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Noblisse Oblige

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-- *Commentaries from past newsletters* --

With all the news of wrongdoing by people in the government, church, business world and throughout our society as a whole, I want to call your attention to a principle I learned about as a child. It is the principle of *Noblisse Oblige*. I really do not know when it first came to my attention, but I was in grade six or seven when I first heard about it. This term means "The obligation of honorable, generous and responsible behavior that is a concomitant of high rank or birth." I especially want to address the obligation of Christians to practice it.

I do not need to tell you that our society has turned into a society of scofflaws. If you do not know the meaning of this word, it is what it says it is. Scofflaws are people who scoff at the law. They pay no attention to it, and regard you with amusement when you call attention to their lawlessness.

Almost everyone ignores the law in some way or the other (Romans 3:23). Beginning in the early years of life, we begin to disobey the rules of the society we live in. Being ignorant and naturally rebellious we disobey our parents. When we begin our education, we learn to cheat, and continue to do so in middle and high school. Nowadays, up to 80% of students cheat in the colleges and universities of our nation. Where do we learn to do these things? Throughout our society, most are not taught biblical rules of right behavior, and there are few good role models. Parents and everyone around us disobey the laws of the land. Many of our athletic idols are scofflaws whose behavior is ignored or even praised.

Further evidence of our lawlessness is found in the work place. There exists in our land what is called a cash economy. People ask for services rendered to be paid in cash, because there is no paper trail. The reason people want cash is that they do not have to declare it as income so it will not be taxed. Waiters and waitresses, (who incidentally do not make much money) rarely declare their tips as income. In other areas of the service industry people do the same thing.

In the organized economic world there is much lawlessness. Insider trading scandals are commonplace in the investment sector of the economy. Pyramid schemes are rampant. Scams of all kinds are revealed every day. Fraud is rampant. Embezzlement is commonplace.

In local governments graft and corruption are common. Contractors can get around the law if they slip the inspector a little money under the table. Payoffs for help in elections are revealed frequently. Lobbyists influence legislation by

providing all kinds of extra benefits to politicians. Even presidential decisions affecting companies and even nations are influenced by "donations" to election expenses. Sadly nothing is done to punish this activity though it is illegal.

On the highways there is lawlessness. People drive their automobiles at breakneck speeds. The highways are nothing more than racetracks. If there is limited speed in a construction zone, they race through it ignoring the signs that threaten large fines if they get caught speeding. Drivers run through stop signs with only minimal slowing. Even law enforcement officers are not good examples. I see highway patrolmen, deputy sheriffs and other officers who have sworn to uphold the law speeding and breaking the same laws that they are charged to enforce.

And then there is the problem of sexual behavior. There are no restraints on sexual activity whether it is heterosexual or homosexual. Fornication is so common among youth that 80% of girls graduating from high school are no longer virgins. Adultery is a common practice. Almost everyone I see in my office has had an adulterous relationship at some time. A few years ago after the murder of Bobby Kennedy, I met a woman who had been one of the "girls" that were members of his entourage. Several years later after she became a Christian she realized the wrongness of her own and the behavior of those around her at the time. The stories she told about the sexual predations of John, Bobby, Teddy and other Kennedys were shocking. They were shocking because their predations were unknown to the rest of the world until Mary Jo Kopechne's death. Even then they were hushed up.

Then there are the continuing sexual exploits of actors and actresses in "Hollywood." There are hardly any sexual mores anymore. And then there are the accusations made against our president. Don't you think it is incongruous that a man was not appointed Head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff because of an adulterous affair, when his Commander in Chief is rumored to have many extramarital sexual liaisons?

