

Exodus 20: 1-17 and Philippians 3:4-14 “Giving Your Heart to God”

THERE ARE MANY JOKES ABOUT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, INCLUDING MOSES SAYING TO THE PEOPLE: “THE GOOD NEWS IS THERE ARE ONLY TEN, THE BAD NEWS IS WE CAN’T CHANGE THEM TO THE TEN SUGGESTIONS.” AND MOSES SAYING TO GOD: “WE WERE HOPING FOR SOMETHING MORE ALONG THE LINES OF SELF-HELP” AND “I POSTED THEM ON FACEBOOK BUT THEY DIDN’T GET ANY LIKES.”

THE LIST OF EXAMPLES CAN GO ON AND ON. HOWEVER, WHILE IT IS SOMETIMES IN OUR NATURE TO JOKE EVEN ABOUT SERIOUS THINGS- IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO NOT LOSE SIGHT OF THEIR IMPORTANCE

.LET US REMEMBER THAT- THE TEN COMMANDMENTS ARE THE FOUNDATION OF GOD’S LAW, AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE IS PARAMOUNT IN BOTH THE JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN FAITHS. FURTHERMORE, THEY WERE GIVEN NOT SIMPLY TO CREATE RULES, AS IT IS USUALLY COMMONLY THOUGHT.

INSTEAD THE COMMANDMENTS ARE INTENDED TO ENABLE US TO KNOW GOD’S WILL FOR THE WORLD, AND THEY SHOW HOW WE CAN PLEASE GOD. HOWEVER, WHAT IS OFTEN FORGOTTEN CONCERNING THE LIST OF RULES IS THAT GOD ACTUALLY GIVES TO US A REASON WHY WE OUGHT TO OBEY. AND THIS IS NO SMALL THING, SINCE GOD COULD SIMPLY HAVE GIVEN THE RULES, AND COMMANDED US TO OBEY BECAUSE GOD SAID WE MUST.

INSTEAD THE LORD OUR GOD REMINDS US OF HOW HE HAS ALREADY SHOWN HIS LOVE AND POWER. AND IT IS BECAUSE OF WHAT GOD HAS DONE WE ARE COMMANDED TO OBEY.

EXODUS 20:2 PROCLAIMS: “I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD, WHO BROUGHT YOU OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT, THE HOUSE OF SLAVERY, YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME.”

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT IS INDEED THE BASIS FOR ALL THE REST OF THEM. HERE IN THE FIRST COMMANDMENT, WE ARE GIVEN THE REASON FOR WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE, WHICH IS- BECAUSE GOD IS THE ONE WHO REDEEMED US.

GOD’S REDEMPTION OF THOSE WHO LIVED IN SLAVERY IS SEEN IN JEWISH THOUGHT NOT SIMPLY AS A PAST EVENT, BUT A PRESENT REALITY FOR EVERY GENERATION SINCE THEN. SO ALSO IT IS FOR CHRISTIANS, WHO ARE ADOPTED INTO THE FAMILY OF GOD THROUGH CHRIST. WE TOO HAVE BEEN FREED FROM SLAVERY, NOT SIMPLY IN A HISTORICAL SENSE, BUT SPIRITUALLY FROM SLAVERY TO SIN AND DEATH.

IN THE WESTMINSTER LARGER CATECHISM, IN OUR BOOK OF CONFESSIONS, QUESTION 104 ASKS THIS CONCERNING THE FIRST ARTICLE OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS: “WHAT ARE THE DUTIES REQUIRED IN THE FIRST COMMANDMENT?”

THE ANSWER: “... KNOWING AND ACKNOWLEDGING OF GOD TO BE THE ONLY TRUE GOD, AND OUR GOD; AND TO WORSHIP AND GLORIFY HIM ACCORDINGLY, BY THINKING, MEDITATING, REMEMBERING, HIGHLY ESTEEMING, HONORING, ADORING, CHOOSING, LOVING, DESIRING, FEARING OF HIM; BELIEVING HIM; TRUSTING, HOPING, DELIGHTING, REJOICING IN HIM; BEING ZEALOUS FOR HIM; CALLING UPON HIM, GIVING ALL PRAISE AND THANKS, AND YIELDING ALL OBEDIENCE AND SUBMISSION TO HIM WITH THE WHOLE SELF; BEING CAREFUL IN ALL THINGS TO PLEASE HIM, AND SORROWFUL WHEN IN ANYTHING HE IS OFFENDED; AND WALKING HUMBLY WITH HIM.”

THIS SOUNDS LIKE A LOT FOR US TO DO TO FULFILL ONLY A SINGLE RULE, AND YET WHEN WE ARE ABLE TO RESPOND IN WAYS LISTED WE WILL KEEP NOT SIMPLY JUST THE FIRST COMMANDMENT, BUT ALL OF THEM.

