

“WHAT DO I DO WITH THESE?”
Psalm 19:7-14, Matthew 21:33-46, Exodus 20:1-20
October 3 & 4, 2020

Today is Communion Sunday for us here at Fountain Park UMC, so I invite those of you who are seeing this at home or hearing it on the radio, to take a moment to prepare the elements of communion so that you will be ready at the end of the message today.

We heard this morning in Psalm 19 that “*the law of the Lord is perfect...*” (vs. 7), that God’s “*...commands...are trustworthy...and right...and just...*” (8). **King David lifts up the value of having God’s laws in our lives** so that they guide us and protect us from sin and disobedience to God’s Word. Since God’s Word is truth, since God’s laws are trustworthy and right and just, it does us good to learn them and have them active in our lives so that we might follow God’s ways every day.

But “while the Law is valid, **the Law does not solve our sin problem.** The Law is like a mirror. When you go into your bathroom and look into the mirror, you see the hair that needs to be combed, the face that needs to be cleaned, or the tie that needs to be straightened. The mirror reveals what is wrong that needs to be made right. The mirror does not actually comb the hair, wipe the face, or straighten the tie. It is only there to reveal, not to fix.

“The mirror is like the Law. It’s a reflector. It shows you what’s wrong. It shows you what you really are. But the Law can’t fix your problem. It can show you sin. It can show you dirt and grime. But what the Law could not do, Christ Jesus did. Christ Jesus fixed the problems we have with sin!

“Many people today think that in order to be made right with God they have to keep God’s Law. The problem is that, even on their best day, they cannot satisfy the demands of a perfect God.”¹ And while God’s Law is good, and perfect, and right, we cannot please God simply by trying to fulfill the Law, because we cannot possibly fulfill the whole Law. We as humans are just not able to do it.

You see, the Laws of God are the parameters that we are to live within. God has given us His **Laws for our own protection and safety.** God knows the hearts of humanity, and He knows how

¹ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 183-184)

easily influenced we are by the schemes of the Devil. So God has laid out His perfect guidelines for us to follow, so that we might find freedom within them, and find life because of them. But the Law of God is that mirror, reflecting the sin in our life that we need to confess so that we might allow Jesus Christ to renew us and redeem us back into the image of God. The Law cannot fix us and strict adherence to the Law is not how we find Salvation from our sin. But let's look at God's Law for us, so that we might get an idea where God is leading us and what He has given us to guide us away from sin.

I invite you today to turn in your Bibles to Exodus 20 and follow along as I read the account of God giving the people of Israel **the 10 Commandments**. (READ Exodus 20:1-20)

The people of Israel had been living in slavery for over 250 years to the Pharaohs of Egypt. Being slaves in that country, they were surrounded by the pagan culture of the Egyptians. And being slaves, the people were ruled by the cruel laws of Egypt. So as God has now led them out of slavery in Egypt, the people have no laws to live by, no guidelines that regulate the life of the people. As the people have made their way to Midian, to the Mountain of God at Mount Sinai, **God has decided to give them basic commands to follow** in order that freedom and safety and security might come to the people. God wants to give them laws to live by so that they might thrive as His people.

There, at the foot of Mount Sinai, God speaks His commands to the people. Out of the fire and smoke on the mountain, God gives His commands for appropriate living. God reminds them, "***I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves***" (20:2). It wasn't Moses, nor Aaron, nor any of the pagan gods of Egypt. It was out of love for His precious people that the Lord God had delivered them out of Egypt, had provided both food and water for them, and had directed them to that very mountain to begin making them into a great nation. Just before this, Moses told the people God's message "***Now, if you will obey Me and keep My covenant, you will be My own people. The whole earth is mine, but you will be My chosen people, a people dedicated to Me alone, and you will serve Me as priests***" (19:5-6). It was God's delight to pick these people to be His servants, and they were to be different than the rest of the people of the world by obeying God's laws and commands. So

God lays out the guidelines He expects the people to live by.

Now the first four commandments are about **keeping a relationship with the Lord God**

Almighty. In order to be the people of God, they had to worship only Him, and not go after any other.

In fact, they were not to make up their own god and give it the distinction that only the Lord God should have. The people were not to use anything to try to represent or idolize God. Their worship was only to be to Him.

Likewise, the way that they related to God was to be very special, too. The people were not to use God's name in any way that demeaned or degraded Him. They were to keep the name of the Lord their God holy and above reproach. The name of God was not to be used in a common way, nor was it to be used blasphemously. If God was the Almighty God, then it was right that the people lifted Him up above every name and kept His name precious.

And then, to stay connected with the Lord God Almighty, they were to follow His example set at creation. They were to work 6 days, and on the seventh day they were to rest. That was to be their Sabbath day, and it was to be a holy day unto the Lord. It was for the people to remember what the Lord had done for them so that they could rejoice in Him, and glorify Him, and give thanks to Him for all that He had done in their lives.

