



The Fulfillment of the Law

Ezekiel 36:24-28

Sunday, July 6, 2025, Aledo

Rev. Dr. David R. Schultz

Last Sunday was really special. I loved the music Mike brought to our 8 am folk service. That was followed by a wonderful all-church worship experience at 9:15 which included the baptism of Tomika and Hope Guyton—plus, we received Tomika into full membership of the church. What a joy!

At both 8 am and 9:15, I announced that our church had received a wonderful, lasting gift from Verla Thompson's estate. Afterwards, our trustees served a wonderful fellowship meal at which we raised \$961 for improvements to our kitchen.

After church, Candice and I went to Old Oaks in Milan and enjoyed live music by Jordan Danielson. After he completed his set, we trekked over to the Full Gospel Revival Center in

Kolona, Iowa, to hear guest evangelist Dr. Michael Smalley. That was special because Mike was in our youth group back when we were youth pastors in our former denomination in Garland, Texas. I was with Mike when he was a junior high kid called into the ministry. Mike is literally one of the fruits of our ministry, and he preached an excellent sermon on the righteousness of Christ. We'd kept in touch through Facebook, but we hadn't seen Mike in person in over forty years.

Last Sunday, everything was perfect, except for one thing: I was really unhappy with my sermon at the 8 o'clock service, especially given that Mike Smalley's sermon was so good that night! Then again, he preached for nearly an hour. It'll take me three services this morning and it still won't add up to an hour!

As it turned out, there was a glitch with getting last week's service uploaded to WRMJ, and they weren't able to broadcast it. When Terry James notified me of the glitch, I said, "Thank you, Jesus!" I took it as a God-wink. God didn't like my sermon any more than I did.

We're just finishing Adam Hamilton's book about the Ten Commandments in our Tuesday morning Bible study, and my sermon last week was on the Ten Commandments. As I was preparing for this week's message, I couldn't get away from them, and I took that as the Spirit drawing me back to those ancient rules.

The Ten Commandments have been in the news lately, because two states, Louisiana and Texas, now require posting the Ten Commandments in every public school classroom. A third state, Oklahoma, requires the use of the Bible in public schools.

I get it. We are "One Nation, Under God." And our currency reminds us, "In God we trust." I hope we're not creating some Christian version of sharia law. Besides, the Ten Commandments are laws handed down by God through Moses to the people of Israel as they were being transformed from slaves in Egypt to a nation holy unto God. I don't think the Ten Commandments were intended to be the end, as it were. They were intended to be the means to a greater end. And the end—or the goal—of the Ten Commandments is for us to live in relationship at a couple of different levels.

The first three commandments—to worship God alone and respect his name—have to do with our relationship to our Creator.

The fourth commandment is about Sabbath rest, and while it also concerns our relationship with our Creator, it adds the idea that as his created people, we must take care of ourselves by giving ourselves rest. And that would have been welcome news to a people who had been nothing more than slave labor in Egypt.

The fifth commandment is about our relationship with our parents. Taken together, the first five commandments have to do with our relationship to those who have given us life, and to respect those life-givers.

The final five commandments concern our relationship with neighbor. In other words, the final five call us to respect life, marriage, property, and truth. That is, they call us to live in relationship with other people who, like us, have been created by our God.

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Good laws are relational laws. They are rooted in relationships, and they help us to live in relationship with one another.

In December 2000, Lieutenant Scott Gillen of the Chicago Fire Department was assisting at a crash on the Dan Ryan Expressway when he was struck and killed by an intoxicated driver. In the aftermath of that tragedy, his family and friends called for the creation of a state law which requires drivers who are approaching an emergency or police vehicle to slow down and, if possible, to change lanes. It's known as Scott's Law, and it's a law that was legislated out of a relationship that family and coworkers had with Lt. Scott Gillen. Even today it requires drivers to be in relationship with first responders on the highway, if only for a few fleeting moments. In other words, good laws are relational laws. And they are also means to a greater end.

Likewise, the Ten Commandments were the means to an end, rather than the end itself. Laws that are means to an end may be legislated. However, the end to which they are a means cannot be legislated. The Ten Commandments are posted in some southern classrooms because the lawmakers in those states legislated it. But they cannot legislate the ends, which is to say, they cannot legislate the goal. That's because **you cannot legislate the heart.**

Let's face it: Laws are created for the lowest common denominator in society. I don't need a law to tell me to slow down when there's an accident or when there are men working in a construction zone. I don't need a law to tell me to slow down in a school zone when children are present. That's because I love those children and I love those construction workers. I don't know their names, and I may never see them again in my life, but that doesn't matter. I still love them because they are my neighbors.

Jesus touched on some of the commandments in his Sermon on the Mount.

²¹ “You have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’ ²² But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell...

²⁷ “You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-30, NLT)

Jesus wasn't proposing new laws; he wasn't trying to legislate anything. Rather, he was looking to the fulfillment of the law which would happen with the transformation of our hearts. Ezekiel described it this way:

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²⁴ “For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. ²⁸ Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God” (Ezekiel 36:24-28).

There it is: the goal of the Law. A transformed heart is the goal of law. And we don't have to wait until we get to heaven for that to happen. It can happen here and now. It's why Jesus said the greatest commandment was to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. And the second is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself.

It was never God's goal to simply establish law. Rather, law—the Ten Commandments—were established as the means to a greater goal, which is a transformed heart. And posting the Ten Commandments cannot change the heart. Only love can do that. Paul had this to say to the church at Rome:

⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:8-10).