

The Law & The Commandments

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Our God, we need your forgiveness. We need your healing. We need the renewing power of your Holy Spirit.

We need to be fed in our spiritual hunger. And we need you to confront us in the circumstances of our personal lives. We ask that as we take these few minutes to confront you through your word, that you will accomplish by your Spirit those things for which our hearts cry out.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. To provide you with a little background for what I want to say this morning, there is a verse in Matthew 5, part of the Sermon on the Mount, which I would like you to look at first.

And it's Matthew 5, verse 17. So I'm talking about the law and the commandments.

And Jesus says in 5, 17, think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets, but I have come not to abolish them, but to fulfill them.

[1 : 36] For truly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. He who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

The second thing I want you to look at is from your prayer book, and it's part of the catechism on the subject of the commandments, and it's on page 546.

And it's an ancient pattern of teaching people, which probably isn't in vogue in these days, but it was once that you asked questions and you had set answers, which you learned by heart.

[2 : 55] And so in order to understand the commandments, you would be asked these questions and you would learn by heart these answers.

Let's try one question and one answer, and then you'll get the feeling of it. You said that your godfathers and godmothers promised for you that you would keep God's holy will and commandments.

To whom were these commandments given? To the ancient people of Israel are the commandments of the certain moment. Now, I haven't got time to go through this.

Slip to the... I mean, I'm doing... making the great mistake that I don't want to do, and that is leaving out the Ten Commandments. And that's the way we mostly live our lives.

But I... Go to the bottom of page 547. How does the Christian church receive and teach these commandments? And what do you chiefly learn from these commandments?

[4 : 09] And what is your duty towards God? Well, I'll stop.

But if you find the sermon isn't up to your expectations, please feel free to go back and read the rest of that during the course of the sermon. The...

You probably read the news this week, which... I mean, it was just a little story, but it was a story of one of the really top racehorses in the country that went round the bend and broke his leg in three places and had to be shot.

Now, you may not think that that's a very appropriate thing for a sermon to contemplate that. But the fact is that both I, myself, and lots of people I run into in the course of a week have just come around the bend, have broken their leg in three places and have to go on living.

And... And so they're badly smashed up. And that's about the way I feel this morning. I mean, you know, it would have been a mercy if somebody could have come and put me out of it long ago.

[5 : 51] But part of the reason for that, I'll explain by telling you that one of the distinguished members of this congregation, attending the men's Bible study on Wednesday morning, did to me what he's done on several occasions before.

And he says, Why do we stand up every Sunday morning and confess our sins? He says, In the course of my week, I meet a lot of really bad people in prison and in other places.

Now, I think it would be entirely appropriate if they were asked to confess their sins. But when you get people who have got up early in the morning have come to church, surely you're dealing with the best people that there are.

Why would you ask them to confess their sins? And he couldn't understand that. And it may be that some of you don't either.

Well, the circumstances of my week from that point on were fairly difficult.

[7 : 07] And I thought a lot about that question and wondered. I ran into a, what do you call them, a crown prosecutor. And he says, There's some really bad people out there that he ran into in the course of his business.

And again, I saw it. So why does this happen? That the good people are forever confessing their sins and the people who aren't so good never confess theirs.

Something's wrong with the way we do things. But, then I went, you know, then I, I, I got involved in a heavy meeting this week in which I really lost my cool completely.

And I spoke a lot of things that were on my mind and heart. and, uh, just the realization that just below the surface in your life there is so much anger and so much pride and so much arrogance and so much impatience and so little love.

All those things are just below the surface. And, uh, so I delight to come and confess my sins and to, uh, to find forgiveness.

[8 : 39] And the reason I'm subjecting you to this little exercise is because, uh, my function in part is to hear your sins and give you the assurance of forgiveness.

And, uh, part of the ministry you have, to me, as a congregation, you, you have to hear mine and forgive me. In other words, so that, so that, uh, our life as a congregation can continue to be viable if we hide our sins from one another and don't confess our sins one to another and they're not dealt with and we lose, uh, we lose touch with the grim reality of them, not in terms of our offense against the public standards of justice, but the offense which comes against the command to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and our neighbors ourselves.

But that just, that just isn't there. Now, the reason I'm talking to you about the commandments this morning is, uh, I'm, I'm going to give you a short history of the Bible, uh, from one end to the other. The, uh, God has created us, he sustains us, and we know that he loves us.

