

**Sermon**  
**19 October 2014**  
**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

**By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald**

**Text: Exodus 20:1-17**

**Matthew 22:34-40**

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We live in a regulated society. There are rules everywhere, for everything. And although this might sound a wee bit negative, it's not. Because although all the millions of rules we have to obey can sometimes get a bit much, I think in reality rules makes us feel safe.

Rules are like the fences around us, and as long as we are inside the fences with others who obey the rules like we do, we have nothing to fear. It's only if someone breaks a rule, that we start to feel threatened and scared, as if there are holes in our fences and we are not protected anymore. That's why we send the rule breakers out of our communities – so we can feel safe again.

But as has happened so many times in history – even in Old Testament times the people of God started abusing these fences – they started using it for shutting people out, instead of only keeping themselves safe. They made it more and more difficult for people to get in, so God decided to make a plan.

He broke their fences down completely and made a cross with it. And from that day onwards he told his people that they should let themselves be governed by love alone. That they didn't need millions of laws to keep them safe, because if they love God and their neighbour, then they would never break any of the laws they had to obey in any case.

“Neighbour” doesn't only refer to your actual neighbour, of course, but to anybody you get in contact with. And if I had to translate the word used for “love” in “*love your neighbour*” into our language and culture, it would mean something like “deep rooted and honest *respect*”.

This is, of course, still applicable to us as Christians today.

But very often we just shrug our shoulders and say, I've not broken any of the 10 commandments, so I am as good a Christian as you can be.

Because I've not:

- Prayed to a different God – tick;
- Made myself an idol – tick;
- Misused the name of God – tick;
- I keep the Sabbath holy – tick;
- I honour my father and my mother – tick;
- I've not committed a murder – tick;
- I've not committed adultery – tick;
- I've never stolen anything – tick;
- I've never given false testimony against anybody – tick;
- I don't covet things other people have – tick.

So that's me, I don't break the law of God.

But what does all of this mean even?

- 1<sup>st</sup> commandment: I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other God's before me.
- *This doesn't only refer to actual other gods, but to anything else that is as important (or even more important) to you than your faith in God.*
- 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment: You shall not make for yourself an idol and bow down before it...
- *This doesn't only refer to actual things you bow down to, but to anything you worship – it could be sport, telly, alcohol, a hobby... Anything that gets 1<sup>st</sup> place in your life, where God is supposed to be your very 1<sup>st</sup> priority.*
- 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment: You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
- *Out of respect for God, we should only use his name when we are talking to him or about him, and always do that respectfully.*
- 4<sup>th</sup> commandment: Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
- *The Israelites were not allowed to work on the Sabbath day – because this was the day set apart for worshipping God, and it was also a testimony to the people who lived around them. We Christians are supposed to do the same, except we set apart a Sunday, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead – and this day should be different from the rest of our week. Because God wants us to have a special day devoted to him, where we can stand still for a little bit and reflect on what it means to believe in him, and then also to gather up strength for the rest of the busy week that lies ahead of us.*

- 5<sup>th</sup> commandment: Honour your father and mother.
- *If it wasn't for your father and mother, you wouldn't have been here. So no matter what, you always need to treat them respectfully.*
- 6<sup>th</sup> commandment: You shall not murder.
- *This doesn't only refer to actually picking up a knife or a gun and killing somebody, it also refers to hurting others – physically or emotionally – in such a way that they wish that they were rather dead.*
- 7<sup>th</sup> commandment: You shall not commit adultery.
- *You shouldn't be unfaithful to the person you married in any way – not even only in your mind.*
- 8<sup>th</sup> commandment: You shall not steal.
- *You shouldn't ever take anything that belongs to somebody else, including things like their dignity and good name.*
- 9<sup>th</sup> commandment: You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.
- *You shouldn't say things about others that can't be proven as true, and even then you should always keep in mind that we will never know the full story behind other people's behaviour.*
- 10<sup>th</sup> commandment: You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbour.
- *Christians shouldn't wish that they had the things the people around them have. Because that will result in envy, and nothing good can come of that.*

So – not really that easy to not break any of these laws, is it?

