



“But instead a covenant of Grace”

BY PASTOR JOHN HILLMER

Today – we have TORAH. God’s immutable Law. Decalogue. God’s Word “10 Commandments” they been called ‘the foundation of civilization’. “Rule of Law”.

In this land, they are deemed ‘holy’. We argue about them; FOR them. These ‘Sacred’, “Holy Words”, chiseled into stone, and some states enshrine them into monuments on the grounds of the state capitol. But what exactly ARE they?

Do they operate like the 4 “Laws of thermodynamics”? Or there are 3 laws of thermodynamics? Some argue that the “Zeroth law” regarding temperature is ‘not’ law.

“Ten Commandments” - “Decalogue” - Torah. How to number. What is their count? 10, 11 or 12? Count the “You shall / shall not” Go ahead, add them up! Don’t forget the two at the beginning with the imperatives “remember” and “honor”

What is their function? Are they “Do, or die?” Break one and “go to hell?” Are some ‘considered’ more important? I for one, take them VERY seriously. To “shape” my life, and give depth, purpose, and direction to life. Not just for ME - but for the sake of community. The “common good”. Ultimately, they form a covenant of Grace, not a covenant of ‘condemnation’ or ‘accusation’ or death.

Let’s look at Psalm 19 – it’s really a meditation on “God’s law”. “God’s laws” are God’s “glory”. Natural law - verses 1 – 6. Then after verse 6 a “seam” or shift with verses. 7 – 10 the “Torah”. “God’s Law” - Torah – is God’s glory. It’s reviving the soul; rejoicing the heart, enlightening the eyes. God’s wisdom is ‘clean’ and ‘pure’ and endures forever. More precious than gold; sweeter than honey in the comb. Verses 11 – 14, the end of the Psalm, are the function & purpose of God’s Law - “Enlightenment”. Inspiration. Don’t let my lesser self, get the better of me.

Now let's look at the catechism, - SO helpful. First of the "5 Chief Parts" - The Ten Commandments. Each commandment is stated and followed with "What does this mean?" Always the teacher Luther was - "we are to fear and love God so that...BUT INSTEAD..."

Take the Seventh commandment: You shall not steal. **What does this mean?** We are to fear & love God, so that we do not take our neighbor's money or property, nor acquire them by crooked deals, **but instead** help them to improve and protect their property & income.

The Eighth: You shall not bear false witness. **What does this mean?** We are to fear & love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputation **but instead** we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.

10 Commandments are a "Covenant of Grace". Not a 'hammer of the Law', designed to smash & break us. Or a tool that WE USE, to 'hammer on others', and judge them; accuse others, and condemn them. A Place of Grace.

By living within the Torah, it becomes a place where we meet God. A place where God's Love and Justice is found. A place where our "soul is revived"; our heart "finds joy"; and our eyes are "enlightened" (Ps. 19). And THAT is why Jesus cleansed the Temple. (Gospel. John 2). That is why he overturned the tables and why he said "Get these things OUT of here!"

Because the Temple had become a place - NOT where one met God but where business was conducted, and profit-taking became King. It was no longer a place of Grace, and truth, and peace, and justice. It was all about 'convenience'; all about 'me' all about a simple and simplistic shallow understanding of the "law". "Offer this sacrifice - get your ticket punched - and you're good to go with God", because you 'did the thing' to the letter of the law.

Celtic spirituality has this way of talking about "thin places." Do you know about this? "Thin Places" are those places- where it feels like the distance between our finite world and God's eternal & spiritual reality collapses - becomes thin - and one senses the presence of God. A "Sacred space" - "Holy Ground". It could be a mountaintop; the power of nature; the beauty of creation. Don't forget that Moses, received the TORAH on the mountain. Sinai. It could be a common, everyday place - a simple room with one chair.

"Thin places" - where the distance between the human and the divine, collapses and we feel close to God. The "Temple" was supposed to be such a place. But it had become a

"FAT" place with no room for God. God was pushed out. And so when I read John's testimony that Jesus "cleansed" the Temple - he was returning it to be a "THIN" place. And when I read the whole of John's Gospel, it occurs to me that every place has the capacity to be a thin place because God's presence in Jesus is set loose in the world, no longer confined to Temple (or for that matter church) but "the world". Incarnational. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us – full of Grace and Truth.

The "INCARNATION" is that "God is here in Jesus". That God is available, approachable and present. Not chiseled in stone, or 'far away'.

The "Law" (Torah, Word) is supposed to be such a place. A place where one can meet God. But when the Word – the Law – becomes fat with judgment, accusation and condemnation, we do not meet God there. We stand face-to-face with our demise.

But instead – through the love and the lens of Christ, the WORD, the TORAH, is a place of Grace; where we meet God, and see God.

May that be our vision. May Christ Jesus be your vision.

Amen.