That's the whole world. And God has established a covenant with us, and because God has made that commitment of himself to us, we respond to him by a life of obedience in terms of the things he wants us to do.

[10 : 26] So that as history unfolds in the scriptures, uh, you get, uh, a creation being given to Adam, you get a covenant being established with Abraham, you get a law being given to Moses, and then you get, uh, the contradiction of that law in the period of the judges when the law was known but people would not obey it, and so they called for a king who might represent them and a kingdom which would, which would at least anticipate a new kind of rule, a new kind of order, a new kind of submission and obedience of people to one another under a king.

Uh, you have from the prophets uh, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Amos and Daniel and all the rest of them, they, uh, they saw the wickedness, the rebellion, the disobedience of people on every hand.

They looked into the king's court and saw it there. They looked into the business empires and saw it there. They looked into the life of the common people and saw it there and they said there has got to be something new.

A new kind of relationship has got to come. This is not what we were created for. This is not the purpose of God being fulfilled. And that's what Ezekiel told his generation and Jeremiah his and all the others told him.

And the last of the great prophets was, uh, John the Baptist. And one of the great pictures from his ministry was the axe is laid to the root of the tree.

[12 : 24] The whole thing was going to be knocked over and, uh, reduced to a stump in the ground. And, uh, this happens when Jesus comes and brings the old law crashing down to the ground and establishes a new basis for a new covenant between God and his people.

the old law which kills and condemns is replaced by a new law based on a new covenant and a new commandment.

The commandment being that you love one another as God has loved you. The old law which, uh, which at the very best was only a form of damage control because you cannot maintain a society in which murder, adultery, false witness, covetousness are rampant.

One of you this morning told me before the, uh, before the service having spent three weeks in Russia how the whole structure of society is breaking down and it looks like somebody is going to have to take a gun in hand to bring it to order again.

Well, you see, that's what happens and society can't tolerate that. Society can't tolerate a people who don't know what the supreme value is for them.

[14 : 14] A society can't tolerate a people who replace God with something of their own creation. A society cannot tolerate a man assuming that he is in charge of the world so that he doesn't have to take a day of rest.

A society cannot tolerate over any length of time a disregard for the elders and the parents of people. You can't do it. The whole society comes crashing down.

And so God gave to Moses the law in a sense to try and restrain the damaging effects that come through selfishness in the breakdown of any society at any time and at any point in history.

But that wasn't going to solve the problem. All that was going to do is restrain the problem from the damage that it can do. In the same way that you tell your children, this is what you will do and you will do it because I say so.

Well, that's basically what God said to his people. But God hoped they would grow up to the point where they would do what he said because that was their heart's desire to.

[15 : 29] Even as you hope your children will grow up to understand that your love for them was in their best interests. And so you get the difference between the old law, which had unattainable goals, and the new law, which provides an irresistible relationship.

And what it means is that what God wants to happen is that the whole of creation, as it finds a focus in the whole of humanity, will come into a relationship where the love and purposes of God are acknowledged and people are obedient to those purposes in the way they live lives, in the way they relate to one another.

When we look at our society, we see the flaws in our society demonstrated for us because how do you get a politician to behave when suddenly great power is put into his hands or her hands?

How do you do it? That's the way, I mean, temptation doesn't come for most of us, for many of us, I might say. This is a delicate way to try and get the balance in that statement.

But temptation doesn't come from things being taken away from us. The temptation comes from all that we've been given. And what do we do with it? So, where do you get politicians to whom you can entrust power?

[17 : 21] Where do you find Supreme Court judges? Where do you find ministers whose lives are not scarred by scandal?

How do you protect children from parental abuse? How do you protect the glorious gift of human sexuality from being a total disaster zone in the lives of most people?

Well, the picture that I want to give you is this. that we have a concept of progress, you know, in our society, of material prosperity, of endless amounts of consumer goods.

We have all those things that we are striving to have more and more of. And we want to create a market for them, and we want to go on producing them, and our technological progress will keep creating new vistas.

and we think that there is the endless possibility of progress in that direction, and we all know that it won't work. You can't use that many more than one or two cars, or one bed to sleep in.

[18 : 43] It's just you can't go beyond certain limits. But there is one area in which we can go forever in any direction all that we want without ever creating a problem.

love, and that is in the direction of love. Because love is the product for which we have an unlimited supply of raw material.

