

GETTING COMFORTABLE WITH
DIVINE
DEMANDS

A BACKDOOR APPROACH TO THE 10 COMMANDMENTS

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DEDICATION



To all my children down to the third and fourth generation
that they might know the foundation principles
which kept our family together in good times and in bad.

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INTRODUCTION



In the Midwest, we have a proverb: “Back-door friends are best.” As a stranger knocking on my front door, a “Do Not Disturb” sign might discourage you. As a door-to-door salesman, you might be tempted not to ring my doorbell when you read, “Beware of Dog,” or “No Solicitors.” As a back-door friend, you don’t have to confront an irate homeowner. Just come on around back; the coffee is brewing and we can relax over a cup of java.

When you approach Mt. Sinai from the front you see a volcano belching fire and smoke. Who could get comfortable with that? But, as friends of Jesus, we have a back-door approach, which is the subject of this book.

In this series of devotional studies, we will discover the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) as much more than a list of rules and regulations one can apply to the dos’s and don’ts of life. Rather, they are a revelation of those underlying, foundational principles that can mold and meld the core beliefs and values of a rabble into the people of God.

When the Israelites escaped Egypt after four hundred years of bondage, they were hardly more than a disorganized, undisciplined swarm of people. On the third month of their liberation, they received the Ten Commandments from God through Moses, and they were on the way to becoming one nation under God.

A similar thing happened in our nation when in 1776, remarkable documents—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian values—began the leavening process, which transformed thirteen independent colonies into the United States of America. That progress toward a more perfect union is still at work.

***We can build a life
pleasing to God on
the foundation of the
Decalogue.***

What happens to nations can happen to an individual searching for unity and transcendent meaning in life. In the Decalogue one can find those foundational principles upon which one can build a life that is pleasing to God.

The first principle is *revere God*, his priority, his invisible glory, his name, and his Sabbath. The first four commandments are not inflexible. They are expressed in different ways at different stages of life. But the attitude is the same. They guide you to feel reverence toward God. The next six commandments lead you on how to *respect man*. The holy awe you feel toward God is to be manifested in the respect you feel toward others who are created in the divine image. That begins with the honor you feel toward your father and mother. The home is the best place to learn about the sacredness of life, the faithfulness of the marriage bond, the respect of others to enjoy their possessions, the respect for the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and the feeling of joy you have for others to have and to hold that which is rightfully theirs.

There you have it. Not rigid rules and regulations, but flexible guidelines.

I
THE FIRST TABLET
REVERENCE FOR GOD

RELAX AND GET COMFORTABLE BY PUTTING FIRST THINGS FIRST



And God spoke all these words: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.

(Ex. 20:1-3)

After a sumptuous meal, we like to get comfortable. Men often loosen their ties, unbuckle their belts and flake out on the couch. Let me ask both women and men a vital question: Can we get comfortable with the laws of God? Can we turn those tablets of stone into bread and feast on them?

There was a time when I considered them not as a ten-course meal, but as bitter pills. They were hard to swallow; something to be endured rather than enjoyed. The “thou shalt not” made me feel as if I were tied up in knots. *What is God trying to do, tie me down and make my life dull and boring like my parents’ lives?* In those early days, I perceived God as a cosmic killjoy. I had enough negatives in my life without adding ten more.

***Are the Ten
Commandments
advisers or
adversaries?***

It took me years to see the Ten Commandments as advisers rather than adversaries. They were given not for God’s sake but for mine, to mark the path that leads to happiness and fulfillment. As

long as I stayed within those boundaries, I could enjoy the protection of Providence.

***Our God is
incomparable in
preeminence.***

How can we unravel these divine imperatives? One of the best ways is to take each “thou shalt not” and turn it into a “thou shalt.” These negative prohibitions, which on the surface seem so restrictive, can be turned into positive principles of praise, which are liberating.

Let us begin our studies with the first commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me.” We must not have any gods before or besides the living God, because our God is incomparable in preeminence. There is nothing that can compare with God who is in a class by himself.

This is like the hinge that opens the door of praise. We can praise God in every situation, under every circumstance, in spite of anything, because of who God is. That’s the essential difference between thanksgiving and praise. Thanksgiving centers on what

***God fills our hearts
with praise even
when everything else
disappoints us.***

God has done. We are grateful because this and that have happened. Praise is not dependent upon happenings, like happiness is. It is grounded in the nature and being of God. Our Scripture puts it so well when it says: “I am the Lord your God.” God fills our hearts with praise, even when everything else disappoints us.

Because God is one, he is in a class by himself. One is the only number that is singular. All other numbers express varying degrees of plurality. The difference between one and two is a difference in kind. The difference between two and two million is a difference in degree.

Connect that thought with Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one.” In other words, nothing in all of the universe can compare with God. The difference between God and man is a difference in kind; the difference between man and mankind is a difference in degree.

There are those who would like us to believe God is man lifted to perfection; that, as man is, God was, and as God is, man will be. Has God somehow evolved along with his universe? I believe God is one; different in kind from his creation, awesome in majesty, transcendent in glory. Nothing can stand beside him, save his Son, and nothing can go before him. It is the supremacy of God that fills my heart with praise in the most miserable of circumstances.

Let me lead you in an exercise of praise. Point one: does God punish sin? You bet! Is God a jealous God? Have you ever seen love without jealousy? Jealousy is the flip side of love. Because God loves us he wants us exclusively for himself. When we are seduced by sex, success, and surplus, he is righteously jealous. Does God visit the iniquity of the fathers and mothers upon the children and grandchildren even down to the third and fourth generation? You bet. That's not a curse, that's the reality of the situation. If we live in a moral universe we cannot escape the trickle-down-effect of previous generations.

***The supremacy of
God fills my heart
with praise in the
most miserable of
circumstances.***

But, wait a minute! This does not fill my mind with praise, it afflicts me with fear and foreboding. But why? This terrible promise only applies to those who reject God.

I, the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers, to the third and fourth generation of *those who hate me.*

(Ex. 20:4 NIV, emphasis mine)

But what if some child, grandchild, or great-grandchild chooses to love and obey God? Then the cycle is broken and God will show steadfast love, not for three or four generations, but “to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Ex. 20:6). Do you feel a praise coming on? Iniquity at its worst