

Home at Last: Laws For Lovers

WITH MIKE TUCKER

Is it just me, or does it seem like the longer a couple is married the more they tend to look like each other? I know this isn't true with every couple, but it does seem that it happens quite often.

And not only do they tend to look alike, at times they even begin to take on each other's mannerisms, patterns of speech, and more. I guess when you spend that much time with someone it's bound to happen, isn't it?

Well, here is the good news. The same is true in your spiritual life. The more time you spend with Jesus, the more you tend to look and act like Him! That's not just true, it's His promise to us.

Open your Bible to the New Testament book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 10:16a

"This is the covenant that I will make with them. After those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws upon their heart, and on their mind I will write them...."

The phrase, "I will put My laws upon their heart," implies a relationship of love that causes a change in behavior. It says that laws are kept because of Love.

I've been married for some time now, and I've learned that my wife has commandments. She has the commandment, "Thou shalt have no other girlfriends before me." And "Thou shalt not take my name in vain, but thou shalt speak kindly to me." If you're married, does your spouse have some of the same commandments?

However, it is not difficult for me to keep these commandments. I love Gayle so much that I actually love doing things for her that make her feel loved. Her commandments are simply basic laws of relationship, and they are actually quite similar to the Ten Commandments in the Bible. The Commandments in Exodus 20 are simply laws for lovers!

The Laws of God are also an expression of His character. If you want to know what God is like, you can begin by looking at the Law of God, especially as that law is revealed in the life of Jesus. By looking at God's laws you see the things that matter most to Him. Basically, God cares about two things: that we love Him, and that we love each other.

With that in mind, allow me to direct your attention to a story found in the Gospel of Matthew. Turn with me to the 22nd chapter of Matthew.

The experts in religion were constantly testing Jesus. Most of the time they were attempting to discredit Him, but even in those trying moments, Jesus availed Himself of the opportunity to teach things of great value. This story is no exception.

Matthew 22: 35-40

One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

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In the Jewish mind, the Law represented God's greatest word to man, and it found its climax in the Ten Commandments. These ten short decrees were the supreme expression of the greatest words ever spoken by Almighty God. Now, this expert in the Law asked Jesus which of the ten was the greatest. Jesus' response was probably not quite what the man expected. Instead of picking just one of the them, Jesus offered a broad summary of all ten, linking them together as of equal importance.

The first four of the Ten Commandments deal with our relationship with God:

1. Don't have any other gods before God
2. Don't make an image of those gods or worship them
3. Don't take the name of God in vain
4. Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy

All four of these commandments, as found in Exodus 20, deal with our relationship with God.

The next six commandments deal with our relationships with people. Just as the first four commandments establish boundaries in order to protect our relationship with God while showing Him respect, so the last six commandments establish boundaries in order to protect our relationship with people:

5. Honor your father and your mother
6. Don't murder
7. Don't commit adultery
8. Don't steal
9. Don't bear false witness
10. Don't covet anything that belongs to your neighbor

Pretty simple, aren't they? And yet, every law of the land today is based on one of these ten. In the United States, we have thousands of laws on the Federal, State, County, and City levels. However, each of those laws could be said to be an expression of one of God's Ten Commandments.

While governments have expanded these principles in exhausting detail, Jesus went the opposite direction and summarized them as laws of Love. Love God and love your fellow man. That pretty much sums it up, doesn't it?

Now, Jesus' summary was not actually unique to Him. We find that Jesus was quoting Old Testament passages that illustrated these two great principles of love. The first is found in Deuteronomy 6:5. This was a passage of Scripture that was used as a daily prayer by every devout Jew. It was called the *Shema*.

Deuteronomy 6:5

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might..."

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Notice that Jesus added a bit to what had been written in Deuteronomy. To heart, soul, and might, Jesus added “mind.” We are to love God with our minds, as well. Even our thoughts are to be thoughts of love to God.

The second Old Testament reference is found in Leviticus:

Leviticus 19:18

“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD...”

Jesus was quoting these two passages with a slight edit, and He proffered His statement as an endorsement of the Ten Commandment Law of God. Nowhere does He refute that law. In fact, it cannot be refuted, since it is an expression of God’s own character; and because God does not change, His character does not change.

