

## 20180311 Directions for Life

Rev. Dawn told me she didn't expect me to fit tightly within her sermon series on grace and covenant but, me being me, I wanted to have our messages fit together. I struggled at first to determine how the Ten Commandments fit into a series on God's covenants. I went back to chapter 19 to give me a running start at them and there it was.

Exo 19:3-8: Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." So, Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, "We will do everything the LORD has said." So, Moses brought their answer back to the LORD.

There is the covenant language! This was just prior to Moses meeting God on the mountain and receiving the tablets. Then it hit me that the place these tablets were stored was within the Ark of the Covenant which traveled with the people wherever they went and when Solomon finally built it, the Ark of the Covenant was kept in the inner-most spot in the Temple, the Holy of Holies. The Ark or the Covenant symbolized God's presence with the people. The Ten Commandments were within that presence. I like that symbolism.

Moses came down from mount Sinai with two tablets. The first dealt with how to have a right relationship with God, and the second tablet dealt with how to have a right relationship with your fellow citizen. This is the split Jesus gave in his telling of the greatest commandment. First it was to be in a loving relationship with God, and the second was to be in loving relationship with your neighbor. Rev. Dawn included this great commandment from Jesus last week. Here it is from Mark.

Mark 12:29-31 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

I’m going to be looking at these commands in three different ways:

Through the eyes of a sinner

Through the eyes of a lawyer

Through the eyes of God

First through the eyes of a sinner.

We look at the list of rules and most often think in two different ways. Either we feel shame for our failure or feel superior looking at our neighbors who appear to be failing worse than us.

As humans we tend to compare ourselves. If there is a standard we look to see how we’re doing against it. If there is another person with us we check out how we compare to how they are doing. The joke about two people running away from a bear comes to mind. One says, “You can’t outrun a bear” and the other replies, “I don’t have to outrun the bear I just have to outrun you.” Obviously, that’s not the goal but we go there. We think as long as there’s someone doing worse and they haven’t been struck by lightning, then we’re safe. We go into survival mode first and foremost.

I’m betting the moment I understood what the ten commandments said, I tried to give myself a score. I’m betting that you did too. Because we see we don’t meet all the expectations of the law we feel shame. We see the law as something that makes us worthy or unworthy. If we feel we are doing well obeying, then God must love us because that would be fair. If we don’t feel so good, especially when we’re told even thinking about breaking one is equal to breaking one, well then, we hope God is looking in the opposite direction and we can hide from Him. Treated in this way the commandments can cause separation from God due to our shame. That’s not what was intended.

Moses didn't receive the tablets until after the people were liberated from bondage and fed in the desert by God's manna. God didn't wait to provide his love until after they obeyed, and he doesn't withhold his love if we fail today. God's love continues to be poured on us through his grace, not because we deserve it, but because we exist. That would be that Prevenient Grace that Rev Dawn preached about with Noah and the rainbow. The law was instruction in how to live as a child of God, not how to earn becoming one.

The daily devotional The Disciplines brought out a quote recently that speaks to this. "There's nothing you could ever do that would make God love you more, and there's nothing you could ever do that would make God love you less." The law wasn't sent to cause us to feel scared, or shameful, or fear separation from God. Yet when we see the commandments through the eyes of a sinner that is often what happens.

There were a few times in scripture where someone who felt they were especially law abiding bragged to Jesus. In most cases they were the Pharisee, or lawyers of the community. Let's look at these scriptures through the eyes of a lawyer.

Through the eyes of a lawyer

The Pharisee were the experts in the law. They made the words of God more detailed to make sure they could judge compliance more accurately. It makes me think of the case law documents judges put out after each trial to help others after them see how they judged a person as guilty or innocent.

Judging others is the name of their game, so being as detailed as possible about what would be OK and not-OK is important. The focus is still very much on the sinner and their relationship to the law, but in this case, it is judgment of another not self-reflection.

