

Sermon: Can you name the 10 Commandments?

Reading: Matthew 22:34-40

Introduction

Laws, love them or loathe them, most would agree we actually need them. Good laws help the nation to govern wisely and uphold freedoms and promote justice in society, without good laws we plunge into chaos. Highway Code is a good example as road users and pedestrians all follow the same rules and observe and understand the same signs which keeps drivers and pedestrians safe as possible on what can be very dangerous territory. Imagine if we lived in a society where everyone simply made up their own laws and acted upon them as they saw fit, amending them according to their own desires, self interests or with popular opinion? Consider these.....

- Henry VIII's son Edward VI set in place a law which made it illegal to break a boiled egg at the sharp end. If found guilty you could be sentenced to 24 hours in the village stocks. Some say the King made the order because he was fastidious about etiquette.
- Thanks to a law enacted by Edward VI, between 1547 and 1553, it became an offence to stand sock-less within 100 yards of the Queen.
- According to ancient statute, it is legal to murder a Scotsman within the ancient city walls of York, but only if he is carrying a bow and arrow at the time. And it's not a Sunday.
- It is also high risk for Welshmen to visit Hereford on a Sunday, where it's legal to shoot the Welsh all day, provided it takes place with longbows.

I don't know how many of these are true or just folk law!

Laws in this nation were once underpinned by our Judeo-Christian heritage and have helped govern and shape our nation for over 1000 years, mostly for the good.

However in the last half century we have seen a shift away from our Christian roots and a move to a more secularisation of society responding to popular culture and creating a new normal!

In the last 50 year or so, laws which have been introduced and others liberalised which has led to a cultural revolution changing the face of our nation, for example In 1967 a number of laws were introduced and repealed which has changed British culture completely, these included, sexual offences act, liberalising homosexuality, abortion and the obscene publications act.

1993 saw another step away from the Christian roots with the introduction of the Sunday Trading Act which now allowed widespread trading on the Lord's day. Sundays which was once seen for many as a day of rest, has now become another shopping day where many people have to work in order to serve others. It grieves me when Christians accept these changes and simply go along with them, even participating in them rather than maintaining the biblical principles behind the law of the Sabbath, which is to rest and honour God keeping the day holy.

Even the environmentalists surly agree the benefits to the eco system when production and consumption, travel and pollution ceased for 1 day every week to let the land and the people rest, even if they are not religious. In our reading today Jesus is faced with a question concerning the laws and which is the most important? Which ones should we keep and why? The question sounds innocent enough but its intention is more sinister, the motivation for asking this question is anything but innocent. Consider the laws amended in

1967, how many of these do you agree with and worthy of celebrating because of the positive impact on our nation as a whole and which ones cause you to weep when we think of the damage that has been done?

Taking abortion as one example is such a sensitive issue to speak on. Some argue its good that women have the right to choose and abortions are safe, others however weep that abortions in England's and Wales in 2019 reached a record high of more than 200,000, up 4% from the previous year of 192,900. This makes the Covid crises look like a snuffle by comparison!

This thought may help us to understand the challenge Jesus faces when confronted by the question the lawyer poses to Jesus. The questions intention is to create friction with public opinion, cause controversy between the religious groups and bring Jesus into conflict with the state (Rome).

Context

In chapter 22 Jesus silenced the Sadducees after they asked a question intending to tie Jesus up in theological knots concerning the resurrection. Jesus answer left them embarrassed and raging. They had underestimated Jesus. Now it is the Pharisees turn to ask their question. This time they will not be caught out quite so easily. The Sadducees failed because they underestimated Jesus, but the Pharisees had a different strategy, they chose an expert in the law to present their question, who better to ask a legal question than a lawyer. How could they lose?

The Greatest Commandment

Jesus takes the Pharisees back to school, back to basics so to speak. These religious groups have been so caught up in the letter of the law, they had forgotten the reason for the law. This provided Jesus with the perfect opportunity to remind them of the greatest commandment.

When we think of the greatest commandment what comes to mind? The most common mistake I hear is 'to love our neighbour as ourselves'. This however is not the greatest of the commandments as highlighted in our reading today. For Jesus reminds us that the greatest of all the commandments is to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. How easy it is to say but how challenging it is to us when we ask ourselves, the question, 'Do we love God this much?'

We make time for being with family and friends. We make time to tune into our favourite TV drama or show each week. We find the time for leisure and pleasure activities, for eating and drinking, holidaying, sleeping and resting. But how much time do we set apart and dedicate to God each day or week as we are called to?

I want to return to the greatest commandment in a moment but first would like to consider some of the other commandments of God. Pause here for a moment and write down the 10 commandments given to Moses on Mt Sinai. How many can you name?

How did you get on?

The Unpopular 10

Did you manage to identify more than 4? A survey conducted in 2009 by the Guardian newspaper reported the average Briton can quote only 4 of the 10 Commandments. A YouGovPoll conducted in 2017 revealed societies attitudes towards the ten commandments have changed and not all 10 are as popular as they once were. Any ideas which ones they felt were no longer needed or important? There are no surprises when we

consider which ones were considered important for society. Those surveyed said only 6 are relevant for today: The survey response on levels of importance.....