However, there is a danger. The danger is that we view the Law of God as a list of requirements for entrance into Heaven. This is not true. The Law of God should not be viewed in this manner. In fact, even its literary structure suggests that the Law of God is something very different than a list of legal requirements.

In the days when the Ten Commandments were first delivered to Moses on Mt. Sinai, the Bronze Age, there existed something called a Suzerainty Vassal Covenant. First of all, a covenant is different than a contract. A contract requires at least two parties, each of whom must perform if the contract is to be valid. This is not true with a covenant.

A covenant assumes a relationship between two parties, one of whom is greater than the other. In a covenant, only the greater of the two parties is to perform an act for the covenant to be fulfilled. It is assumed that the lesser party must simply remain in the relationship and remain faithful to the relationship, and then the greater party will perform that which is promised.

The Suzerainty Vassal Covenant was made between a Suzerain, Lord, or King, and his Vassals. Archaeologists have uncovered many copies of such covenants from the Bronze Age. These covenants all took pretty much the same literary form. They began with an announcement of the King or Lord’s name, a description of their realm, and a recounting of their mighty acts or deeds in battle. Then there was a description of what that Suzerain or Lord would do for all the Vassals in his realm as long as they remained loyal subjects. Such as, if an invading army came in, the Lord would protect his vassals, or if a famine hit the land, the Lord would feed his subjects, and so on.

Here is why this is important. The Ten Commandment document we find in Exodus, beginning about chapter 16 or 17, reads exactly like those Suzerainty Vassal Covenants of the Bronze Age. And since this is a covenant between God and His people, which includes you, the Ten Commandments are not a list of obligations that *you* must perform. Instead, they are a listing of blessings that God will produce *in you* simply because you are His child.

God will make you a person who would never want any god but Him, and will make you someone who would never make an idol or desire to worship any other god. He will

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make you someone who wouldn't dream of taking His name in vain and who would dearly love to worship Him every week as you keep a day of worship holy.

God is promising in the Ten Commandments to make you someone who would honor your parents, never want to take a human life, honor your marriage by being faithful to it, never bear false witness, never steal, and not covet. God is promising to make you a person who is better than you ever dared dream possible! It's a promise, not an obligation.

Of course, God would never do away with anything that reflects His character, and He would never do away with something that He has promised to produce in you! His law is as eternal as His covenantal promise and His character.

You see, your salvation has three parts. During our last meeting, we spoke of the first part of salvation: the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. Theologians call this part Justification. In this part you are spared from the penalty for sin. You and I deserve the penalty since we have sinned. The Bible declares that we deserve the penalty of eternal death. However, God has delivered us from that penalty because Jesus has born it for us through His death on the Cross. He offers it as a gift of His love to you, a gift you cannot earn or deserve. It is a part of His covenantal promise to you.

The second part of your salvation is God's promise to deliver you from the power of sin in your life. This is called Sanctification. You and I have become enslaved to sin. We can't help ourselves. But God says that a part of His covenant with us is His promise to break the power that sin has over us. He will replicate His character in you. He will produce the Ten Commandments (the expression of His character) in you, making you a person you never dared dream you could become. He will do the work to make you like Himself – to sanctify you. Your job is simply to choose to be in relationship with Him.

The third part of your salvation is that God has promised to deliver you from the presence of sin. We call this Glorification. This is where the Second Coming of Jesus enters in. Jesus has promised to return for us, destroy all sin, and take us to a place where we will live forever without any sin. Everyone will be filled with love for God and love for each other. It will be a place of peace, safety, love, joy, creativity, activity, and wonder! That place is our home! We call it Heaven.

These are the three parts of your salvation: Justification, Sanctification, Glorification. Tonight we are talking about Part Two of your salvation, the part that involves God's promise to replicate His character in you. He will make you someone who keeps the 10 Commandments because they are written on your heart.

So we've come back to our original text for the evening, Hebrews 10:16.

Hebrews 10:16

*"This is the covenant that I will make with them
After those days, says the Lord:
I will put My laws upon their heart,
And on their mind I will write them..."*