

# “Code of Conduct,”

5 February 2006

Bible passages:

**Micah 6:8** (*The Message*)

God has already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple. Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don't take yourself too seriously—take God seriously.

**Mark 12:30-31** (*TEV*)

*(Jesus said)* “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength...Love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

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Do you recall getting “conduct grades,” or what was once called “deportment, when you were in school. As I recall, conduct or deportment had to do with how we behaved in class. It didn't have anything to do with knowledge of subject matter, but just simply how we conducted ourselves in the course of the class time. That's all very fitting, because the word ‘conduct’ is defined in one sense as “**the way that one acts or behaves.**”

As I recall, I often got comments like “talks too much,” or “not always attentive in class.” I don't know about you, but my parents would tolerate almost any letter grade in any class, but they absolutely would not tolerate a low grade in conduct! Their rationale was that we couldn't exactly control our intelligence and capacity for learning, but we certainly could control or manage responsibly the way we acted in class.

I suspect that most of us have learned that there is a right and wrong way to conduct our lives outside the classroom. We know the basic rules of society, and we know what is expected at work, at school. Occasionally, if we're watching a game like the one that the Colts should be playing in this afternoon, we will see the referee penalize a player for “unsportsmanlike conduct.” That's because the player did not abide by the rules of the game—the rules that determine the right or wrong way to play.

This topic was originally entitled “the Oriole Way,” based on the code of conduct for the Baltimore Orioles baseball team. Earl Weaver, manager of the team during the 1960's, said that the “Oriole Way” consisted of pitching, defense and the three run home run.”

However, it was really more than that. Part of the Oriole way had to do with their farm team—the players who were being brought up and into the Oriole organization. That was the training portion of the team, and it had to do what they referred to as “the right way” to play baseball. That meant solid defense, discipline and team over individual.

The “Oriole Way” worked well for many years. From the mid-60's, the team had a twenty season run during which they won 7 division titles, 6 pennants, and 3 World Series. The

“Oriole Way” was the standard way to doing business for anyone who worked or played for that organization.

Some of us may have heard of another company that had a certain code of conduct, and that was Hewlett-Packard; for that company, it was referred to as “the HP Way.” For many, “the HP Way” bordered on religion, and it was considered inviolable. Basically, it was a management philosophy that emphasized integrity, respect for individuals, teamwork, innovation, and contribution to customers and the community. It had earned the loyalty of thousands of employees since the company was founded by Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard back in 1939. In fact, when the two founders died in 1996 and 2001, obituary writers noted that their enduring legacy was not the multi-billion dollar tech giant; it was “the HP Way.”

At least, it seemed that way at the time. However, times changed, and the company grew more cutthroat in its dealings. Some argue that the new practices have trampled on the company's heart and soul. For years, “the HP Way” was a way of life for its employees, but a new CEO was accused of mishandling layoffs, valuing profits more than people, and creating a cult of personality. Whatever the cause, the HP Way, like the Oriole Way, has been lost, which is often what happens when not everyone believes the values and vows to live by them.

It seems to me that there's a way to live that overrides the Oriole Way, the HP Way, or any other way, and that's the code of conduct that is supposed to govern the way we, as people of faith, live our lives and conduct ourselves. Our two Bible passages point the way for us.

The first is from the prophet Micah who is trying to put words into the hearts of his listeners. Micah was sharing the words of God, and believed he was charged with keeping people alive to God and alert to listening to the voice of God. It is in that sense that he speaks these words:

**God has already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women.**

**It's quite simple. Do what is fair and just to your neighbor,**

**Be compassionate and loyal in your love,**

**And don't take yourself too seriously—take God seriously.**

Let's dissect that a little bit and see what the “faith way” is all about. There are really three basic elements, and the first is: “**do what is fair and just to your neighbor.**” Originally, this meant that it was for each person to learn his or her responsibility to fellow human beings, and to live in accord with that responsibility. Another version of this verse simply reads, “**to do what is just.**” In other words, we know how we are to act in regards to others, and we commit ourselves to abide by those codes of conduct—rules that might be written or unwritten, spoken or unspoken.

For instance, the Ten Commandments served as a basic outline of how the people of Israel were to live humanely with one another, and the same commandments apply to us today. They deal with how we are to respond to God, and how we are to live our lives in a faithful way—not maligning others, showing respect for everyone in everything we say and do.

Next, our version says that element number 2 is to “**be compassionate and loyal in your love.**” Again, another version puts it like this: **to show constant love,**” and yet another uses the word “kindness” instead of love. Whatever word we use in translation, it indicates the kind of loyalty and faithfulness that God has pledged to us, and could well be called “steadfast love.” It refers to loyalty in all human relationships and faithfulness to God.

Then there’s the third basic element, which says: “**Don’t take yourself too seriously; take God seriously.**” Our version is probably pretty loose, and one of the other ones might better represent what is intended here. The original is more closely translated as “**to walk humbly with your God.**” And a more modern version puts it this way: “**to live in humble fellowship with our God.**”

Part of the way I understand this part of the passage is that we are to remember that God is God, and we need to be about trying to live God’s will, God’s way, rather than always insisting on our way, our will. God’s will is always loving, and it is always good. To walk with our God means that we are to live our lives in tune with the way God is, in ways that are always filled with loving goodness.

Our other Bible passage is telling us “the Jesus Way.” A teacher of the Law asked Jesus the question, “Which is the most important commandment of all? And Jesus answered with the “Great Commandments” one and two. He said, “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength...Love your neighbor as you love yourself.**”

It couldn’t be more straightforward, and these words are echoing the essence of Micah’s words to the people of Israel. This code of conduct is relatively simple: Love God with our whole being, and love our neighbors the way we love ourselves.

The way I understand this is that we are to keep ourselves out of the central focus of our lives, and try to live centered on God and God’s direction for our lives. This has everything to do with our relationship with God, and as a consequence, our relationship with others.

Well, what does this all mean for us? What is “the Jesus way” or the “Code of Conduct for the Faithful?” I wonder if it can best be summed up with one word: kindness. That means that the heart of who we are, the central essence of our character is kindness. C. Neil Strait described kindness

quite well, when he said, “**Kindness is more than deeds. It is an attitude, an expression, a look, a touch. It is anything that lifts another person.**” Joseph Joubert put in another way in saying, “**Kindness consists in loving people more than they deserve.**”

A life centered in God will be a life that is obvious by the kindness it shows, kindness toward everyone and every part of creation. It shows itself in everything we do and in everything we say. It shows itself in how we act when we are alone or in a crowd. There can be no other way, if we are being faithful to God.

### **Closing:**

The founder of Methodism, John Wesley, didn’t exactly use the word kindness, but I really think that was the code of conduct that he described when he said:

**Do all the good you can  
By all the means you can  
In all the ways you can  
At all the times you can  
To all the people you can  
As long as ever you can!**

To that I say, “Ditto.”

Have a good Super Bowl Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.