

Five Ways to Follow God: Deuteronomy 10:12-22 Micah 6:6-8

When I was a child, all I wanted to be as a grownup was a Forrester working in the National Parks. At the age of 14, as a newly born again and on-fire Christian all I wanted to be was an evangelist. But, as I grew up, I learned that this evangelist desire could be fulfilled in many different jobs; as youth pastor, Scout Master, college instructor, camp director, pastor, even as a youth league soccer coach. Along the way I also learned that God was not so concerned with my chosen profession as much as whatever profession I chose, that I work at it with all my heart, for the glory of the Lord.

That's an important lesson that I hope you young people will take to heart today; to please God you don't have to be in some specific "Christian" profession, such as evangelist, pastor, or Bible professor – as I once thought, you can do just about any job as a God-honoring ministry; be that carpenter or investment banker. As a wise pastor once said, if God has called you to be a farmer, I would hate to see you backslide into being a mere preacher. Yes, you can work at just about any profession for the glory of God, it is not a matter of what you do, as much as your relationship with God whatever you do.

Thus, every single person needs to ask themselves, "what does God require of me?" Which again is not so much based on what you choose to do professionally as much as your relationship with God while you are doing it. This is what today's scripture is all about.

In our Deuteronomy lesson for today, after 40 years of wilderness wandering because of their failure to trust God the first time around, now the second generation of Israelites is preparing to enter the Promised Land and Moses, for the second time, is reminding them of all the laws that God has laid down for their prosperous and long life in the land. Now, in today's set of verses, Moses is summarizing all those laws as not so much what to do, but how to live in a close relationship with God.

So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you?

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| <p>Fear the Lord your God, Walk in all His ways, Love Him, Serve Him with all your heart & soul, And keep the commandments</p> |
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of the Lord your God and His decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being. Deuteronomy 10:12-13

Did you notice that all these are ACTION words? This is what God wants you to do, this is how you are to live, once again not doing any specific task – but doing everything that you do from within your close relationship with God.

At first glance, these five words may also seem somewhat repetitive, but if you look more closely – which is what we are going to do today – you will see that they do cover the whole of your life experience. So let's take them in order.

First, let's clear up this idea of what it means "to fear the Lord your God."

When most people think of the word "fear" they think of being scared or terrified. Like watching a scary movie as a child and thereafter being terrified of Frankenstein showing up on your back porch, or in my case, it was Gort, the robot from The Day the Earth Stood Still. This is not what the fear of the Lord is.

Another thing, "fear of the Lord God," is not "fear of punishment," which by the way, is how many people naively view God. My mistaken childhood impression of God had Him looking like an angry Father Time, wearing a long white robe and beard with a set of scales in His hand, waiting to measure the quantity of my good works against my sins. This version of God was all judge, no father.

I am surprised at how many Christians continue to have this distorted view of God, always living in fear of punishment and judgment; like the fearful servant in the parable of the Talents.

As a man was going away on a long journey, he entrusted his property to three servants. To one he gave five talents, to another he gave two talents, to the last he gave one talent. The one with five went to work and made five more. The one with two went to work and made two more. But the servant who was given one talent, out of fear of losing it, went and buried it in the ground.

The master returns and rewards the first two servants for increasing what they had been given. But the last servant who buried his talent in the ground out of fear of losing it, ended up getting punished for having done nothing with it (Matthew 25:14-30). The point of this parable is, **that a distorted view of God will cause you to be fruitless in your walk with God and you will lose many a blessing.**

Instead, the correct understanding of the "**fear of the Lord,**" carries with it this idea of awe, reverence, and respectful submission to a higher authority.

Thus, you should understand that there is a big difference between being afraid of God and "fearing the Lord;" the first is inspired by sin and ignorance, the second is inspired

by love and relationship. Who can help but respect or be in awe of God when you see and think about His great and wonderful creation and the lengths He has gone to in order to save and restore His lost children.

In the Chronicles of Narnia, when the talking animals say that they are going to take Peter, Edmond, and Lucy to meet Aslan the lion – a form of Jesus Christ in this story – Lucy asks, “but is this lion tame, is he safe” to which the animals reply, “*O No, Aslan is certainly neither tame nor safe, but he is Good.*” This is what it means to “Fear the Lord,” to live in continual amazement that the all powerful Creator of the Universe, the “*God of gods and Lord of lords,*” not only knows you by name, but also personally cares for you in a more powerful way than you can comprehend. We sing a joyous hymn about such Godly fear:

I stand amazed in the presence Of Jesus the Nazarene, and wonder how He could love me, A sinner, condemned, unclean. Oh, how marvelous! Oh, how wonderful! And my song shall ever be; Oh, how marvelous! Oh, how wonderful!

Is my Savior’s love for me. (Charles H. Gabriel, 1856-1932)

This is what the prophet Micah meant by declaring that the way we please God is by “*walking humbly with Him,*” which is another way of saying, “fear the Lord your God.”

So, if you fear the Lord God, if you hold Him in deep reverence, you will not only want to walk humbly with Him, but you will also want to **walk in ALL His ways.**

You may ask, how is walking in all God’s ways different from keeping all his commandments? Good question.

The answer is that you can obey all the laws – which mostly measure your outward performance – and still not be loving, or concerned with the welfare or widows, orphans, and strangers.

In the next section of this scripture, God describes Himself:

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| For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, |
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Simply meaning that He is the only God that there is or ever was – a concept he had great difficulty teaching to the Israelites – and that you could always expect Him to be a just God – to treat all people fairly. But then He goes on to say that he is also a God...

who executes justice for the orphan and the widow,
and who loves the strangers,
providing them with food and clothing.

You shall also love the stranger...