UNFORTUNATELY, DOING THIS IS EASIER SAID THAN DONE, SINCE IN OUR HUMANITY WE INEVITABLY FAIL TO DO THIS ALL OF THE TIME. THE GOOD NEWS IS EVEN WHEN WE FAIL IN THIS DUTY WE CAN RELY ON GOD’S FAITHFULNESS AND LOVE AS REVEALED IN JESUS CHRIST.

FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE NEW TESTAMENT READING, PAUL REMINDS HIS READERS WHO GOD IS AND WHY THOSE AMONG THEM WHO ARE NOT JEWS ARE NOW WELCOMED INTO GOD’S HOUSEHOLD.

IN FACT HIS MESSAGE IS THAT BOTH JEW AND GENTILE HAVE RECEIVED GOD'S GREATER REVELATION IN HIS SON JESUS, AND ARE CALLED TO RESPOND. THE APOSTLE PROCLAIMS-JESUS CAME TO EARTH TO SHOW US THE FATHER, TO SHOW US WHO GOD IS AND HOW MUCH GOD LOVES US. AND JUST AS IMPORTANTLY, AS GOD INCARNATE, JESUS' ABILITY TO AVOID SIN, WAS BASED ON HIS UNIQUE AND INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

LISTEN TO WHAT THE REV. HENRY BLACKABY WROTE CONCERNING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KNOWING GOD. "EVERYTHING IN YOUR CHRISTIAN LIFE, EVERYTHING ABOUT KNOWING GOD AND EXPERIENCING GOD, EVERYTHING ABOUT KNOWING HIS WILL, DEPENDS ON THE QUALITY OF YOUR LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. "

THE APOSTLE PAUL UNDERSTOOD THIS VERY WELL. HE WAS A MAN WHO ONCE FOLLOWED AND SERVED GOD BY KEEPING FAITHFULNESS TO GOD'S LAW. AND YET, SAUL, AS HE WAS KNOWN BY THEN, DID NOT REALLY KNOW OR TRULY LOVE GOD.

INDEED AS A PHARISEE, IT COULD BE SAID THAT HE, IN MANY WAYS, PLACED THE LAW ABOVE GOD.HE DID SO BY SPENDING SO MUCH MORE TIME AND ENERGY ON THE LAW RATHER THAN ON ITS AUTHOR. BUT THEN AFTER SAUL MET JESUS ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS, EVERYTHING CHANGED. IT WAS NO LONGER WORDS ON A SCROLL THAT PAUL FOLLOWED, BUT JESUS, GOD'S WORD MADE FLESH.

AND IT WAS THAT RELATIONSHIP, BASED ON PAUL'S LOVE FOR GOD, WHO FIRST LOVED HIM THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING. THE APOSTLE'S LETTER TO THE CHRISTIANS OF PHILIPPI WAS MEANT TO INSPIRE AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO LIVE AND GROW IN THEIR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, AND THEIR LOVE FOR GOD.

PAUL REMINDED THEM THAT FALSE TEACHERS, WHO WERE TRYING TO GET PAGAN CONVERTS TO CHRIST TO FOLLOW JEWISH RITUALS AND REGULATIONS, WERE LEADING THEM ASTRAY. THUS HE WROTE THAT IT WAS NOT THE RITUALS WE DO WITH OUR BODIES THAT MATTER, BUT WHERE THE FOCUS OF OUR HEART AND SPIRIT ARE.

PAUL SAYS THAT ALL THINGS OF THE FLESH- LIKE RACE AND NATIONALITY, RELIGIOUS STATUS AND SOCIAL CLASS ARE RUBBISH COMPARED TO KNOWING GOD THROUGH CHRIST. HE STRESSED TO THEM THAT HE WAS NOT SPEAKING AS ONE WHO COULD BE ACCUSED OF JEALOUSY TOWARDS OTHERS, FOR HE HAD FULL BRAGGING RIGHTS AS A DEVOUT JEW.

INDEED PAUL EXPLAINS HE WAS BORN TO FAITHFUL PARENTS, WHO FOLLOWED ALL THE RULES SINCE HIS BIRTH. HE WAS BORN INTO THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN, RAISED AS A HEBREW, AND AS A PHARISEE, PAUL FOLLOWED GOD'S LAW METICULOUSLY.

HE HAD EVERY REASON TO WANT TO PRESERVE AND PROMOTE THE VALUE OF HIS DEVOTION TO THE LAW OF GOD. AND YET, AFTER COMING TO KNOW THE LOVE OF GOD THROUGH CHRIST, PAUL CHOSE TO DISCOUNT AND DISCARD EVERYTHING ELSE IN HIS LIFE, SO HE COULD KNOW AND SERVE CHRIST BETTER.

YOU SEE, TO KNOW GOD, REALLY KNOW GOD IS NOT TO HAVE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HIM, BUT TO BE IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM. RELATIONSHIP IS EVERYTHING WHEN IT COMES TO GOD, AND IT ALWAYS HAS BEEN FROM THE VERY BEGINNING.

