

## Summer Series: The Way of the Heart-

### Ten Commandments

June 3, 2018

Some of us have been watching the NBA basketball championship series between LeBron James' Cavaliers and Stephen Curry's Golden State Warriors. Thursday night, the game went into overtime, and with 2.7 seconds to go, and with Golden State ahead by ten points, Klay Thompson took a shot because the shot clock was winding down. You don't really need to attempt a shot at that point, because the game is essentially over.

Tristan Thompson was guarding him, and threw an elbow high, which is called a flagrant foul. Fouls happen all the time in basketball; that's part of the game. But a flagrant foul can get you thrown out of the game, because they can injure a player. Things got chippy from that point on, there was a lot of jawing back and forth, and it took the refs almost ten minutes to see if any other player should be thrown out of the game.

If you are going to play basketball, you need some rules. When Jim Naismith created basketball for his students in 1897, he devised 13 rules. Most of them are still valid. Look at rule number 5:

"No shouldering, holding, pushing, tripping or striking in any way the person of an opponent shall be allowed. The first infringement of this rule by any person shall count as a foul, the second shall disqualify him until the next goal is made, or if there was evident intent to injure the person, for the whole of the game, no substitute."

The point of this rule in particular is to make sure a player doesn't get hurt. Life in community, whether it's in a game or a classroom or a workplace needs some rules. We actually have some rules that are set out in our church constitution, for the pastor and for members.

We're starting a ten week summer series today on probably ten of the most famous rules in the Western world: the Ten Commandments. They are rules for life so that we don't hurt ourselves and other people. The point of life is not the rules. Jesus didn't say in John 10, I came that you might obey a list of rules...No, He said, I came that you might have life, and have it abundantly. The point is the fullness of life the way God intended it. But we need some rules so that we don't hurt each other along the way.

We don't have an easy time with rules, do we? When God set up life in the garden, God gave Adam and Eve one rule: I don't want you to eat the fruit off this one tree, and they can't follow that one rule. Well, did God really say...? Doesn't God want us to have any fun? To me, the story is meant to show how God intended us to have fullness of life, but didn't want us to hurt each other. So God gives us some guidelines.

Now if you don't hear anything else today, I hope you'll hear this. Obeying the Ten Commandments doesn't earn us any favor with God. God is simply mad about us; we don't have to earn that. We are saved by the grace of God, the grace shown to the whole world in the death and resurrection of Christ.

But following the commandments a way to live out that grace in community in our daily lives. It's a response to God's love in our lives.

We see this in the original setting of the commandments. By the way, the 10 Commandments are only ten of the 613 that God gave Moses on Mount Sinai. But these are the ten most important. These are the ten most universal. These are the ten that are mentioned twice, once in Exodus 20 and another time in Deuteronomy 5. By the way, when I consider the Ten Commandments, I sometimes remember the Mel Brooks movie, "The History of the World," when Moses comes down from the mountain with three tablets, and says, The Lord has given us these fifteen.... And then he drops one tablet... These ten commandments!

Just so you know, the law of Moses contained 613 commandments, but most of them were relevant to the time period. And even the ones that we still consider relevant, Jesus expands their meaning when he begins to teach. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21ff) he says, You have heard it said, You shall not murder (the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment) but I say to you, Don't be angry with your brother or sister without cause, and don't call your brother or sister a fool. Jesus moves beyond, Did I kill somebody, to ask the question, Is my internal life destructive or life-giving?

Jesus says, You've heard it said not to commit adultery (Matthew 5:27ff). I say to you, Don't look with lustful eyes on your neighbor. Jesus takes the commandment and goes further with it.

We Lutherans have a particular take on the use of the law, the use of the commandments. What we say is there are two, and maybe three uses of the law. The first use of the law is to have some order in society. The law keeps us from having chaos. Don't steal from people. That seems pretty basic when we live in community. But then it gets problematic in terms of interpretation. You've seen that warning at the beginning of the movie you watch: Piracy is not a victimless crime. And we think: Oh, come on, they're a huge Hollywood company; it doesn't hurt anybody to download a movie so I can watch it when I want to.

Maybe it gets more personal when you see something like this from an author's website: Piracy is not a victimless crime! Just ask us working moms! Please buy our books, don't steal them or share them illegally. How do we live out this command not to steal? We'll talk about that later in the summer. But the first use of the law is to keep society from being chaotic, where anything goes. You don't have a right to take someone's life. And we struggle with that one in terms of abortion, or capital, where we Christians disagree on what it means to obey that commandment.

Don't lie about someone. We call that slander or libel, and you can sue somebody for that. To have an orderly society, we can't do certain things. So that's the first use of the law, to create order in society.

And the second use of the law is show us that we need a Savior. We try to obey the law, and we can't do it. A couple of examples: we know we're not supposed to harbor ill feelings towards somebody, but we just can't let go of the grudge. We know that we shouldn't lust after someone; we know that using pornography demeans and objectifies women, but we can't stop. So the second use of the law drives us to recognize our need of a Savior. We can't obey the law; we constantly come up short. So the law is like a mirror that says to us, you can't do it. You need help. It drives us to Christ, who by the Holy Spirit's power can transform us from the inside. The second use of the law says, We can't be good enough, righteous enough, moral enough. We need a Savior.

The third use of the law was disputed early Lutherans. Some Lutherans said that because Christ sets us free, we don't need the law any more. And others said, No, the law acts as a model for us of what God wants for us. The law is a guideline that is still useful. And that is what is called the third use of the law. Our relationship with God is a gift; we don't earn it by obeying the law. But the law is a guideline for us as we live in community.

Look at the way the law of Moses comes about. God does the saving, and the law is a way for the people to respond to God's salvation. Remember that the Hebrew people had been enslaved in Egypt for 400 years. God finally says, Enough! I want you out! So God calls Moses by a burning bush, and Moses goes to the pharaoh and says, Let my people go, and pharaoh says, no way! And ten plagues finally convince the pharaoh to let the people go. And God finds a way for them to cross the Red Sea, also known as the sea of Reeds, and off they go into the wilderness.

That's all in Exodus 1-14. So notice this is God's saving work. The people haven't done anything to earn it. God simply says, I love you. I want you free. I'll make it happen. Two chapters later, the people are hungry, and they cry for the food they used to eat in Egypt. In fact, they want to go home. So God provides manna in the wilderness; God provides quail for them to eat. In chapter 17, they are thirsty. And Moses strikes a rock and water gushes out. They are provided for again.

So by the time we get to this chapter, God says, I have saved you. I have created you to be a people. I got you out of Egypt. I am providing for you in the wilderness. Now, here are some rules I want you to live by. I want us to be in a covenant relationship together.

So I want you to see the Ten Commandments not as restrictive rules that keep us from having any fun. They are guidelines from a loving God to keep us from hurting ourselves and our neighbors.

