

“You Shall Love The Lord Your God With Your Whole Heart”

There are ten commandments given by God to Moses. The Rabbis further broke these down into 613 mitzvot or commandments believed to be in the Torah. 248 were positive commandments and 365 were negative. Today, the scripture places before us these ten commandments. Every Christian must read, learn and inwardly digest them. Please turn to prayer book, page 847-848 and review them with me while I show you what happens when they are broken and the correct attitude that you and I must adopt before God in their behalf.

His name was Timothy. In his graduating year, he had won an essay contest and a half scholarship to the college of his choice for four years. All he had to do was to attend the scholarship banquet, to enroll in the college of his choice, to send proof of his enrollment and maintain a certain academic grade point. Please note that the first rule was that he had to attend the scholarship banquet. If he could not attend, he was to notify the organization that gave the scholarship of the dire emergency that prevented his attendance. What do you suppose happen to Timothy?

I. God’s Ten Commandments-Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20

In an atmosphere of thunder, lightening, volcanic fire and thick darkness, the Israelites heard the ten words or commandments of God being given. From out of this foreboding background, the booming voice of God said: *“You shall have no other gods but me, you shall not worship idol gods, you shall not use my name profanely and you shall keep the seventh day of rest and worship sacred. Honor your father and mother, respect your elders. You shall not murder, commit adultery nor steal. You shall not gossip, slander nor lie on one another. And you shall not be envious, desirous of your neighbor’s house, your neighbor’s wife, male or female servant, his oxen, donkey nor of anything that belongs to your neighbor.”* Exodus 20:1-16. The immediate response of the people was to cringe in fear and beg Moses only to relay God’s message to them from that day forward. If God spoke directly to them again, they believed that they would die.

Why is it that most of us do not observe the law or rules unless the fear of God is in us. How many young children do you know will pick up after themselves, take their baths without prodding, wash the dishes or help with things around the house because they want to share the household chores? How many of us truly put God first, refrain from saying little bad words, give back to God a generous share of our blessings, and set aside regular times of pray and meditate to God without the fear of God being put in us? The murderer, adulterer, thief, addict, and abuser usually doesn’t stop until he/she is caught. And do not mention gossip, slander or the little white lies that we think we can pass on with impunity.

There is something within human nature that more often than not responds only to fear of punishment. So, the Israelites said to Moses, *“You speak to us, and we will listen, but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.”* Exodus 20:19b. Will they indeed listen? It had just been recent that they complained against Moses’ leadership when they were hungry and later when they were thirsty-thus they did not listen to God’s words through Moses.

Moses, nevertheless, assured them that God's intention was not to kill but to save them. He said, *"Do not be afraid, for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin."* Exodus 20:20.

And so the ten commandments are given to us to save our lives and to order our society, not to kill or just make our lives miserable. So too, the rules and regulations in our families and in society are given to help give order to our homes and society. Know the rules, follow the rules and live a good life before God and human kind.

II. When People Do Break The Law-Matthew 21:33-46

In Matthew 21, Jesus finds himself in the synagogue in the presence of the Pharisees and scribes. They are seeking anyway possible to destroy him. Like the Israelites at Sinai, they do not want to hear the words of God, even through a spokesperson. And so, Jesus told them a story about a landowner who had a vineyard that he leased out to tenants.

The landowner had used his land to plant a vineyard, secured it with a fence, conveniently put a wine press in it and built a watchtower for its protection. Then he generously leased it out to tenants as he journeyed into a far country. Now mind you, the land, vines, fence, press and watchtower all belonged to the landowner. All he required at harvest time was a few table grapes and some wine from his vineyard.

Nevertheless, when he sent servants to collect his share of the harvest, the tenants twice beat, killed and stoned the servants. Then he gave them another chance, thinking that they would respect his own son enough to send him his due. Ah, but the tenants saw this as their opportunity. They said, *"This is the heir,"* the old man will never come back here again. Now is our chance to own the whole enchilada. *"Come let us kill him and get his inheritance."* Matthew 21:38 And, so they did! When the story of the tenants was ended, Jesus then asked the Pharisees what should be done with those tenants.