Looking at the commandments through these eyes reminded me of the portion of my career I spent writing information security policy. I created policy for two different large corporations. When the policy was first created it was just a few pages long. Then Audit got involved. They wanted more specific wording "to bring clarity". The clarity was for them to more easily judge whether the rule had been broken more than for the person reading the rule to understand it. Adding more detail at times moved the end goal out of sight. The end goal was to protect

information. Having a large book of rules caused people to just do a word search for what they wanted to do and if it wasn't explicitly listed as forbidden they figured they couldn't get an audit finding on it – even if it obviously lessened information protection. They lost sight of the true goal. The goal became not getting an audit finding instead of the goal being to protect information.

The lawyers sometimes were responding to the people's request to provide more detail. If God was going to punish them for not obeying the sabbath then they wanted to know exactly what to do and what not to do to stay on God's good side. So, they created a whole group of rules around what defined "Sabaoth rest". Jesus broke those rules quite often so obviously they weren't what God intended.

The word Torah is often translated as "Law" but it can also be translated closer to "direction" or "teaching". This brings me to my final exploration.

Through the eyes of God

It may sound presumptuous that I'm claiming to describe what God thinks. No, He didn't come to me and write on my computer screen with a flaming finger. Christ gives us the mind of God by his example, and other scripture supports these thoughts. I'm also relying on the nudges of the Holy Spirit from time in study and prayer. I'm going to take you down a path that many scriptures have led but ask you to take it more seriously.

I don't think God meant for us to feel shame, or to judge each other based on how well we followed the laws he gave us. The intent was not to provide a way for us to make sure we kept God on our side. The intent was to give us direction in how to stay connected to God and how to treat each other. From the eyes of both the sinner and the lawyer it feels like the main interrelationship is between the person and the law. From the eyes of God, the key interrelationship is between the person and God and the person and their brother.

The first three commandments can sound like God has an ego problem.

You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an image.

You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.

The truth of the matter is that God is where we get our strength and if we desire to connect to God nothing else can be in the way. The analogy I go to in my head is of a power outlet. I need to plug in my lamp if I want it to light my room. If I move anything, especially something with weight, in front of it I can no longer reach the outlet and my lamp stays dark. Sure, I could use an extension cord, but that doesn't last as long and most often can't provide as strong a current as the source outlet. That extension cord could be seen as an idol in some creative ways, but I'll try to hold myself back.

These commandments are more like our parent's command to "eat your vegetables" than you'd think. God wants to provide us with strength for the journey. The psalms understood this.

Psa 118:14 The LORD is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.

Paul understood this and he wrote the Philippians.

Phl 4:13 I can do all things in him who strengthens me.

The first commandments protect us from losing connection to the source of our strength. They are given from a loving God that wants to support us directly. He does not go against our free will so if we put things between us he doesn't remove them. Our life is much easier when we can "plug in" to God's strength though.

The fourth commandment has to do with resting. Back when I was young I thought my Mom and Dad put me to bed, so they could get some kid-free time. Little did I know that it was for my health, so I could grow and thrive! Without sleep my brain didn't work as well and my body couldn't have those wonderful growth spurts. The fourth commandment is one of the hardest for me to follow, but it is the one that needs no poetic analogy. We've got work to do. Get some rest!

It is interesting to me that the commandment to honor your parents is considered part of the first tablet, the one dealing with how to have a right relationship with God. God is the great creator. Your parents created you. To practice respect for those that created you is to respect the great creator. This isn't limited to biological creation because how you raise a child also creates who they become.

My parents kept me alive and taught me my first life lessons. Respecting them is training for learning to respect my Father through Christ.

The remaining five commandments have to do with how we treat each other. We see the law as a benchmark. God sees the law as a path to walk through life. We've got our eyes on the wrong end game. The point isn't to check off how well you fulfill each law. The point is to understand how to love. We often miss the "why" of the law. It was created to provide direction in how to love. In this way it dovetails into the Sanctifying Grace Rev Dawn spoke of last week. It gives us guidance in learning to live and love as Jesus did. He was our example of how to love like God desires. Love binds us together as a Holy people.

I'm going to take this one step further. It may sound a little crazy at first, but I believe scripture supports it. The definition of "sanctify" is "to set apart or to declare Holy." I believe when we love each other we are showing love toward God because God is part of who we are.

