

## "Decalogue"

Pako Evening Service: 05/02/2017

Readings: Exo 20:1-17 (pg 77); Mat 22:34-40 (pg 991). Sermon: "Ten helpful Words"

Congregation, have you ever asked yourself or perhaps even been asked, "What is my guide to living a life that is pleasing to the Lord, especially now that I am a Christian?" Now we could say to ourselves or to someone else, "Use the word of God!" Now of course this would be good advice, but isn't there something that is a little more succinct that I could quickly read and follow? Yes, there is and it's called the law of God. The Ten Commandments give us guidance on how to live pleasing lives to God. And if you wish to have it even more succinct, use the summary Jesus taught in Matthew 22:34ff, "Love the Lord your God with your whole being and your neighbour as yourself!"

To ask yourself or for someone to ask you this question is a great encouragement for it indicates the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. For the Holy Spirit wants us to live in obedience to God the Father, and to be more and more Christ-like in all our living. Once we or someone is converted and realize what God the Father has done for them in Christ, only once response is appropriate - how do I live a pleasing life in response.

Now I agree it is a constant struggle for our old sinful self continually wants us to go one way, namely be selfish, self-centred, disobedient and the like. However, with the help of the Holy Spirit we can gradually put sinful practices aside, and begin doing works that please God. Eph 2:10 and other passages make that clear.

Now I said gradually, for a) the devil is still a formidable foe and is actively trying to get us to sin and feel that we are unworthy to be even considered Christians. However, and this is b), the life of sanctification by the Holy Spirit is a life long process. In fact, because we have died and risen with Christ, sin has been rendered powerless. It no longer controls or has mastery over us as it used to. We no longer have to succumb to sin, although admittedly, we often do! So, if you need guidance, I would point you to God's Law, the Ten Commandments, the 'decalogue' (ten words) and the summary of the law.

The law hasn't been done away with as some NT Christians suggest. Paul in Rom 8:4 says that God required that the law be fulfilled in us, and holds his readers responsible for keeping the law. James says that those who break a single command of the law are transgressors of the whole law (Jm 2:8-11). The Apostle John defines sin as lawlessness, and says that the test as to whether we love God, "is that we keep his commandments" (1 John 3:4; 5:3). Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount said that he didn't come to abolish the law. In Mat 5:18 Jesus says that, "Not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."

Now of course there has only ever been one person who lived up to God's law perfectly and that was the Lord Jesus Himself. But that doesn't mean we can now say the law doesn't need to be obeyed anymore, and we can do what we like. Yes, most certainly, we have now been saved by Christ from God's punishment for not keeping the Law perfectly! Praise God. But the Holy Spirit, working in our hearts, creates within us a desire to do things that now please God. And he does that by opening God's word to us. In fact, it's a sign of thankful hearts. It's a sign of gratitude.

Now you may be asking yourself, "Why does the Holy Spirit point us to the law, and not simply focus on our wonderful forgiveness and salvation in Christ? After all don't we live in the age of grace? Sure we do, but the giving of the law was a gracious act in itself. Without the law, we wouldn't know how to live pleasing lives to our Saviour God. What's more, we would be making a further mistake if we see our obedience to the law as something that saves or adds to the work of Christ. That's not why we keep the law!

Rather, we should see the law as a guide on how we can live thankful lives in response to God's great work of salvation in us through Christ. It's actually the fruit of the gospel! And I would suggest that if you don't see as such, then the Holy Spirit still needs to do more work on you so that you may have a fuller understanding of what it means to be saved from the fires of hell to eternal life in glory!

In many ways, grace and law go together. They are not opposites. In fact, the Ten Commandments start with grace! God gave the law to the former slaves of Egypt, camped at Mt Sinai, after they were delivered from Egypt and hence shown grace! The Lord addressed these free people He had delivered from the bondage of Egypt! That was grace in action. And then he said, "Here is some more grace, live by these laws for they will be a blessing to you! God's law is good and gracious and by their obedience we can show we love God, not only for his day to day blessings, but also for his wonderful salvation in Christ. Obedience to God's laws will protect us from unnecessary sorrow and pain. Oh if only the nations of the world would recognize it. Oh if only people would stop watering down God's good law on which so many countries have originally based their laws on.

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Allow me to give you an example of God's gracious law. God's law says, "Do not commit adultery." Why would God say that? Well ask what happens when you commit adultery? Let me tell you, you create a disaster. Committing adultery is the most ungracious and selfish thing you could ever do. It breaks relationships, ruins people and destroys families! When our loving Father says, "Do not commit adultery" then don't do it, for it's a great law to obey.

In many ways, it's a false dichotomy to say that law and gospel are two opposites. Rightly understood, they complement each other. They go together and are not opposed to each other. The gospel comes first: "I am the Lord who set you free, now keep my commandments." Both are God's gracious acts. Grace in the form of deliverance came first, then His gracious law. Therefore, God's law is good and gracious! It shows us how to live God-glorifying lives. In fact, it doesn't matter where you look, grace always came first and God's law was also gracious!