1. Murder (97%)
2. Stealing (93%)
3. Adultery (73%)
4. Bearing false witness (87%)
5. Honouring Mother and Father (69%)
6. Coveting (61%)

Although some of these figures look good, by using the same statistic it looks rather wrongly that 3% don't think murder is wrong, 7% don't think stealing is an offence, and a whopping 27% no longer see adultery as a sexual offence. I know there are lots of problems with statistics. The shame on our nation is the omission of the first four?

1. Not to worship idols
2. Misusing the Lord's Name
3. Worship no other gods
4. Keep the Sabbath Day holy

Of the Ten Commandments

1. The first four are about our relationship with God, see above
2. The next six are concerned with our relationship with each other.

To remove love of God from our lives and concentrate on loving our neighbour makes us humanists.

Jesus response to the lawyer who asked which is the most important of the laws was clear, and it included the first 4 commandments, love the Lord your God with all your heart.....Can we truly say this of ourselves when we consider our love for God and how we express and show our love when we gather together for worship? When we are always looking to reduce service times and get frustrated when services of the Word and Sacrament are longer than 1 hour there is something wrong.

Grace not law

In our culture churches are not only cutting the numbers of services and reducing service times but even dismissing the laws of God as irrelevant claiming as Christians we don't need to follow the laws as we now live under grace. This is a misuse of the text to which Paul was writing to the Romans. We need to remember Jesus said He did not come to do away with or abolish the law but to fulfil it. When we consider the teachings of Jesus throughout the gospels and the book of Revelation we discover Jesus actually raised the bar on each of the commandments, not dismissing, over ruling them or making them unimportant but actually made them even harder to follow..... Don't believe me, then consider what Jesus said about adultery, it is not just the act of committing adultery which is sinful according to Jesus, but even looking at another person lustfully is sinful. Likewise murder is no longer actually taking someone's actual life, but if we hate them and wish them dead, we have as good as murdered them in our hearts.

The Greatest Commandment

returning back to the greatest commandment, Jesus responded to the expert of the law that loving God was the greatest commandment which covers the first 4 given to Moses which include, Worship God and have no other gods before Him; Make no idol or image of God to worship; Honour the Lord's day and keep the Sabbath day Holy; Don't take the name of God in vein (Blasphemy). These last two are the hardest to remember as they are the easiest and most commonly broken without thought.

By holding to these commandments we are showing our love for God. These are not meant to be followed slavishly but out of a desire to love God, not out of blind obedience but out of reverence for who God with thankfulness and praise. My love for God should be so great and so evident that nothing else compares to it, comes close to it or competes with it! Love is the driving factor. The Psalmist says, he has come to love the laws of God because of the one who gave them is good (**Ps 119:1**). We worship God whose laws are good because He is good. If we dismiss His laws for what seems popular today we should be very concerned. God takes His laws very seriously and they are not open to debate or a democratic vote, nor swayed for popular opinion. They are not intended to prohibit but keep our lives in line with His will for our good and His glory.

One of the phrases I occasionally hear which does make me cringe is, “We must learn to love ourselves more if we are to love others better!” This is a modern, narcissistic, cultural self obsessed comment. If anything we already love ourselves far too much and take ourselves far too seriously as being the most important.

Jeremiah reminds us that God will instruct us and write His laws on our hearts and no longer on tablets of stone (**Jer 31**), but at the centre of our being, this is what being born again does. Our affections and desires have changed, no longer slaves to sin or following dead traditions, but entering into a loving and reverent relationship with Almighty God. When we reach the point where the sin we once loved, whether it was gossip, sexual immorality, cheating, coveting etc is avoided because we recognise it offends God, we are on the right lines, as our affections and desires for what is Holy is growing within us. If our desire is to love ourselves more then we need to be careful as we are placing ourselves, our self interests at the centre of our lives and we end up worshipping ourselves more than anything else. What would our church look like if everyone loved God as much as ourselves? How different would our churches in this nation look. God is seeking worshippers that will love ad worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. (**John 4**)

The son of David

The passage moves on from the question of love and law as Jesus asks the Pharisees a question of His own. Seventeen times the NT describes Jesus as the ‘son of David’. David lived 1000 years before Jesus, so how could He be David’s son? It’s a good question as it points to Jesus true identity. According the genealogies recorded in Matthew and Luke, both show Jesus as having the royal lineage of David. But the question Jesus poses is not simply about lineage but existence. Just as the woman whose daughter was tormented by a demon (**Matt 15:22**) and the blind men by the wayside (**Matt 20:30**) called out to Jesus as ‘son of David’. Their hope was not in Jesus’ lineage but in His divinity. They recognised He was before David, thus expressing their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. The Pharisees and the Sadducees could not see what the blind men saw so clearly when they encountered Jesus. Jesus confounds the Pharisees and Sadducees with His question and points out He is more than simply a descendant of David as He was before David, therefore greater than David which is why David in the Holy Spirit called Him My Lord. As Jesus says, “I am the root of the offspring of David” (**Rev 22:16**). Only the Incarnate Son of God could ever make this astonishing claim. Is Jesus our great love, if so, how do you show it? Jesus is clear, ‘If you love me, you will obey my commands’.

Summary

Love is not a feeling we have to wait for before we act, like falling in love. That is emotionalism. The love Jesus speaks is not emotionalism but obedience and submission of will to God and not out of blind slavish obedience, but out of reverence and joy in the Lord for His ways are true, life giving and a blessing. Love God, love others. trust in His ways and lean not on our own understanding. **Amen**