



247 Broad Street | Red Bank NJ 0770
(732) 747-0446 | www.umcredbank.org

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The 10 Commandments – “The Two Laws of Love”

Romans 13:8-10

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

Matthew 22:36-40

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” 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 greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

This summer we have been focusing on the 10 Commandments, trying to hear what they meant in their original context and applying them to our contemporary lives. We’ve discovered that more than simple “do this, don’t do that” laws, they are a moral code, guidelines for how to live as a loving community, centered and focused on a loving God. Honestly, I was nervous about selecting a 10 week worship series... I thought we would all get bored of this topic, that the summer would pass with us counting down with a groan... ugh! How many more commandments can there be! But this series has been a gift of growth and challenge for me, and I’ve heard for many of you as well. We’ve been challenged and inspired to take this “old book” and use it as a lens through which to see our daily lives, and to reflect on what God is asking of us... how can we live even more faithfully, how can we love even better?!

Sister Joan Chittister, who’s resource I’ve been utilizing in my sermon research and preparation, calls these commandments the “Laws of the Heart”, they are not laws of any country or kingdom... They were meant to shape attitudes and spirits. They are not meant to restrict us from life... but rather to lead our lives and communities into fullness and faithfulness. The 10 Commandments tell us what’s worth focusing on in our own personal

lives. They're a vision of what it means to be a good, healthy, happy, authentic, human community.

The challenge comes when people get legalistic about the commandments.... or really anything found in scriptures. When we teach these laws as inflexible, rigid, and absolute, the HEART of the law is destroyed and the love that motivates it withers. When we take laws that are meant to enable life-giving, caring community and reduce them to restrictions and black and white expectations, we misuse and abuse them. God's laws are not about law at all – with punishments built in - they are about LOVE.

As we strive to live out our faith, we cannot miss the forest for the trees! We cannot get so caught up in the details that we miss the big picture... the overall message of love. Jesus knew this and taught this over and over with his followers. He continually challenged those who tried to apply the Jewish faith in legalistic ways, at the expense of community, at the expense of care for the other, at the expense of relationship. He pushed back on legalistic Sabbath restrictions, on expectations of who he could and could not share a meal with, on our eagerness to place judgements on others without taking a good look in the mirror first. Over and over, Jesus points us to the heart of our faith and how to live out God's love in real time.

When asked what was the greatest of all the commandments, Jesus boils it down to the heart... “You shall **love your God** with your whole heart and your whole mind, and your whole soul.” To study the commandments and miss this lesson is to miss the commandments entirely. If all we hear when we read the commandments is a manual defining sins for ourselves and others, a checklist of behaviors by which we measure our holiness, then we are missing the point! We're missing the heart!

Lists can be comforting though. Allowing us to feel holy without ever really having to be holy. It teases us into doing all the right things for the wrong reason. It is all too possible to go to church, to profess faith in God, to live a rigidly pure life, never to steal a penny, never to tell a lie, never to give in to greed, never to succumb to lust – and not really love God at all. It's only when all of who we are and what we do fully reflects the heart of God – when we make nothing but God, god; when we put our hope, not in money or things or people or power, but in God alone – that the rest of the commandments take on real meaning in life. When our actions and choices in life stem from love of God and others, rather than simply duty or a sense of obligation, that's when true community can come alive and we become co-creators with God.

So how do we grow in our love of God – the whole self - heart, mind, & soul? Just like any loving relationship, we need to spend time with God... in conversation through prayer. Just as you would build a relationship with a spouse or a friend, you would start by spending time, talking, sharing your hopes and dreams, your fears and failures. You would talk and listen... give and take... never looking at your relationship as a one way street, but something that needs both giving and receiving. You would try to get to know the other better – make time for worship and reading scripture, talking with others about your faith and exploring your spirituality. Our relationship with God is not only about what God can do for us, especially in those times of great need, but also about what we can do for and with

God. Loving God with all of who we are means inviting God into all aspects of our lives, looking for how to live in ways that reflects that love back to God and others around us. Loving God with all our mind means backing up our passion with knowledge. By asking questions. We can't be afraid to challenge and wrestle with God and our beliefs. Every day is made up of hundreds of little moments that are opportunities to love God. And every single opportunity matters.

But loving God alone is not enough. We are part of an interwoven community where our actions and inactions impact others. Loving God overflows from simply a "me and God" mentality to a love for all that God has created. While the first four commandments focus on love of God, the other six all focus on loving our neighbor, living in right relationship not just with God, but with those we share this life with. It is through this love that we become a new kind of people, a godly community, a holy nation. In these last six commandments we learn to protect life, to love unselfishly, to do justice, to honor truth, to turn our hearts to God rather than to make gods out of the things our hearts crave.

Jesus taught that while loving God comes first and is the greatest commandment, the second "love your neighbor as yourself" follows right after, and upon these two commandments, EVERYTHING else hangs! To live all of the commandments as The Two Great Commandments is to be sure that we are not even tempted to make any one of the commandments themselves the kind of false god that leads us to judge and punish and deny love to others.

How is it that you live out these commandments – loving God and loving your neighbor?

- What have you done recently to grow in your love for God? Do you feel that your relationship with God is growing deeper each day, or is it stagnant, and if so, what are you going to do about it?
- You know the hymn, "They'll know we are Christians by our love?" The strength of our faith & the fullness of our love for God is displayed in how well we love others. How do you challenge yourself to love your neighbor a little better each day?

These are the questions to keep asking ourselves... to keep coming back to... the ones that should guide our moral compass as we go to work, spend time with family, choose what to purchase, and decide how to vote. Every aspect of our lives should be guided by these two commandments – and LOVE should guide us all. May it be so. Amen.