

The "WHY" of the Law Exodus 19:1-8a Psalm 19:7-11

As Exodus chapter 19 opens, Moses has brought the people of Israel to the foot of God's mountain where God will address the people in person for the first time. God says that this demonstration of His close relationship with Moses, is so that the people will "*trust you ever after*" (vs.9). The proper editorial comment here would be, "yeah, sure." As they had already proved in the first three months, this peoples' faith and obedience is as fickle as their next crisis; which they will demonstrate repeatedly for the next 40 years. Actually, even now, God will not talk directly to the people, rather He will have a conversation with Moses while letting the people listen from the foot of the mountain. And what a conversation they have, Moses speaks and then God replies with thunder, His very presence signaled by fiery smoke covering the mountain and quaking earth beneath their feet.

Even though this conversation did not have its desired effect, it does have an effect. The Bible records that the people were terrified by the display on the mountain and wanted thereafter to put a distance between themselves and God; they said from now on they would be quite content to let Moses just tell them what he and God had talked about lately. Moses replied that they need not fear God rather that this display was simply to instill in them the fear of sinning against God, of breaking God's laws – which He will next give them in the **Ten Commandments**.

Apparently God has always had good reason for wanting to instill such fearful respect of His commands. I think it is safe to say that throughout history the Ten Commandments have been both the best known and the most resisted instruction in the Bible.

Why? Because the Commandments are absolutely clear in distinguishing between what is right and what is wrong and also in pointing out that God, not humanity, is the one who defines what is right or wrong. Which is why, as our nation has lately tried to declare its independence from God, forces from that side have worked so diligently to remove the Ten Commandments from public view.

In the 1970's, the state of Kentucky passed a law that every classroom in its in public schools had to post the 10 Commandments. The copies were paid for by private funds and on the bottom was a notice indicating that their display was intended as a secular history lesson in what served "*as the fundamental legal code of Western Civilization and the Common Law of the United States.*" When these displays were challenged, State Courts agreed with the secular intent of their posting, but in 1980, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that the Commandments' religious force could not be ignored and thus their posting violated the 1st amendment's right to religious freedom. The Court's opinion stated that the Commandments' presence on school walls might "*induce the schoolchildren to read, meditate upon, perhaps to venerate and obey, the Commandments*".... which is exactly what the teachers were wanting students to do. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone_v._Graham Strangely enough in 2005, when county courthouse

and state capital monuments displaying the Commandments were next challenged, the Supreme Court reversed itself, saying that such displays were secular and not in violation of the 1st amendment. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Van_Orden_v._Perry Yet the Commandments haven't reappeared in the schools, so that battle seems lost for good or at least until our next national revival.

We will get into the Ten Commandments properly next week, but before going there we first need to know the "WHY" of the Ten Commandments -- something I don't remember ever being taught in Sunday School -- **what is God's intention behind giving us these ten rules?**

The first clue is that before God gave the Israeli people His **rules**, He reminded them of the **relationship** He has already established with them and the relationship He hoped they would have with Him.

When your teenager, with a brand-spanking new drivers' license, is asking to use the car at night for the first time – and to pick up several friends to go to the mall. You then have to lay down the law, placing restrictions and tight boundaries around what she or he can and cannot do and about when they had better be home. The typical teenage first response is: "my folks are the strictest, they just don't trust me; they don't want me to have any fun."

The players listen in disbelief as the new coach lays out his rules for being a team member. They can't believe the requirements, or the schedule, or the restrictions placed on them. He even tells them how to behave when they're not with other team members. Certainly this coach won't last long; no one will want to play very long for him; he's taking all the fun out of it. Why is it that coaches feel they need to lay down the law?

God brings His newly freed nation to the foot of the mountain. He has Moses tell them that He's about to lay down the laws by which they are to live. They are not free to live as they wish. As awed as they are by the fire and smoke, they begin to question their new life. They knew their freedom was too good to be true; having just escaped from Egyptian slavery now God is already placing restrictions on them; surely He's taking all the joy away from them. Why is it that God feels he needs to lay down the law?

Illustration adapted from, "Laying Down The Law" Curry Pikkaart @ SermonCentral.Com

I can't speak for all parents and coaches, but I do know that God knows something about true freedom and about what we need to experience the very best of life that He would give us. God knows that we need the law, but before we agree to abide by the law – like any good parent, like any good Coach – **God also knows that we need to have a relationship of respect and trust both with Him and that behind all the laws is only a concern for our very best.**

So at the foot of His mountain, God first reminds these people of what they already know about Him. They know that God has the power to protect them as He demonstrated with the defeat of the Egyptians. They have also learned that God has the power to provide for them, even in the wilderness, springing water from rocks and laying bread on the ground for them every morning. God said, *I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself* (vs.4). The imagery here is of a mother eagle fiercely and powerfully protecting her baby chick. This is how God wanted the people of Israel to visualize **His** relationship with **them**.

If you obey my voice and keep my covenant,
You shall be ...
my treasured possession,
a priestly kingdom,
and a holy nation,
Exodus 19:5-6

Next, God describes the relationship He hopes **they** will have with **Him** (19:5-6).

