Read the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17?)

Why open with the Ten Commandments? Two reasons. 1. It is a passage we are all familiar with and can relate to. It is essentially our foundation. A place where we all are in agreement. The second reason is because I deeply believe that we cannot take the bible in pieces. It does not serve the greater good to lift up and live out the part we like and ignore the others. It is critical for us to that the bible’s teachings as a whole, Old Testament and New.

Before we move into Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, I have a warning. Parental Discretion is advised. Not because of profanity, but these are loaded texts that some pastors would avoid altogether. Not ours though. Ryan would dive right in and in light of that, and the firm belief that the Holy Spirit will, if I allow it, guide me through these passages and equip me to bring His message forth, above and beyond any mere interpretation I could offer on my own, I shall as well. With that in mind, let’s see where Paul takes us as we continue though his letter to the people of Ephesus, the region, the world for that matter, both then and now.

Ephesians 5:1-6:9 It’s a longer reading, so please close your eyes and hear these words.

Read Ephesians 5:1-6:9

Paul was rather to the point. He tells us what to do, why we are to do it and how to do it. He is very much like a parent teaching a child, or exactly like Christ teaching the church.

In the Message translation, the beginning sounds like this: *Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn’t love in order to get something from us but to give everything to himself to us.* ***Love*** *like that*.

There it is. What to do, why we do it and how to do it. The end.

Just kidding. If Loving is our call, then some consideration of the word LOVE is in order.

I got out my giant Webster’s Dictionary and looked up the word, Love. There was a litany that went on for almost 5 inches, in small print, mind you. It started out with, “ a profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person; and it wasn’t until the 12th definition that you find, “the benevolent affection of God for his creatures, or the reverent affection due from them to God.” Our society and our culture has taken the word love and diluted it so drastically, that we now love things, too often more than people. I found myself saying, “I love my new earrings.” Really? LOVE them? They are earrings. Not another living breathing one of God’s creations. I am also guilty of parting company, saying, “Love you man.” I have been a blind co-conspirator to the mutilation of this word, **LOVE** and I promise you, every time I say it now, I think twice. As we will hear later on, my use of it did not reflect anything sacrificial. I am in big trouble if I equate my affinity for my earring to the love spoken about in John 3:16, where he says, “For God **so loved the world** that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Eugene Peterson tells us that if we are going to recover the word for use in the practice of resurrection, we have a lot of work to do. Indeed. And church is the primary place we have for learning the language of love. He points out that love is not a solitary act. It is relational. A study noted “Love and respect are to characterize all relationships in the body of Christ **as an expression of believers’ commitment to the Lord himself**.”

So when we are hearing Paul talk of love… when we hear him say “**love like that**” think of God’s love, the love of Christ, not a love of a new dress, a favorite old truck, or a book sitting on a shelf.

Now let’s look at how Paul tells us how to imitate God, both in what we to do and what we are **not** to do.

During the time Paul wrote this letter of “Do this” and “Don’t do that” our worlds were not so different than they are today. Casual sex, to loosely use the term, was common practice, even to the point it was part of some initiation ceremonies. In the 1960s we equated being open to anything as enlightened, free spirits. Those holding to conservative religious upbringing were considered uptight and cold, even frigid. I can sort of understand the lack of self-control during a time when the Good News of the Gospel was new, but I am at a loss as to how we continue in this day and age of fornication, where love is reduced to sex without relationship. The very act that brought us into the world, conception, has been turned into a passing urge, acted upon without thought or concern for the consequences. So his “Do Not” message, about sexual immorality is just as relevant today as it was near 2000 years ago. As are his warnings against obscenity, foolish talk, coarse joking, idolatry and greed. He reminds us that we were once in darkness but not only have we come into the light, we **are** the light.

The reason we opened with our mission statement is that I got to thinking about being called **the light**. And as Christians, as **the light** … we are called to live out that statement. The **sharing of the Good News** is what really jumped out at me in two dramatic ways. One was that it takes two, to share. It speaks of relationship, which is a common thread throughout the bible and living out our calling. The other thing I thought of, was, have you ever shared with someone and they felt differently and things got uncomfortable? Perhaps one or both of you became defensive, wanting to shut down instead of digging deeper. I got to thinking, I wonder if that is the light breaking through? Maybe that discomfort is darkness being exposed. I don’t know. It was just a thought I wanted to **share**.

**Walking in Wisdom**

Getting back to Paul, he goes follows his list of don’t with on to a “DO.” Be wise. Make the most of every day. Halfway through our study on Job this summer, Ryan told us this about wisdom. He said, “The reason wisdom is sought, is because it answers the why question. Knowledge tells of the how things happen. Wisdom tells of **the why things happen**.” In Job 28:28, God tells us, “The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom.” The message that rang through to me personally, loud and clear, is **the call to be intentional**. Do what you have to do, what you need to do, but do it wisely. Know what you are doing, why you are doing and who you are doing it for. It’s all for God ultimately. We should never lose sight of that.