1 John 4:11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4:12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

God is within us. There is a part of each of us that is God, that is the divine nature in our human form. Here is a segment from Matthew chapter 25 that also makes me believe in this way.

Mat 25:37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you. "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

I'm beginning to see that very literally. We are part of God. We are part divine. We have been called members of Christ's body with Christ as the head. To act unkindly to your neighbor is act unkindly to God, and to yourself. To see our neighbor as separate from us is an illusion. We are one in the spirit, one with

each other, and one with God. Scripture tells us there is nothing we can do to separate us from the love of God. Just perhaps that is because God is part of us, not some separate being. We are one.

Here's the analogy that sprung to mind for me. Did you realize that our bodies are half us, and half microorganisms, mostly bacteria? For a while they thought it was 10 to 1 meaning 10 times the number of bacteria to human cells but new science has dropped that to 1.3 bacteria for each 1 human cell. Still I am less than 50% human. Before you say yuck I'd like to remind you that you are also in the same condition. Yet I consider myself 100% ME! Most of us even help populate our little inner village by eating yogurt after taking antibiotics for example. All of this makes me who I am and keeps my body functioning properly on this planet.

We must start seeing ourselves like an organism, not just an organization. We are the inner village of the body of Christ. Loving each other strengthens the community. Building each other up empowers the whole group. Looking at the commandments as "law" draws us into thinking they need a judge and jury. What Jesus taught was that sin required a gentle physician to help heal the sinner which healed the overall body.

When we have a problem in our body we can't function well. We often end up sleeping more and not able to go to work while the illness travels through the system, until the body's defenses kick in. If the disease is serious we'll pull in a doctor to help us heal. We have dis-ease within the body of Christ sometimes too. This causes us to work less effectively. We focus on the problem, the differences of opinion, and lose sight of the work God has called us to do.

We may need rules from our heavenly Father to teach us right from wrong in the beginning, but hopefully as we mature in our faith we can see the reasons behind them. Being in harmony isn't something we do to prevent God's anger. Being in harmony is how we strengthen the body of Christ to do God's work in this world. Through God's grace we can grow in our understanding until we are like the Corinthians.

2Co 3:3 You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts

The commandments are directions to help us along until our vision aligns with God's. The commandment to love God requires us to love our fellows. The relationship to track progress on isn't between us and the commandments. The relationship is always between us and God. God doesn't let anything come between He and us. For our wellbeing, He asks us not to let anything come between us and Him from our side. God is the source of all strength. We would be foolish to block that flow. The core of these commandments from my study, is to love and support each other so we can respond to God's call together as a strong and thriving body.

Don't block your source, get enough rest, respect the folks that kept you alive, and be nice to your sister and brother. We're even closer than family in God's eyes. We are one.

I wrote a children's song I hope helps us remember this message. It is not about keeping score. The lesson is to learn how to love.

<https://soundcloud.com/darci-strutt/how-to-love>

My son I hope you know how much I love you  
And I hope you also know I love your sister too  
I need you to listen, I don't want to say this twice  
When you two are together treat your sister nice

Daddy I need more so I know what to do  
Can you explain how I should see this through  
Dad wrote out examples of how being nice would look  
He tried not to go overboard or create a book

Don't pull your sister's pony tails; that would make her cry  
Don't touch her favorite toys or her blanket hide  
I hope this is a help, please learn from this list  
Or I may need to punish you if you behave amiss

I didn't pull her pony tails instead I pulled her bangs  
And it wasn't even on the list me scaring her with fangs



So really you can't punish me; the list I did obey  
If you want to punish someone look in Mommy's way

She pulled sister's pony tails; the hair brush made her cry  
She took her favorite blanket in the clothes washer to hide  
Daddy you don't seem pleased that I obeyed the list  
I'm guessing there was a point there that I might have missed

I can imagine God the Father feeling just like this poor Dad  
He gave us some directions, but we treat our brother bad  
We missed the lesson in His words from above  
The reason why he gave them was to teach us how to love

Amen