Let's now take a wee look at the 10 commandments, at the "old law", and compare it to the summary of the law Jesus gave in Matthew, the "new law":

- 1<sup>st</sup> commandment: I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other God's before me.
- *If you really love God – of course you won't have any other gods.*
- 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment: You shall not make for yourself an idol and bow down before it...
- *If you really love God, of course you won't make yourself an idol and bow down before it.*
- 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment: You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
- *If you really love God, of course you won't misuse his name.*
- 4<sup>th</sup> commandment: Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
- *If you really love God, of course you'll set apart a day in your busy week, a Sunday, to worship God and to rest.*
- 5<sup>th</sup> commandment: Honour your father and mother.
- *If you really love your neighbour, of course you will honour your father and mother, who are even closer to you.*
- 6<sup>th</sup> commandment: You shall not murder.
- *If you really love your neighbour, of course you shall not murder.*
- 7<sup>th</sup> commandment: You shall not commit adultery.
- *If you really love your neighbour, of course you shall not commit adultery, because that will hurt other people.*
- 8<sup>th</sup> commandment: You shall not steal.
- *If you really love your neighbour, of course you shall not steal, because that will harm someone else.*

- 9<sup>th</sup> commandment: You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.
- *If you really love your neighbour, of course you shall not give false testimony against him/her.*
- 10<sup>th</sup> commandment: You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbour.
- *If you really love your neighbour, of course you shall not covet anything that belongs to him or her – you will be glad for them if they have nice things in their lives.*

So literally – if you love God and others, you won't break any of the commandments. So that's why Jesus said – to make it simple, let's have only 2 rules – love God and love others.

These 2 rules are really important – it's the back bone of Christianity. Because if you don't love, you can't call yourself a Christian. But if you *do* love, you can change the world.

Because sometimes that is all other people need – to be loved. And you know what the best thing about all this is? If we love others, they will love us back. That's the one thing about love that always amazes me – nobody can resist the power of true love.

Jeffrey Smead tells the story of a wee boy who built a toy sailboat.

He would take it to the park every day and sail the little boat on the pond. Because he loved his boat, he was very careful not to let it go too far out into the water. But then, one day, the inevitable happened, and the boat sailed beyond his reach.

He had got himself soaked trying to retrieve it, but the boat had gone out too far for the wee boy to rescue it. He went home heartsick, expecting that he would never see his boat again...

But a few weeks later he was walking through the village, and, believe it or not, he saw his boat in the window of a little second hand shop. He was so excited!

He went into the shop and said, "You've found my boat! I made that boat! It's mine and I'd like to have it back please."

But the man behind the counter said, "Well, maybe it was your boat at one time, but it's my boat now! And if you want it, you will have to pay me 15 pounds for it.

"FIFTEEN POUNDS?!?!?!" said the boy. It seemed like an enormous amount of money. He had no idea how he could ever come up with that much money.

He started to hang his head and walk out of the shop, when the owner said, "If you'd like to earn a little money, I could use some help around here."

And so it was agreed. Every week the boy would come and sweep the floors, tidy up the shelves, and in return the owner would give him a few pounds.

Finally the day came when he had enough money to buy his boat back. He was thrilled. And as he walked out of the store, holding his boat like a

long-lost friend, he said, "You're mine twice now! You were mine the first time, because I made you; and now you're mine again, because I bought you!"

The exact same thing is true about us. God made us, and then because he loves us he bought us too – through Jesus he bought us out of our slavery to sin. So we belong to God *twice* – that's how much he loves us.

So let us love him back, not only through loving *him*, but through loving each other too.

Can you imagine what a changed place the world would be if everybody did that?

Rules do make us feel safe. Let us make it our only rule to love – everybody and in everything, and make Christianity a safe place. In a world where there is so much danger and uncertainty – people are longing for safety, so let's give them that. After all, God gives us everything we need...

He gives us strength when we feel weak, he gives us friends when we feel lonely, he gives us a purpose when we feel useless, he gives us direction when we feel lost, he forgives us when we make mistakes. He promises to never leave us alone, no matter what, because he loves us. And he has proven this to us – twice.

So let's walk out these doors and go love those people who are easy to love, as well as those who are not easy to love – not only because we have to, but because we want to, because God loved us first.

Amen