We come to another “Don’t”. Don’t get drunk on wine. Instead be filled with the Spirit. You don’t need a long list of reasons why getting drunk, on wine or anything else is a bad idea, and **unwise choice**. It just is. It was then and it is now. Paul follows quickly though with another “Do.” *Be filled with the spirit*. *Speak to each other in psalms, always giving thanks*. Doesn’t that sound nice? Being filled with the Spirit and speaking to each other in hymns and spiritual songs, chanting to the Lord. It was my idea of heaven for a long time. It sounds wonderful, exemplifying thankfulness, kindness and respect. But the key to this passage comes at the end. The wisdom comes at the end. The *why* comes as the end. Ephesians 5:21. *Submit to one another* ***out of reverence to the Lord***. Said in the present tense. Not a onetime event, but an ongoing way of life. Literally meaning, to line up under. Sinclair Ferguson likened it to soldiers placing themselves under a general. Given the ongoing battle with the evil one, the likeness to the military may be quite fitting.

Two things here. One, the wisdom, the why … **out of reverence**. Because of who God is and what the Lord has done, we respond. And two, we can only do this in relationship with each other and with God. We can’t do it all alone. We **need** another in order to submit. Can’t be independent here. Next Paul takes the three most basic relationships found in Christian society and in typical Paulian fashion, tells us do this, don’t’ do that; put off this and put on that; say no to this but say yes to that. He addresses our marriages and home life, the relationship of parents and children, and that of the work environment, all in an effort for us to better understand the dire need to live a life of Love, to live a life of respect, to live a life of submission to one another, **out of reverence for the Lord**.

The next passage is one where I personally walk a fine line between being a hypocrite or being enlightened. When John and I married, I asked to have the line about *obeying or being* *obedient to your husband* taken out of our vows because I thought obedience was something you taught to dogs. I lucked out though, as the Anglican marriage vows didn’t contain those words so we didn’t have to work through that.

However, had it been necessary to have deeper understanding, I would have arrived at the place **I am now** much sooner, that man and wife we were created to complement each other while filling different roles. It’s called divine order. When Paul tells wives to submit to our husbands, he isn’t giving the wife beater a free pass. Quite the contrary, while the role of submission might sound challenging from a woman’s perspective can you imagine the husband’s command, being likened to Christ, as the head of the church?! This passage isn’t about turning back the clocks on women’s right to vote or receive equal pay for equal work, it’s about addressing the different roles we have as man and wife and only when the husband assumes his role as head of the household and only when his wife submits to him, can the two truly become one flesh. Back in a time when women were clearly regarded as lesser to the point they were considered impure at sometimes because of their own bodies, Paul calls upon men to do more than provide, he calls them to, and I quote, “make her holy, cleansing her by the washing of water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless”. That’s a lot. Paul’s equating marriage between man and woman to the profound mystery that is Christ and the church is far deeper and more sacred than a wife letting her husband boss her around. To love to the point of self-sacrifice, literally, paired with the submission that comes with respect, **that** makes a pretty solid foundation on which to build a relationship and raise a family. It makes a solid foundation in which to grow a healthy society.

Moving on to the parents and children, Paul tells us, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

Again, we come back to self-sacrificing love and respect. Note here again, like he did in the case of marriage, Paul points to the submission and then to the one responsible in order to make this relationship as it was designed to be, its divine order. **Children** obey your parents … **Fathers** do not provoke your children, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Lastly we come to the relationship between slaves and masters. And in all practicality, this is instruction for the workplace. There has been much ado made about the citing of slavery in the bible. Matt said it very succinctly at Theology on Tap a week or two ago. Just because it is in the bible doesn’t mean it is good. The bible shares with us the history of Christianity. But just because it happened doesn’t it mean it should have or that as Christians we support it. Sometimes it is merely a fact, and not always a pleasant one. Period. Since slavery was part of the life in the times, Paul had to address it. However, it carries over well into the workplace in this day and age when slavery is **not an accepted** practice in our society.

Salves obey your masters with respect and fear and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. He reminds masters to treat their slaves well because ultimately they are **all serving the same Master** and **he** doesn’t have favorites. In both sections of fathers and children and masters and slaves Paul reminds the people of Ephesus that there is a mutual responsibility to be upheld. There is a relationship that must be honored thru Submission. In that submission respect and love flourish.

As we have been on this journey with Paul, he wasn’t telling the folks in Ephesus anything they didn’t already know. Not telling them anything they hadn’t heard before. So much so that he goes all the way back to the Ten Commandments. What he acknowledges is that Relationships are hard. Love is messy. But we are called into it. Relation. With each other. With God the Father, Christ our Lord and the Holy Spirit that dwells within each of us. And as we work though these relationships, grow them, mend them, nurture them and start new ones, always, always, always be reminded of the why. **Out of reverence for Christ**.