They were quick to judge and said, *"He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."* Matthew 21:41. They had answered correctly, but did they understand the import of what they had just concluded? Many times we are caught in a similar situation. We often do not learn from the wisdom we have gained elsewhere.

Jesus' reply was, that the stone which was once rejected by the builder has become the chief cornerstone. There is an amazing thing about God. Time and again, those who have been rejected by society and even by the church, God gives a special place: A Moses who had a speech impediment became a powerful spokesperson before Herod; David, a once mercenary among the Philistines, solidified and unified Israel against all foreigners, including the Philistines; the shifting sands of Simon Son of John became Peter, the solid rock of the church; and, of course, Jesus a simple carpenter from the village of Nazareth was the Christ of God. The Pharisees understood too well what Jesus meant and they didn't like it.

The primary sin of the tenants in the story was covetousness-the sin of desiring others' goods. The sin of covetousness festered into greed. Greed led them to abuse, killing and murder the heir of the landowner. Jesus in Luke's gospel said, *"Beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."* Luke 12:15. And Paul

wrote, *“For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it.”* II Timothy 3:2-5. We, like the tenants, must beware of holding the form of religion but denying the power of it.

The sin of the Pharisee was pride, boasting and the presumption that they had a corner on God’s favor. In today’s gospel, Jesus was calling them to an accounting in the presence of God before it was too late. Some heeded the message. Many did not.

III. The Attitude We Need Before God-Philippians 3:4b-14

In philippians, Paul finds himself near his end. He previously said it really didn’t matter to him whether he lived or died. He would have preferred to die and be with Jesus, nevertheless, if that was not what Jesus wanted him to do, he would be content to remain alive for the Philippians’ progress and faith in the Lord. Last week in essence, he challenged them to work out their salvation in fear and trembling, knowing that it is not easy to obey all of the laws of God. This week Paul set before the Philippians, you and me and people of all ages, the quintessential attitude and goal for every Christian.

First, he establish his credential before Jew and gentile alike. No one could out distance him in religious pedigree. He was circumcised on the eighth day. He was a full blooded Hebrew from the chosen people of God. He came from the same tribe as David and Jesus, the tribe of Benjamin. He studied law as a Pharisee under Gamaliel. He proved his zeal in keeping the law by being a persecutor of Christians and as to his adherence to the law, he was blameless. Paul had all of those attributes and assets. His credentials were impeccable,

Second, Paul discounted all of them in comparison to his relationship with Jesus Christ. To him, they were like dog waste. His credentials of righteousness according to the law, his striving to be perfect before God had been infused by a different kind of righteousness—one that was not merited but bestowed upon him by the grace of God. As a result of that blessing, he had an overwhelming feeling of the sheer undeserved love of the creator.

Third, he had received this relationship with God and hungered for more. Moreover, he wanted to know the power of Jesus’ resurrection which is only obtained through sharing in Christ’s suffering, death and triumph over death.

Finally, he felt that he had not quite gotten there yet because his whole life was driven by the desire to please God and he believed that God was keeping him alive to guide his churches in the right direction. I truly believe that children’s desire too is to please their parents and have their parents be proud of them. Paul concluded, *“Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.”* Philippians 3:13b.

Now back to Timothy. Timothy did not attend the scholarship banquet and he did not notify the scholarship organization of any dire emergency. Six week later, he called the organization to ask why he had not received his scholarship. Timothy did not attend the scholarship banquet, did not explain why and did not notify the organization that he had enrolled in the college of his choice. Unfortunately, Timothy lost a half scholarship for four years. Why? He did not follow the rules.

In today's lessons, we had set before us the Ten Commandments. They constitute the standard by which we are to live before God and before one another. They are not easy to keep but God's intention for us is life not death. The Gospel lesson showed us what happens when we brazenly flaunt God's laws through covetousness or pride. And. Paul tried to help us to live in gratitude for what Jesus Christ has done for us. Therefore, having the spirit of God within us, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, we must press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us seek to follow God's commandments, give God his due and seek to make each day a little better than the last.

Let us pray. O God who has given us your laws to direct us, sent your son Jesus Christ to teach us and your Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth: help us to empty ourselves of all pride and arrogance and to lean heavily upon you, as we seek to live out our lives in gratitude for you love for each of us. We pray this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.