Deuteronomy 10:17-19

Meaning that God will always treat all people fairly, but He doesn't treat them all equally. God has a soft-spot in His heart for those who are downtrodden, who are oppressed, who are hungry, who struggle to make a living for themselves: the widow, the orphan, and the stranger (or as we now call them, "the immigrants"). So in order to "*walk in all God's ways*," means to think with both the mind and heart of God, or as our Micah scripture describes it, not only "**to do justice, but also to love mercy.**" Mercy does not negate justice, it goes beyond mere legality, to finding ways to bring healing to brokenness.

There is a supposedly true story told about Fiorello LaGuardia the mayor of New York City during the difficult years of the Depression.

Mayor LaGuardia was a big-hearted, colorful character. He sometimes rode on the fire trucks in the big city, and took the children from the orphanage to a professional baseball game. When the newspapers went on strike, he would read the Sunday comics on the radio to the kids.

One very cold night in January, 1935, Mayor LaGuardia went to the night court in the poorest area of New York City. He sent the judge home early that evening and LaGuardia himself took over as judge. That night an old woman was brought to him.

She was charged with the crime of stealing a loaf of bread. The woman told LaGuardia that if it were just herself who was hungry she would never have stolen a thing, but her two grandchildren were starving and she had no money even to pay for some bread, so she stole it.

Nevertheless, the shopkeeper whose bread was stolen would not drop the charge. He said: "*Your Honor, she must be punished to teach the other people here a lesson. Otherwise they'll think stealing is OK.*"

Mayor LaGuardia turned to the woman and said, "*I know you did it for your grandchildren, but you cannot break the law and steal. Your fine will be ten dollars.*" Then pulling a ten-dollar bill out of his own pocket and tossing it into his famous sombrero, he said, "*and here's the ten dollars to pay your fine.*" But LaGuardia didn't stop there, he went on to say, "*furthermore, I'm going to fine everybody in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a woman has to steal bread in order to feed her children. Mr. Bailiff, collect all these fines and give them to this defendant!*" So the hat was passed around to everyone in the

courtroom. Even the shop keeper and the bailiff paid their fifty cent fine and the incredulous old woman left the courtroom with forty-seven dollars and fifty cents to help feed her grandchildren.

That is what walking in all the ways of God means; not only to live justly, but also to go beyond justice to bestow mercy whenever possible. God in His justice must declare us all guilty of sin and as we all know, the penalty for sin is death. Since we could never pay that penalty for ourselves, God then satisfied His own just demands by Himself coming to earth and dying to make that payment. This is what it means to value mercy as well as justice, which is what has saved and reconciled us back to God to now be given that same ministry of reconciliation to share with others. This is how we walk in ALL the ways of God.

To Love and serve God with all our heart and soul, seems a rather self-explanatory command. If we realize how much God loves us and to what great extremes He has gone to save us from our own self-inflicted deaths, why wouldn't we want to return that love back to God with all our heart and soul?

But do you understand that love is always a choice?

Modern culture would have us believe that we don't have any choice in who or what we love. They would convince us that our passions control us; which is not so. God gave us freedom of choice. We have the power to choose even who and how we love. We can give in to our passions, we can let them control us and go along on a tidal wave of emotion. Or we can learn to control and guide our emotions and our desires as well as our thoughts (Proverbs 4:23, 2 Corinthians 10:5). So like every other decision in life, we still must choose either to love or not love -- even God.

If we choose not to love God, what other alternate loves are out there?

There's money, wealth, security, comfort, entertainment, drugs, even self. All these other loves are the small "gods" that will control and will always enslave your life. Then at the end, these false gods will leave you guilty, dead and unforgiven, because you didn't give your love to the one person, the only real God who could have saved you from such a death. You always have a choice in the matter. But how foolish to choose something else over loving God.

Like love, serving God is also your choice. But if you don't serve God, then you will always end up serving one of those false gods who can never give your life much meaning much less save your soul.

Finally there is the command to keep all God's commandments. The Israelites of course, having been designated a priestly nation to witness to all the world, were given a significant set of rules for how to live, what to eat, how to worship. But fifteen hundred years later after Jesus sent the Gospel out to the entire world, a tribunal of Jewish Apostles, led by no less than James the brother of Jesus, determined, that these laws applied only to Jews living within a Jewish culture. **Gentile Christians were never bound by such kosher laws.** However, the Ten Commandments out of which all these other laws were built, were never restricted to just the Jewish nation. Rabbis recognized 7 of the commandments as having been originally given to Noah to help guide for how people could live together safely in community. The other three about loving God uniquely, would also apply to everyone who looks to God as savior.

So regardless of the laws, or lack of laws in any particular country, the Ten Commandments, still reflect the values of God and the standard by which He will one day judge all people. As such, continuing to live by the Ten Commandments should also reflect the values of everyone who sees within themselves a copy of God's nature – which He intentionally built into us. The Apostle Paul would later write that when gentiles instinctively obey the commandments – which they have not seen- such proves that these commandments were God given to all people for all time (Romans 2:14-16)

Of course if you don't wish to be bound even by the Ten Commands – you can always live by Moses' summary either as given here in Deuteronomy, or as later advised by Jesus, ***loving the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, along with your neighbor as much as you love yourself.*** Then, as Jesus said, you will have unconsciously obeyed all the other laws without even having to think about them – and as Moses said, *it will go well with you.*

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While these five principles along with the Ten Commandments, which were given over 3,500 years ago, no longer have any legal authority over our life, they still reflect the heart and values of the God whom we serve, and hopefully love with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

In closing, let me ask you a question. **Do you love the Lord your God, and are you serving Him with ALL your heart and soul?**

How much would it actually change your life to do so?

More importantly how much happier do you think you might be by doing so.

Let's pray about this.