servants." Americans often have a hard time embracing the "unworthy" part. From childhood we've been stroked and encouraged to view ourselves as very "worthy." We expect to be compensated for our efforts. We have our rights. But a servant does not have rights. God does not owe us a single thing for our service. It is impossible for a mortal to make God indebted to him or her.

Instead, we owe God. God created us and God owns us. We owe God a perfect, sinless life from beginning to end. We owe Him a life in which we complete every task God has given us to do. We have already blown it. If we were to live a perfect life from today onward, there would be no surplus goodness in that with which to pay off our past debt. Nothing we do can make up for our failures. We can never even begin to pay off our debt.

Salvation is a gift of God, given on his terms. We cannot earn it. But there are terms, and those terms include service. Our deeds of service are not optional! The irony is that God chooses to reward our service (Matthew 25:21,23). But remember also, God will not reward us if we refuse to serve (Matthew 25:24-30).

The message of Jesus' parable is that we should remember who we are. We are servants, not employees. We have no rights. We are expected to serve.

# Teaching Children Self-Control

One of the greatest gifts you can give your child is self-control - a foundation built day by day as you teach your child to make decisions about his own behavior. Remember that a child may be well-behaved for all the wrong reasons - fear of punishment or withdrawal of affection. This often results in a tendency to "act up" in awkward moments. In the long run, children raised to be outer-controlled rather than self-controlled may be more vulnerable later to peer pressure and rebellion.

The potential for self-control is best released during the toddler years, when the child is eager to do things for himself. We can capitalize on his natural inclination to master his environment by helping him master himself. A young child has little to be steward over - except his own body. Challenge yours by offering opportunities to gain control:

"Let's see if we can close the door without a sound." "Let's see if we can walk on this straight line." "Let's see if we can hear this pin drop." This provides a context for reminding a child not to fidget or lose his temper: "You are boss of your body. You can decide to sit still."

Another effective way to help your child develop self-control is to let him know in advance the kind of behavior you expect - at a party, in the grocery store, library, or church. When kids know what is expected, all it takes is a glance at someone who is out of order - not meant to instill fear, just one that reminds a child where he is and what he's supposed to do.

One word of caution: Construct your expectations realistically. Remember your child is an individual and he is changing all the time. Set your expectations just high enough to call forth the best from your child, but never too high for him to reach. Otherwise you end up with a discouraged child.

Since children respond well to word-pictures, as mine got older I used Proverbs 25:28: "*Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.*" In ancient times, cities built walls to protect themselves. Any breach made them vulnerable to invasion and defeat.

In the end, training which encourages self-government rather than dependence on outer control produces the kind of child people want to be around. A child with all the selfs our culture tries hard to foster too late and too superficially: self-awareness, self-reliance, self-confidence, and self-esteem.

When a child knows he can make the right decisions and is in control of his actions, all of these will follow naturally.

©Barbara Curtis 1999. Barbara, mother of 12, is author of 9 books and over 1000 articles.  
Visit her at [www.barbaracurtis.com](http://www.barbaracurtis.com).

## Deacon's Directory

Karl Lynn	New Members	770-979-4292
Ken Watson	Benevolence	678-376-2677
Peter Berry	Benevolence	678-376-1878
Danny Doble	Spanish Translation	770-931-0601
Audie Flowers	Visitation	770-277-5749
Patrick Freeman	Kingdom Kids	770-921-1811
Glenn Hayes	Kingdom Kids	770-985-6921
Dan Stehr	Visitation	770-925-2943
Bill Francis	Visitation	770-806-8645
Todd Reynolds	High School	770-682-0027
Russ McGarr	Middle School	770-381-5045
Alvin Modest	Worship	678-344-0061
Steve Collier	Teens-Parents	770-717-5784
Danny Emmett	Hope, Events	770-985-4542
Jeff Mueller	Benevolence	770-492-0544
Kendall Knight	Music Service	770-972-6887

## **Contribution**

**06/07/09 - \$7,372**  
**06/13/09 - \$8,238**  
**0620/09 - \$6,358**  
**06/27/09 - \$6,541**

## Family Group Leaders

Peter & Nancy Berry	Suwanee	678-376-1878
Steve & Barbara Collier	Lilburn	770-717-5784
Jim & Chandra Dew	Lilburn	770-330-3479
Danny & Cynthia Doble	Lilburn	770-931-0601
Audie & Jackie Flowers	Snellville	770-277-5749
James & Quiana Martinez	L'ville	678-985-5511
Alvin & Beatrice Modest	Snellville	678-344-0061
Jeff & Jessica Mueller	Tucker	770-492-0544
Ricky & Bridgett Roberson	Snellville	770-879-0868
Joseph & Lisa Washington	L'ville	678-407-0306
Ken & Kat Watson	Suwanee	678-376-2677