- *Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples.*
- *Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom*
- *and a holy nation.*

Think about this for a moment. God has chosen this particular people to live in a very unique relationship with Himself, He promises to guard and care for them as His special treasure, they will be His gift to the world: a holy nation, a nation of priests – showing the world how good life can be when you live in a relationship with God

Wouldn't you like to live in that relationship? Surprise ... you do! What God first offered by covenant to the people of Israel, through Jesus, He now offers the same to all who come to Him in faith accepting the new covenant that Jesus has made for them through His sacrifice. Just like Israel, the Apostle Peter wrote,

you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood,
a holy nation, God's own people...
Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people
1 Peter 2:9-10

[Now] you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now

you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:9-10

This then is the first "why" of the Ten Commandments; as they did for the people of Israel these **Ten Commands continue to lay down the basic groundwork for our relationship with God.** If we know who God is, if we have come to Him by faith and we want to live in a relationship with Him, then we will strive to live by the Ten Commandments. As Peter reminds us, since *He who called you is holy, so be holy yourselves in all your conduct* (1Peter 1:15)

God knew for the people of Israel as he knows for us, that **RULES, given without RELATIONSHIP, lead to REBELLION.** This is true of all relationships. That is why God first showed them and then told them of the relationship He wanted to have with Israel, "*as His special treasure, as a holy nation, His royal priesthood.*"

Whether you are a parent, or a coach, the boss at work, or in this case God, if you lay down rules for others to follow, but you spend no time getting to know these people, involving yourself in their lives and allowing them to get to know you, then chances are that they will rebel against you. **A living relationship must first precede the rules or the people will rebel. But when the rules are lived out in a relationship, they lead to growth, happiness, mastery, and an even stronger relationship.**

This works for families and football as well as in our relationship with God. The Commandments are the rules that need to be heeded if we want a relationship with God. Rebellion then against the rules whether personal, on the part of the people of Israel, or the United States of America is a sign of no relationship. Those who rebel against the Ten Commandments are demonstrating that they don't know God and they have no relationship with Him.

Thus the first "WHY" of the Ten Commandments is that they need to be obeyed to live in a relationship with God. The second "WHY" of living the Ten Commandments as Psalm 19 enumerated, is that they will lead us not only to a GROWING relationship with God but also to a happier healthier life.

Just as knowing and following the rules of piano playing leads to mastery of the piano and knowing and following the rules of football develops both your body and mind to achieve mastery over the game of football, so knowing and following the Commandments leads us to mastery over our life lived with God. **The Ten Commandments serve as our teacher of many important life lessons.**

The first lesson we learn as we strive to keep the Commandments is that in failing to do so perfectly, we learn that we cannot save ourselves, that we need to come to God in faith in order to live in a relationship with Him. This is what King David learned when faced with his own sinfulness; he cried out to God, *for you have no delight in sacrifice;*

*if I were to give a burnt-offering, you would not be pleased.
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.* (Psalm 55:16-17)

The second lesson that living the Ten Commands will teach us is how to live a happier even a healthier life. Simply put, just like following a diet plan or exercise routine, following the Ten Commandments will keep you healthier. How so?

By 1974, Dr. Sydney Sharman had published two books based on his research looking into the relationship between obedience to the 10 commandments and good health. With plenty of supporting case studies, his conclusion was that a lifestyle based on the commandments greatly reduces the vulnerability to neurotic ill health. (1967: *The Ten Commandments and the Psychiatrist*. 1974: *The Ten Commandments and You*.)

*The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
making wise the simple;
rejoicing the heart;
enlightening the eyes ...*
Psalm 19:7-11

And that should not surprise us, because as Psalm 19 describes.

*The law of the Lord is perfect, **reviving the soul**;
the decrees of the Lord are sure, **making wise the simple**;
the precepts of the Lord are right, **rejoicing the heart**;
the commandment of the Lord is clear, **enlightening the eyes ...**
Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.
(Psalm 19:7-11)*

Thirdly, what living the Ten Commandments can teach us, is that as we mature under their guidance, we need no longer follow them rule by rule, but can begin living them out unconsciously. Just as the pro-golfer no longer thinks of the mechanics in how to make a shot – his/her body just naturally does the right thing – the person who has matured in living out the Ten Commandments is free to live a more positive, joyous, God related life.

That is what the prophet Micah was doing when he summarized the Commandments saying,

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?
Micah 6:8

Which is also why, when asked which was the greatest commandment, Jesus actually quoted from Moses' summary of the commandments in the book of Deuteronomy, pairing that with another command from the handbook of the Priest.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.
Love your neighbor as yourself
Mark 12:28-31

"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' (Mark 12:28-31).

The Gospel of Luke records that Jesus also accepted this summary as the key to inheriting eternal life (Luke 10:25-28)

Perhaps there are more "WHYS" but these three reasons are the most important that I can think of.

Even if you have come to God by faith in Christ Jesus, you must still strive to live by the Ten Commandments in order to have a relationship with Him.

And while we have all occasionally broken the Ten Commandments – proving why we need a savior – striving to keep the Commandments will not only help us

- grow in our relationship with God
- and live a happier healthier life
- but will also bring us to a point of maturity where our relationships both with God and our neighbor, will be more out of love than on the law.

When we get to that point we will finally understand what the Apostle John meant when he wrote

Beloved, let us love one another,
because love is from God;
and everyone who loves is
born of God and knows God.
1 John 4:7

So, your take home today, is quite simple. Take this copy of the Ten Commandments and post it prominently in your home (which is even better than a school classroom). Then work at memorizing these Commands, living them and certainly talking them over with your family. Make sure that your children and grandchildren both know them as well as the WHY of the Ten Commandments. Amen?