

Sermon:

The Commandments 6-10; Loving Others

Near the end of his ministry after Jesus had "set His face to go to Jerusalem," He was traveling through Samaria when He sent a few of His disciples ahead into a nearby village to prepare a place for their evening rest. But when the villagers heard where Jesus was headed, so great was their hatred for Jews in general, that they refused to offer Him any hospitality. The brothers James and John were so incensed by this insult that they asked permission to call down fire from Heaven to destroy the town. Jesus simply rebuked the two brothers and walked on to the next village (Luke 9:21 ff).

Now, some 50 years later, his brother James having long ago been killed as the second martyr of the Jesus movement, the aged John the Apostle wrote these words of instruction for the young church.

*We love because He first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: **those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.***

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. 1 John 4:19 - 5:2

What was John trying to communicate here?

Years ago when Jesus was asked about the greatest Commandment, His reply was to summarize them all into Loving God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and loving your neighbor equally. Jesus said that if you can follow these two, then you will have obeyed all of God's commandments. Now in the verse we just read, the Apostle John, who at one time would have burned down a village for inhospitality, has summarized that Great Commandment down even further... **If you love God you will love God's children and you do both by obeying all the commandments.**

A few weeks back, I told you that among other things, the Ten Commandments were intended to serve as our teacher. As we learned to obey the commandments, they would help us grow away from strict obedience to a set of negative rules, into a loving relationship with God, which would have us obeying all the other rules instinctively. **Loving God and loving others would have us automatically and unconsciously living in conformity with His commandments.**

So which would you prefer to live by, a list of rules telling you what not to do.... or a personal desire to live your life loving God and loving His children? That choice seems like a no-brainer to me. I would rather live my life by what I have been encouraged to do, rather than what I have been told not to do.

Interestingly this educational aspect of the Ten Commandments -- growing from obedience, to a set of rules, into instinctively living in a positive way -- is exactly how every healthy child should grow up.

Every child ever born first enters the world as the most selfish, self-centered person they could possibly be. They can't help being this way, their own little world of wants and immediate needs is all that they know. But very quickly they learn to attach their affection to that large person, or persons who gives them what they want. Then through a series of training exercises instituted by those larger persons, usually based on "don't" ... don't touch, don't bite, don't walk out into the street, the growing child learns to modify their self-centered behavior to fit in as a member of society. If those lessons have been well taught and well learned, then the young adult will eventually, instinctively, abide by all those rules as a means both of self-love and preservation, but also out of love for others. Which brings us back to the topic of the Ten Commandments.

God gave us the Commandments as an expression of His deep passionate love for us; saying if we keep faith with Him through obedience to these commands, then we will be His treasured possession among all the peoples of the earth. **Two weeks ago we learned that the first four commands were meant to teach us just that: How to return God's love back to Him** -- by not substituting anything else for His place in our life, nor by trying to diminish or control Him in any way and certainly by not ignoring His desire to live in fellowship with us. For what is **Sabbath keeping** other than our intentional setting aside of time to "*glorify God and enjoy Him forever,*" which as our Catechism would teach us is the chief purpose of our life.

So if the first four commands can be summarized as "*Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength,*" let us now consider how the next six commands can be summarized as "*loving your neighbor as much as you love yourself.*" As John the Apostle wrote, **we were designed not only to love God but to also love those whom God loves and we must do both if we want to be God's child.**

So let's begin with the fifth command, which interestingly, as the Apostle Paul would remind us, is the only one that comes with a promise attached:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'—this is the first commandment with a promise: 'so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.' Ephesians 6:1-3

Note, that the fifth commandment is a lifelong command to always respect, love and faithfully honor our parents. Although the way in which a child honors his or her parents changes over time, the command remains; the honor giving doesn't stop when we turn eighteen, twenty-one, or even sixty-five.

But how then does the promise work with the fifth command? Think of it this way. This is a command for us to learn respect and honor for the most basic level of

authority in our lives and then by extension all other appropriate authorities. Our parents are the very first authorities placed over us within the structure of God created order. **It is the parent who will first embody God to us and as we grow, teach us to love God – or not – as they do.** So if we wish to live happily in this world we will have to learn how to live under and to honor first our parents and by extension God's other appropriately placed authorities: police, governors, drill sergeants, etc. How well we learn to honor parental authority will dramatically impact how we relate to these other authorities, that's where the promises of "living long" and "living well" come in.

But "honor" also asks much more than mere obedience. To honor means to "revere". Both sin and righteousness begins in the heart! So honor also is a heart attitude, expressing reverence or respect. To "honor" be it father or mother or judges or a president or senator or employer or whomever, is ultimately a choice of the will and a matter of the heart. **Just as God wants more than our basic obedience but also our honor and affection, honoring our parents is where we first learn to give both.**

Then as we grow in this obedience and honor which leads to affection, it then extends from our parents not only to those with official authority but also to those whom we should recognize as having inherent authority. Thus again this command to honor your parents grows from being a just rule to obey, into a mindset for loving and honoring all who deserve such respect. In his letter to the young pastor Timothy, the Apostle Paul instructs him that when having to correct an older person in the church, to not disgrace them, but to be respectful and kind, **appealing to them as a father or a mother** (1 Tim. 5:1-2) . The implied meaning of this phrase is that if it is right to treat one's father or mother with respect even when they are in error, so also this is how we should treat all those older than us; honoring the life they have lived and hopefully the wisdom they have accrued.

Then the further natural extension of this fifth command is that we should treat all people as we would treat our father and mother both as a reflection of our relationship with God and in recognition of their relationship with God. *If you love God you will love God's children.*

Then, because we probably needed such, the next five commandments simply give explanatory details for how we are to demonstrate our love and honor for others as much as we love and honor both our parents and God: not murdering others, nor stealing from them, nor cheating on them, nor telling lies about them, nor being jealous of their successes.

Notice how in His teaching, Jesus expanded upon each one of these following commands explaining that they were more than just laws restricting actions but actually intended to be reflections of our attitude, our love, for all of "God's children."

In his "sermon on the mount," Jesus applied the command against committing **murder** to any internal critical attitude or harsh word spoken against another. He went on to declare a broken relationship which we have with a brother or sister will be a hindrance to our relationship with God; advising us to heal our relationships with others before we come to God in worship. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus even taught that we should ask God to qualify His forgiveness of our sins based upon our forgiveness of other's sins against us (this is the part of that prayer which really makes me stop and think). Thus the sixth command, "you shall not commit murder" joins with the fifth; both teaching that we should love others, especially our parents, as much as we love God.

In a similar way Jesus then expanded the command against **adultery** into a prohibition against any form of lust which might draw our hearts away from those we have vowed to love. In this way the seventh command becomes a human version of the first command. We are to love our spouse just as purely as we love God; with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Then the commands against **stealing** from another or **coveting** their possessions, grows not only into a command for giving fair wages – if you do not give your worker a fair wage are you not stealing from them – but also a command to share generously from your abundance.... both again indicating how we treat people as being a reflection of how much we love God. As John the Apostle wrote, *how does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?* (1 John 3:17).

So there you have it, the Ten Commandments which begin with rules for how we are to act towards both God and our fellow humans eventually become a simple set of two guidelines for how to live in a relationship of love with both God and God's children.

When is less more? When we can trade a rule bound life which keeps us focused on a list of negatives – which will eventually grow 613 strong – for two simple precepts which can free us to live an abundant and unrestricted life not only loving and honoring both God but all of God's children. This is what the Commandments, the first four and the last six, are intended to produce in our life.

Let's pray about this