

## From The Pastor

One could say that life can be one big game of hide and seek. That which we most need and want, we run from, and that which we most seek and desire we hide from. To be human is to be in relationship. Yet, relationship is what we most try to control, manipulate, and hide from. Relationships call for vulnerability, loss of control, and a surrendering of self. These are not easy for us. As a substitute, many relationships are based on 'let's make a deal'. If you do this for me, I will do this for you. If you provide this, I will provide the other. Such an arrangement, I suppose, is workable enough, but where is the intimacy of self-giving, the surrender to trust another's love?

Resistance is the most common emotional stance when it comes to commitment and relationship. As we do this with one another, so we do it with God. For all that God has offered as an invitation to relationship, we have somehow managed to make it into something else.

The Ten Commandments are an early attempt by God to establish a basis for relationship. We tend to see 'commandment' as something we must do to stay in good standing with God, and to avoid punishment. The Ten Commandments were given as a divine gift for the right order of society and freeing us from the fundamental pit falls that hinder our relationship to God. Rather than allow the Ten Commandments to lead us to a deeper relationship with God, they have become the standard of accounting ourselves righteous. 'I have kept all the commandments; things between God and me are just fine'. We justify ourselves by the letter of the law, and hide from the true spirit of what the law offers us.

In the new covenant of the Cross, mercy is established as the gold standard of divine love. There is no self-made righteousness. All are sinners, and none can claim heaven on the merits of keeping the commandments alone. Now mercy is the standard, and mercy demands relationships of surrendering love and forgiveness.

Hiding from the more vulnerable stance of personal relationship with God and one another, we have used the Ten Commandments to establish religious rules and laws that defeat God's purpose. The Ten Commandments are given for the right order of social, moral, and spiritual relationships in society. Out of the disorder of human sin, and resistance to relationships of intimacy and obedience, we have used the fine art of bargaining with God as a substitute for mercy and true worship. This is our history of Temple use and Church religion.

The activity of the Temple had become one of bargaining with God. In great contrast, Jesus rightly identifies the temple as 'my Father's house'. The temple is supposed to be that sacred place where God can be worshiped and adored. Yet, it had become a place of commerce whereby the relationship with God is degraded to a bargaining system. In the social\material world this was great commerce. It made lots of money for the temple, but true relationship with God became a matter of deal making.

The thinking went something like this: we sell you a lamb (from which we make a nice profit), you sacrifice it to God (with our help and a small fee), and God will forgive all your sins. A more perfect lamb (one without blemish, will cost you more), will assure more perfect forgiveness. If you cannot afford the lamb, we have cheaper turtle doves for a lesser fee, but you're taking your own chances. Mercy and forgiveness, freely given and offered by God has taken on the human distortion of 'let's make a deal'. The offer of intimacy and personal relationship with God is compromised by debt satisfaction and paid for righteousness.

This is what stirs the anger of Jesus. Jesus is the last and fullest expression of God's offer for relationship and reconciliation. As such, Jesus is not only destroying the Temple, he is replacing it. No longer will bartered sacrifices serve as a sin offering. Now, Jesus himself, who is the Lamb of God, will be the final standard of divine justification. Those who truly seek God will find their desires satisfied in Jesus who is the Son of God. No more hiding is necessary or desirable. Jesus is the one we can embrace with confidence and comfort.

Though the Ten Commandments remain a high standard for right relationship with God, they are not the last word. Now we are to worship God in 'spirit and in truth' (Jn.4:23-24). Knowing and loving God from our hearts makes us the temple of God's dwelling place. To pray in spirit and in truth is to pray in the Spirit of Jesus who is God's divine truth. We are not limited to a specific place, but can know and converse with God from our hearts.

As believers in Christ who gather in his name, we are not a religious social club. Our stance is not to bargain with God by way of religious practice, but to know, love, and serve God from the depths of our being. Grateful for God's unconditional offer of unlimited mercy, we no longer limit ourselves to the dictates of law, but stand on the standard of love alone. Never able to bargain or buy our way to God, we

have only to surrender to what God offers us: a personal relationship of love. This arrangement will make us vulnerable, out of control, and surrendering to the rhythms of our hearts. Wouldn't that be wonderful?

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