

This morning we have read, and heard what is perhaps the most controversial passage of the Bible: the Ten Commandments. I cannot think of a single passage of the Bible that has engendered so many news stories, law suits, court rulings, opinion pieces, and political statements.

We honor this set of rules by carving them into stone, and placing them in public places. Then we fight about whether they should be there. We hallow them by printing them on placards, and posting them in our front yards. We hold them dear by seeking their impact on our nation's history, and founding. The Church venerates them by making them a part of her liturgy. We begin our services with them on Sundays during Lent. We rehearse these commandments, and ask God to inscribe them on our hearts.

We do all of these things, but do we keep them? Do we obey them?

I will be honest with you and say, for instance, that I am not sure I have ever once kept a Sabbath day holy. I am not sure I have ever hallowed a 24-hour period simply to be, and to rest in the knowledge of God, and myself as a child of God.

But that may be where we miss the whole point of the Ten Commandments. We understand these commands as the central rules of a spiritual, and ethical life. We look at them as orders from on high about what to do, and what not to do in life.

I suppose it is too easy to assume this approach, especially when we read the words, "Thou shalt not...." Yes, they sound like rules. They sound like commands. But they are more than that.

These are not the Ten Commandments. They are the Ten Statements of who God is, and who we are. They are not simply rules to keep, they are statements of reality.

Let me try to explain this a bit better. Some years ago I led a Bible study on the 23rd psalm. We know the psalm so well. It is beloved, and beautiful. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

In the Bible study I wanted to move past our admiration of the beauty of the words, and really try to take an in depth look at how profound its statement of faith is. So I was struck with an idea: why not produce a kind of anti-23rd psalm? Why not write a psalm that said just the opposite of the 23rd psalm.

The results were quite profound and, honestly, a bit terrifying.

For instance, the final verse of Psalm 23 reads:

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the
house of the LORD for ever.

We know its beauty but have we ever truly considered the depth of its comfort.

The antithesis highlighted by my anti-23 psalm helps highlight this comfort by showing just how dire the opposite prospect is. This is the final verse of the anti-23rd psalm:

Surely you will shrug off my woe, and violent misery all the days of my life, and I will wander outside the LORD's awareness for ever.

The same idea came to me concerning the 10 Commandments. What would the anti-thesis sound like? What if the Bible had given us exactly the opposite? So listen carefully to how an anti-10 Commandments may have sounded, and how Moses' words following the 10 Commandments may have sounded.

There is no one who lives or gives you life. No one is God. No one brought you here, or anywhere. You are naked in nothingness.

Go ahead, make whatever god you want. Make anything you want as your god; anything that catches your eye, anything you see flying through the air, crawling on the ground, or swimming in the water. Carve any charm you can imagine. Make it up. What does it matter?

Speak whatever you want about God. Swear anything, teach anything, command anything. Say any worthless, destructive, hurtful, and vile thing you want about God, and for God. Nothing is sinful since God is nothing.

No days need to be hallowed. No time needs to be marked as holy, or sacred. There is no meaning, or purpose to recall. Work. Toil forever.

There is no need to honor your parents, or those who came before you. What use is there of a past when you have no future?

Kill.

Take anyone's spouse.

Take anything you want. Take anyone you want. Take either, by any means.

Offer nothing but lies about anyone.

Why should your neighbor have a better house than you? Or wife? Or help? Or source of wealth? Come to think of it why should your neighbor have anything better than you? Why should you even think your neighbor is worthy of anything?

Moses said to the people, “You should be filled with dread; for there is no God who cares enough for us to call us to reverence, or to care for our wellbeing.”

But we are not filled with dread. We do have a God that cares for us enough to call us to reverence, and to care for our well being. That is the point of the 10 Commandments. They are not merely a set of rules to be kept. They are so much more than that.

They are a statement that we belong to God, and that God has called us into this life to live it faithfully, with purpose, and direction. Our actions, and decisions matter because God matters. We are important, and how we live our lives is important because of God.

Our Jewish brothers and sister do not believe that God’s commandments are laws, legalistic rules, and ordinances as if God is a great judicial power enforcing regulations. The Hebrew word *torah*, that is translated as *law*, does not actually mean law. Instead it means *to point*.

God’s laws, and God’s commandments have been given to us to point to a larger, and deeper reality than what meets the eye. God’s laws call us to treat others as sacred because they are. God’s commandments call us to treat ourselves as sacred because we are.

God’s laws, and commandments are not rules to be kept. They are statements of a reality that God cares for us enough to call us to reverence, and to remind us that we, each of us, and all of us, belong to God.

That is the point of the Commandments. Carve them in stone if you will. Place them in front of courthouses, or on your front lawn. But above all, to paraphrase our liturgy, may God, write all these God's laws on our hearts.