

We Start With the Law

On the Ten Commandments

Rev. Julie Olmsted

TCC

October 8, 2017

Once when my daughter and I went to pick up my son at his friend Alex's house we had to go around the yard a bit to find where they were playing. The house was a large one, situated on a beautiful leafy property, with a swimming pool out back. "Uh-oh," said my little 6 or 7 year-old daughter. "What is it, honey?" "I'm breaking the tenth commandment," she said guiltily.

The Ten Commandments are the oldest most treasured document we have of laws laid down for Jews and Christians. There are many laws that precede these Commandments in particular, and what is known as the "Law of Moses" in general, which is the entire Torah, or first five books of the Hebrew Scripture (although this has been disputed, as about half of the Torah is narrative, or story). These laws, most famous set being the Code of Hammurabi (from Babylonia), mainly deal with social contracts, civic responsibilities and matters of property and punishment, a primitive "constitution, of sorts. Law is a fascinating topic and many people are in love with it as such; that's why people become lawyers and law enforcement, probation and parole officers, to name a few law related positions in society.

The Ten Commandments are laws quite distinct from ordinary or social contract laws. What makes them distinct is that they are laws not only dealing between individuals and society, but laws that address humankind's relationship to God. Most of us understand that laws that we have today are theoretically not to restrict and suppress, but to serve and protect. Laws serve and protect us so that life can proceed as smoothly as possible. So that people can get from one place to another, raise and enjoy their families, live lives of relative peace and prosperity. In our constitution we are guaranteed "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." This cannot happen, most of us agree, without a healthy and fair set of laws. We may argue and bicker about what laws are fair, what laws are necessary and what laws are outmoded and biased, but no one would argue that laws are unnecessary or in general, a bad idea.

The beauty of Scripture and any eternal idea is that it applies to nations, to societies and cultures, and to individuals as well. We can go from the general to the particular, and mostly we focus on the particular here. How do we "govern" ourselves? Why is it important to do so? I say we start with the law. I say for our purposes this morning that doing our best to obey the law (in whatever setting) just gives us a fighting chance at something much greater than just being a good person, or living a decent life where we "do no harm." Our Ten Commandments (which are so rich and many layered) and our New Covenant in Christ (Love God, love your

neighbor as yourself) make it possible for us to have something that otherwise might be difficult or impossible: *vision*.

Without vision, I am a robot. Without integrity I have no real vision; I'm just struggling to cover my tracks. What is integrity to you? Being true to your ideals? Being true to your faith? Your family? Your hopes and dreams? All of the above.

Consider that there are no high ideals without vision. A vision of a life well lived might include service to others and to God. But if we are undermining the hopes and dreams of others, vision is impossible, because we will be engaged in defensive story that makes us look good and other look bad. Our minds will be preoccupied with a defense that can cloud our vision and distort our thinking.

Consider that vision is impossible without integrity. If I have no integrity (I don't pay my bills, I don't keep my word, I don't make my bed, I don't take care of my body... All these can be matters of integrity that keep us from seeing what's possible.), then I cannot be inspired or inspire others.

Consider that keeping the law is basically not just to "be good" or keep us safe from harm, but it is to clear the space for vision. And when we have vision we have the hope for what is possible.

Worship can be considered as a way to clear your own life of unnecessary clutter. Prayer and meditation can be considered as ways of addressing and restoring our own integrity, thus breathing new life into our future and the future of others.

It is in keeping and restoring our integrity up against the law of Moses and the law of Jesus that we can become enraptured, empowered, enthusiastic and enthralled with the possibility of love and peace, of an enduring justice and of treatment of the world as though it were our very own child. You can see how the psalmist feels when he says:

The law of the Lord is perfect,
refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

⁸The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

⁹The fear of the Lord is pure,

enduring forever.

The decrees of the Lord are firm,
and all of them are righteous.

¹⁰They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.

Sweeter than honey from the comb. This is how I feel about the laws of God. They pave the way for a life that is sweeter than honey from the comb, more precious than gold. I hope you feel that way, too.