You know, in the pride and greed and all that afflicts the human heart, all that is potentially raw material that needs by the grace of God to be transformed into love.

And that's what growing up and maturing and developing means. We can never produce a glut on the market. There will never be too much.

You can go on endlessly teaching people to love one another and working out the implications and ramifications of what would happen so that you can go on without limit.

[19 : 52] Love is extremely expensive, expensive, but everyone can afford it. It's strange, isn't it? It's very costly, but everyone can afford it.

Amazing. Love is that wealth which the more extravagant you are in spending it, the more of it you have.

And so when you move from the Old Testament law to the New Testament, when you listen to Christ say, as he said, I haven't come to abolish the law, I have come to establish it, to establish all that it intends us to know, all that we are, to establish everything that was in a sense prophesied by the law, but not fulfilled by it, I have come to establish that kind of love.

So that when Christ says to us, a new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you, he's pointing not just to the kind of whipped cream on the dessert, he's pointing to the fundamental reality of people's relationships to one another, in which all that is of pride and arrogance, fear, anger, all those things can be transformed into love.

and the potential to love one another is there. I have, as you know, for the past three weeks been preaching to congregations of whom I didn't know anyone.

[22 : 01] It's a lot easier to tell them this than it is to tell you, because I know how hard you are to love. I mean, I'm not speaking for myself, but I'm speaking for your relationships to one another.

You know, that's, it's, it's different. And that's why you see that at the heart of what happens when the old covenant breaks down and the new is only beginning to be realized and understood that you see the tremendous capacity that there is for love.

You, interesting just to remember that God doesn't say this is the commandment, and if you keep it, you will come into a covenant with me, he says this is the covenant in which he commits himself to us in Jesus Christ unconditionally, him, God himself taking the initiative to pour out his love for us, establishing a relationship with us, and then saying, now in response to that love, you are to love one another.

It's a new covenant, the sign of which is baptism, a new commandment is given on the basis of that covenant, and on the basis of that commandment being obeyed, a new community is created, a community in which people can speak to each other because they have a common language, which is the language of love, that overcomes all the barriers that we humanly have between us.

Well, I think that's the grand story that's at the heart of the Bible, from Adam to Abraham to Moses to the judges to the kings to the prophets to John the Baptist and to Jesus Christ on the cross taking on the eve of his crucifixion the bread and the wine and saying a new commandment, a new covenant, and a new community.

[24 : 38] And that's where we have an absolutely unbounded avenue, unlimited scope for development is in receiving from God the love that he's shown us in Christ and sharing that love with one another in obedience to him.

And that that's what the life of this congregation is about primarily. I mean, it's very clear that we can do anything else you want.

You can speak with tongues of men and of angels. You can understand all mysteries and all wisdom and all knowledge. You can have faith so that you can remove mountains. You can give your body to be burned.

All those would be great ideals, I'm sure, for the religious minded. But Paul takes them all and wipes them out and says, without love, you've got nothing.

And that's what we're called to have for one another. God wants to have God wants to work in our hearts if we can let him.

[26 : 04] Let me pray. Just bow your heads. Lord Jesus, help us to picture you confronting confronting us individually in the circumstances of our own lives and our own relationships and allow us to hear with our hearts your command, your new commandment, that we love one another as you have loved us.

and you give with that the promise that by this shall all know that we are your disciples because we've been let in on the secret of what it means to love one another.

Amen. We sing hymn number 160. We sing hymn number 160. hymn number with 200.

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They first are, I those are even creation, Lord, who comes from thee.

[28 : 23] How is the darkness of mijo, ehe is not me done? God when Peter's on family Be like the kingdom's soon And Lord, he's sacred not To take the plans free You are in power, in Christ and born potatoes, And your life is relationships forgiven God of the Lord is holy.

Gather Your cause, be the concludes return. Hear your breath as light, be the source of fame, for our loudness, say of have.

We and Holy Spirit esper us we Come, we and let the salted Go, to Messiah, Lord Shall, a man sin harmon and all His great salvation.

Geez! Thanks for contracting, Lord, be high-caughterned inelu stand and great. In all the glory of the Lord will see And for just as the light As the glory of the Lord Will the glory of the Lord be with me Amen Amen