These first four commands are for us to recognize the Lord God as the One who gives us life and breath and purpose for our lives. They are given to us so that we might regulate our lives and focus them upon being His people. Yet how easily it is for us to break these commands. How many of you have broken even one of these first four command? Now, I don't need to see any hands today, because I know that we all have broken them. The best of humanity has broken them, and it seems that our whole culture today is focused on discarding these first four commands, telling us that a relationship with God is just not all that important. In fact, we are even being told that to have and maintain these first four commands shows a weakness in us that is just not acceptable. Why would we claim to have a weakness? But hey, when you are weak, don't we rely upon crutches or supports to help us along?

When asked by an expert in the Law about what is the most important commandment to live by, Jesus replied, *“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, He is God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength”* (Mark 12:30). Jesus was saying that a relationship with the Lord God is the FIRST thing we should have in our lives, and it should be a part of us in every aspect of our life – all our desires, all our thoughts, all our activities and in all of our being. The relationship with God is to be over any other, and is to be so compelling to us that it guides our whole life according to the rest of the commands given by God to us. Love for God is to be the most important thing in our whole life, and nothing is to replace that love – not family, not occupation, not material possessions, not leadership positions, not imagination, and not life goals. The love for the Lord God is to be first in us to the end that the rest of our life is guided by that love for Him.

And when we look at **the last 6 commands** of the 10 Commandments of God, we see that they relate to how we are to interact and treat each other. Jesus said it best in His reply to the expert in the Law, *“The second most important command is this: ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ There is no other commandment more important than these two”* (Mark 12:31). If we have love for the Lord our God, then that love for Him is to guide us into the relationship we have with other folks around us. And this starts right at home.

The fifth commandment is, *“honor (respect) your father and your mother...”* (Ex. 20:12). God has given the father and mother the task of raising their children so that when they are older, they can come to know the Lord God and love Him with their whole heart, soul, mind and strength. While some fathers and mothers do a better job at this than others do, I realize that there are some who have great difficulties in raising their children, for whatever reason. But if they have love for the Lord God, then God gives them the ability and guidance to raise the children in a way that brings glory to God.

But the children are to respect and honor their parents, no matter what the situation is, because they are the children of those two people. And it might just be that as the children honor and respect their parents, they might help guide the parents to grow closer to loving the Lord God with THEIR own

heart, soul, mind and strength. Honor and respect given to parents, even if they don't deserve it, can be a powerful witness to the great unconditional love that God has for each one of us.

Yet, there is a promise that comes along with that – *“so that you may live a long time in the land that I am giving you”* (Ex. 20:12). When we show respect and honor to our parents, the promise comes back to us that WE will have a long life because we are serving the Lord in that way.

The next four commands are “one liners,” meant to regulate how we treat one another. *“Do not commit murder”* (20:13) helps us to see that we cannot have love for the Lord God and then treat another person with such disrespect and disgrace that we plot their murder. No matter how angry we are with one another, we are to show love to God AND show that love to each other, which then limits any reaction we would have toward seeking revenge toward another person. *“Loving your neighbor as yourself”* means showing love and forgiveness rather than hatred and revenge. We cannot have love for one another and then go out and kill each other. It just doesn't work. And Jesus tells *“But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell”* (Matthew 5:22). Love God first, and then love one another. So don't kill them with your words or with your actions.

“Do not commit adultery” (20:14) is given to us for the protection of the family. We are to honor the marriage covenant with our spouse, so that even if things get rough, we commit to stay together and work out the problems we have rather than just giving up and go out chasing after another person to satisfy our fleshly desires and passions. Keep the relationship strong. Be willing to fight for your marriage, even to the very end because in the long run, it effects the whole family and tears down the fabric of love. We are to love one another even when the dirt and grime is exposed. Once the ugliness of the dirt is exposed, then forgiveness and restitution can be made for the sake of the family.

Again, Jesus takes it much deeper when He tells us, *“...but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart”* (Matthew 5:28).

Lusting after each other is not loving your neighbor as you love yourself. God wants to protect the family, so the law is given to guide us to have love only for our spouses. Love is not breaking your vows of marriage, but keeping them and building the spouse up so that there is genuine love between the two.

“Do not steal” (Ex. 20:15) is given to us to protect each other. Because one person works hard and has nice things does not mean that we can judge them and decide that we deserve what they have and we take what is theirs. No, God is the One who provides for us, and we are each provided for differently because God knows that some are able to do so much more with the little that they have so as to make more. And God gives some great amounts as a test to see how faithful they will be to Him by reaching out to those in need around them. We are to trust that what the Lord provides for us is enough for us, and we are to be grateful for what we have. I’ve come to discover that some of the wealthiest persons in the world are the ones who are the most miserable, and some of the poorest of the world are the most joyful. It all depends upon how we look at life and how we respond to God’s provision.