In the Garden of Eden, grace was first for the very act of Creation was a sign of grace. And then God said, don't eat of that one tree for I know if you do you will die. But Adam and Eve thought they knew better and we are living with the consequences every day! The Israelites in Egypt were not saved because of their obedience but they were saved by grace when God heard their cries! Read the book of Judges – time and time again God shows his grace and delivers his people! And that same grace is most clearly seen at Calvary. While we were his enemies Christ died for us and set us free. And now in response, we want to obey his law to show we love him and it is good for us and our society to live by them.

Let's never forget. God didn't choose us because we were such good obedient people! It was all of grace. Jesus died on the cross to set us free and he rose again so that we can now live for him in the fullness of hope, life eternal! And until the time we arrive at our final home with Jesus, we travel by the road map that God gives us, His law. We read in Exo 20:2; "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." That was the gospel for these OT people. But now let's put it in NT language. "I am the Lord your God, who set you free through the death and resurrection of my Son." That's the gospel.

And the gospel continues - now you enter the school of discipleship, the instruction in Christian living, the keeping of the law, and living by the Spirit. Do you see? Both the Old and New Testaments teach the same things, freedom from bondage so that we can obey the Lord. God's grace shown to the Israelites and us has a purpose, namely that we can sing the praises of him who saved us, both in word and deed. It isn't an option that we can take or leave when it suits us, but it's a loving response to the God who set us free and saved us. So the Ten Commandments spell out how the people who have been delivered by their loving God must live. Obedience by God's people under the old Sinai Covenant and in the New Covenant is not slave like but child like. Law keeping is covenant keeping. But in the NT this obedience is possible because the Holy Spirit dwells within us and works through us.

Now those who say that the law of Sinai has been replaced by the law of love have failed to understand the teaching of God's Word, nor have they fully understood the gospel. The New Covenant doesn't bring a new law, but a new obedience (Jer 33:31-34). The full meaning of the law proclaimed on that first mountain at Sinai is explained for in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus came to fulfill the law and the prophets (Mat 5:17). Jesus' life and teaching brings the fullest and deepest meaning of the law and the prophets to light. Make no mistake, the law was important in the OT. It was repeated in Deut 5, and recited by God's own voice and written by God's own fingers (Exo 20:22). The stone tablets on which the law was inscribed were kept in the ark (Exo 40:20). And those who were godly loved the law!

The writer of Psa 1v 1-2 tells us, **Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates night and day!** Psalm 119 has 176 verses because the writer wishes to express his response to the good news of God who has not only set him free from slavery, but has given him guidance on how to serve God in a way that is pleasing to God and at the same time good for the Psalmist.

And that is the point. God hasn't given us the law because he likes to see us squirm, but because he knew that it was good for us! The NT church has found that the Ten Commandments supply the best tools for explaining the will of God to NT people. Generally, the Ten Commandments are divided with the first four teaching us about our relationship to God, to worship him, how we use his name and to observe his day. So they are to do with our vertical relationship.

In the second group, God teaches us in the horizontal relationships, that we are to respect parents, the neighbour's life, the neighbour's marriage, the neighbour's possessions, and the neighbour's name. We understand the tenth commandment to address the root cause of all transgressions in the second group. These commands are very succinct statements and most of them are negative, telling us what we may not do. However, people who speak about the Ten Commandments as though the 'shall nots' are irrelevant show great ignorance.

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For the reverence of God and respect for the neighbour are foundational to all social ethics. William Barclay calls it "the law without which nationhood is impossible". Interestingly, many religious groups and people of the world will say "Amen" to the second table, but no longer see relevance to the first table. They are not interested in their relationship with the only true God. Many even go at length to restrict Christians expressing their belief in the true God. Sadly, these people don't realize that both these tables of the law go together. The majesty of God listed in the first table, must be held in tandem with the rights and respect of mankind in the second table. Both are destroyed when one table is forgotten. If we forget the first we will not only be breaking the greatest command, we will have no guide to what is perfectly good and no goal to strive for.

If we forget the second, then love for our neighbour will soon vanish and we break the second greatest command which is like the first. Therefore, a materialistic society has no chance of survival because it erases the first table of the law. Let me give you one example. Religious fanatics who try to kill off another's faith destroy the whole law of God, because they sacrifice the second table in the name of the first. And if you think I'm wrong, have a look at what happens in many Muslim countries. What do most terrorist shout before their ghastly acts? "Allah is great and then they shoot, maim and kill their neighbours!"

Finally, we must see the Ten Commandments, as addressing principles rather than details and that is also in many ways how Jesus expounded them. The Scribes and Pharisees were so careful to obey the laws to the minutest detail. Yet they missed the mark altogether. Jesus calls them "hypocrites", for their hearts were far from God. We also have a danger that needs to be guarded. We are saved by grace. It is by the precious blood of Jesus that we're saved. So may we never see our good deeds, or our Christian behaviour, as that which saves us.

The law is our guide to pleasing behaviour before God in thankfulness for the gospel which came first! So we need to look at the Ten Commandments through NT glasses. For when we do that then we will see that they cover the whole width and depth of human living in all relationships, both to God and our neighbour. And their fulfillment is nothing less than a whole life response of love to God's immeasurable love in Christ. My prayer is that God's law may lead us to Christ-like living more and more. Amen.