Finally, there is the problem of alcohol and drugs. Almost everyone drinks. A smaller number use Marijuana. Lawlessness is the rule in the drug world. Recently my wife and I went to the shopping center to buy some film and to look for a tube of shampoo. On our way in from the parking lot we noticed a Mercedes parked close to the entrance. Three young women were talking to the driver who was all decked out with gold chains and rings and dressed in designer clothes. The Mercedes had been customized with chrome wheel covers, a bug shield and chrome accents around the fender edges and on the rear view mirrors. Chrome mud flaps finished the decoration. My wife commented that it is highly unlikely that a twenty plus year old could afford that kind of expensive car, the clothing and the jewelry unless he was selling drugs. He was, though, the center of attention of the three attractive young girls who were asking to see his tattoos.

Years ago Sam Guze, a professor of psychiatry at Washington University, demonstrated that the bulk of crime is related in some way to drugs and alcohol. Most of the murders and many of the thefts and robberies in our communities today are related to the drug trade.

I do not need to go on. I think I have made my point. How can we expect the children and young people of our day to be law-abiding citizens if there is so much lawlessness in the world? It affects people of high rank. They are the role models that our youth look up to. They will model their behavior after these leaders.

What we are talking about is SIN. According to the W.M. MacKay, the author of *The Disease and Remedy of Sin*, sin is a spiritual disease. Its symptoms are moral paralysis. The sinner cannot stop sinning (Rom. 7:19). He or she tries to cover it up. They do so by sneaking around hoping they will not be found out. They lie when suspicions are voiced. Emotionally they are filled with guilt and shame if their consciences are not seared. Shame and guilt are a natural response because they know they are doing wrong. Even so they keep on sinning.

The only answer to sin is confession and repentance. When we confess and repent, we can be forgiven and cleansed of all unrighteousness, but no one wants to either confess or repent. Neither the church nor the nation realizes that they are remiss. We have closed our eyes to sin and in some instances even encouraged it. Paul said it so clearly. "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them (Rom. 1:28-32)."

Having made it clear now that we live in a sinful society, how does the principle of *noblesse oblige* relate to us in our society today. The answer is that we are of high rank and we have to, "Let (y)our light so shine before men, that they may see (y)our good works and glorify (y)our Father in heaven (Matt, 5:16)." We are people of high rank. We are princes and princesses who as children of the King represent him on earth. Unruly children reflect poorly on their parents. The same is true for us, therefore, we have to set the standards for the rest of society. We are expected to live out our faith. To put it in the language of the street, "If we talk the talk, we have to walk the walk."

With the exception of the Southern Baptists, and Missouri Synod Lutherans the mainline denominational churches have failed to lead us in setting high standards of morality in our time. Instead they do as Paul said they do, they encourage sin.

Alternate lifestyles, abortion euthanasia (called assisted suicide), separation and divorce, and even such heresies as "reimagining" are all officially approved by some of the boards and agencies of the various churches. Since they purport to speak for the church as a whole, the media loudly emphasize their pronouncements. They do so because they are sympathetic to the various causes espoused by the official spokesmen for the denominations.

What are young persons to think if the church they attend says that it is permissible to do the things that Bible tells them they should not do? Their response is to ignore the Bible and do what their human nature tells them to do. The Bible does not get any support from schools and other secular organizations, so there are no inhibiting forces. It is no wonders that sin is rampant in our society.

Like the people who saw the disciples at Pentecost we have to ask, "Men and brethren, what shall we do (Acts 2:32)?" The answer is not quite the same in our case, but is close. We need to repent and proclaim the truth of God's Word loudly and clearly. Most of all we need to cleanse the church. Although the latter action is nearly impossible when the church is controlled by forces that are not on God's side, we can nevertheless become more aggressive in expressing our desire to be in churches that will speak for God. Unfortunately, the forces of reaction make it very difficult for us prevail. If we express ourselves we may be told as a friend of mine was told by his pastor, "If you don't like it, leave." He did, but was very hurt when no one else supported him! He has never found a church that meets his needs since then. He is greatly concerned about the state of the church, his community and the nation. No one else in the church he left seems to be. He had called the pastors attention to the fact that his local church and the denomination as a whole was not living according to scripture. It's dangerous to be a prophet.