“Do not accuse anyone falsely” (Ex. 20:16) is given to us so that we might always be truthful to one another. How many of you like being lied to or lied about? No, I didn’t think so. By loving our neighbor as we love ourselves, Jesus invites us to remember how it feels to be lied about, and then to not hurt someone else by doing the very same thing to them. If we are confronted with something, we are always to “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, SO HELP US GOD” so that we don’t end up murdering one another with lies. Yes, we can kill with our words, and that goes back to the previous command not to murder another person. So God tells us to be careful with our words and use them carefully so as to build up and not tear down another person, no matter who they are.

But how easily it is for us to discard and disobey these four one-liner commands? We let ourselves get so angry that we are willing to, or do, commit murder against another person. We become driven by our lusts and seek the worldly pleasures of sexual deviancy. We want what we want and allow ourselves to take from others even to the point that we destroy what we cannot have just so

someone else can't have them. We lie about each other so that they might not take positions of authority, or might be discredited, or just lie about each other as a personal past-time of gossip. Those things are not showing love for God and love for each other.

See how quickly the Law exposes our inner beings? See how God's guidelines are there to protect each of us from the evil that so quickly surrounds us? Do you see why we need to have the Laws of God in this world in order that we might find love and life and freedom and hope?

The last commandment brings culmination to all of these four one-liner commands, "*do not desire another man's house...his wife, his slaves, his cattle, his donkeys, or anything else that he owns*" (Ex. 20:17). When we covet anything that belongs to another person, we are more likely to murder them, commit adultery against them, steal what is theirs, and accuse them falsely just so that we might get what they have. Coveting always leads us to the next darker step, which leads us further and further away from loving our neighbor as we would want them to love us.

Love for God - Love for people. The two basic commands of Jesus that encompass all 10 of God's commands given to Moses. And they all revolve around love. God first loved us, to bless us and forgive us, and redeem us so that we might turn and love one another in order to bless others, forgive others, redeem others and help them grow in love with God. The Law only exposes our sinfulness – against God and against each other. The Law cannot save us, but God has given us the Law in order that we look at how we are to have a relationship with God and with one another.

So what are we to do with these Laws that so quickly exposes our sinfulness? Well, don't throw them away because they expose sin! Allow them to be the mirror of your own life, giving you a real look at who you really are in the eyes of God. Let these Laws, and the others found in the teachings of the Old and New Testaments, rip open the door of your heart and reveal who you really are so that you might understand the grave position you are in. Let the revealing of your sin take you to your knees seeking God's forgiveness, so that you might acknowledge that, by yourself, you cannot wipe yourself clean. And then let the Law disclose to you the need you have to let Jesus Christ take those sins away.

By exposing our sinfulness toward God and toward each other, the Law quickly shows us how much we are in need of a Savior who can fix that sin in us. But we have to confess that sin in order for it to be recognized (1 John 1:9). God already knows it's there. By us allowing the Law to expose the sin within us, we come face to face with it so that we can admit that we are in need of the One who can take that sin away from us. And that's what Jesus did for us. He stepped down from the right side of God in heaven, to come here to the earth so that we could learn more about how God loves us so much that He wants us to become free from the bondage of sin, which leads us to death. Jesus became like us (except for sin) and showed the goodness of God and the love of God to us. As we compare the goodness of God with the wickedness and sinfulness of this world, we see come to desire that change from the filth of this world to the glory of God. Jesus came to this world so that we might attain that.

Knowing that we were unable to redeem ourselves from the sin that we have in our life, Jesus came to take that sin upon Himself, so that He could pay the great price required to forgive that sin. You see, the result of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life (Romans 6:23), but eternal life is only found through Jesus Christ, who took our sin upon Himself, went to the cross for us, took our place on that cross, and then died the death that was rightly ours. He paid the price of our sin through His death so that we might have eternal life through Him. The communion elements remind us of that sacrifice that Jesus made for us. The bread represents Jesus' body that was broken and bruised and crucified for us so that we might not face the penalty of our sin. The cup of juice represents Jesus' blood that was poured out on our behalf in order to cover our sin and redeem it, forgive it and cleanse it so that we might stand before God purified and holy once more. As we take these elements, we remember the great work that Jesus did for us so that we might become God's people, pure and holy, as we confess our sins and change our ways to abide by, and obey all, of God's commands.

The body of Christ broken for you; take and eat. The blood of Christ shed for you; take and drink. Do this to make you brand new people once more in the love of God. Take them in to you, that you might live. Let's pray...

Father, You do not want us to be separated from You because of the sin in our life. You desire that all people come to You. But we cannot come to You covered by sin. You detest sinfulness, and hate it so much that no one with sin can enter into Your kingdom. Therefore, You sent Jesus to this world in order that through His life, His death on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead, all who confess Jesus as Savior and Lord of their life might become released from that sin that so quickly binds us away from you. As we let Jesus become our Savior, we recognize that we must live differently; we must live in accordance to Your Law. As that Law reflects who we are, let the blood of Jesus wipe us clean so that we might begin to live according to Your standards given to us, calling us to love You with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength. Then, as we love You with all that we are, may we love those around us in the same way. O God, let Your love transform us into new creatures through Jesus Christ our Lord. This we pray in Jesus' precious and holy name. AMEN.