GENESIS SPEAKS ABOUT GOD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FIRST HUMAN BEINGS- AND SIN IN ESSENCE WAS THEIR CHOICE TO SEEK SOMETHING MORE THAN THAT RELATIONSHIP. GOD'S CALLING OF ABRAHAM WAS ALSO ABOUT RELATIONSHIP. AND OF COURSE MOST OF ALL-- SALVATION IS ALL ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS.

A PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER WHO LIVED OVER A HUNDRED YEARS AGO, OFFERED A DEFINITION OF A CHRISTIAN THAT FOCUSES ON BELIEF AND RELATIONSHIP. REV. BABCOCK WROTE: "CHRISTIANITY IS NOT A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS, BUT A LIFE IN THE WORLD. IT IS NOT AN IDEA IN THE AIR, BUT FEET ON THE GROUND, GOING GOD'S WAY."

THESE WORDS REMIND US THAT CONFESSING OUR FAITH IS NOT SIMPLY A DECLARATION WE MAKE, BUT TRUE CONFESSION INVOLVES COMMITMENT.

TO SAY WE BELIEVE IN GOD: FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT, IS TO LOVE AND SERVE THE LORD IN OUR DAILY LIVES. IT IS TO CHOOSE TO LIVE AS A SERVANT, A STEWARD OF ALL GOD PROVIDES. IT IS TO LIVE IN THE WORLD, BUT BE INFLUENCED MORE BY THE HOLY SPIRIT THAN BY SOCIAL OR POLITICAL, OR ANY OTHER LOYALTIES.

ALMOST EVERY SUNDAY IN THIS CHURCH AND MOST PRESBYTERIAN AS WELL AS SOME OTHER CHURCHES, THE SERMON IS FOLLOWED BY A CONFESSION OF FAITH. AND MOST PROTESTANT CHURCHES USE THE APOSTLE'S CREED AS THEIR PRIMARY CONFESSION OF FAITH.

THE CREED IS A SUMMARY OF OUR BELIEF IN THE TRIUNE GOD, SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION, AND OUR UNITY IN JESUS CHRIST. THE ENGLISH VERSION OF THAT CREED BEGINS WITH THE WORDS: "I BELIEVE", WHICH ARE MEANT AS AN INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.

HOWEVER THE LATIN VERSION OF THE APOSTLES CREED OPENS WITH A SINGLE WORD THAT EXPRESSES BELIEF. THE WORD IN LATIN IS "CREDO". AND IN LATIN, THE MEANING OF CREDO GOES BEYOND MERE ASSENT TO KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

IT IS, THEREFORE, NO SO MUCH A DECLARATION OF FAITH AS IT IS A DECLARATION OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND ONE ANOTHER. YOU SEE- THE LATIN WORD CREDO ACTUALLY MEANS: "I GIVE MY HEART".

SO INSTEAD OF – I BELIEVE..., A MORE LITERAL TRANSLATION OF THE APOSTLE'S CREED FROM THE LATIN VERSION IS: "I GIVE MY HEART TO GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY...AND TO JESUS CHRIST...AND TO THE HOLY SPIRIT."

DO YOU HEAR THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BELIEVING AND GIVING YOUR HEART? TO GIVE OUR HEART TO GOD IS IN ESSENCE TO PUT BELIEF INTO ACTION, TO CHOOSE TO LOVE AND SERVE GOD NOT JUST VERBALLY BUT LITERALLY.

YES INDEED, TO GIVE YOUR HEART TO GOD IS TO MAKE MORE THAN A FAITH STATEMENT, IT IS A PROMISE OF ACTION. TO GIVE YOUR HEART TO GOD IS A VOW OF LOVE AND FIDELITY THAT DECLARES YOUR CHOICE TO PLACE YOUR FEET ON THE GROUND AND FOLLOW JESUS AS LORD, SAVIOR, AND GOD.

TODAY, I CHALLENGE US TO NOT MERELY SAY WE BELIEVE IN GOD- BUT GIVE OUR HEARTS TO THE LORD, WHO FIRST GAVE HIS HEART TO US.AND SO WHEN WE RECITE APOSTLE'S CREED, AND SAY "I BELIEVE" OR IN LATIN- "CREDO" –CONSIDER HOW YOU MIGHT GIVE OR MORE FULLY GIVE YOUR HEART TO THE LORD YOUR GOD, WHO REDEEMED.

THE WORDS OF A THANKSGIVING HYMN REMIND US TO GIVE OUR HEARTS TO THE LORD OUR GOD. THE FIRST VERSE SAYS: "O WHAT SHALL I RENDER FOR LOVE SO UNBOUNDED THAT LED THEE MY SAVIOR, FOR SINNERS TO DIE? RECEIVE, I BESEECH THEE, MY HEART'S HUMBLE OFFERING, THANKSGIVING AND PRAISES MY GLAD HEART UPRAISES TO THEE, LORD ON HIGH..."

LET US REMEMBER TO OFFER GOD OUR HEART'S THANKSGIVING AND PRAISES THROUGH OUR ACTIONS AS WELL AS IN OUR PRAYERS. AMEN