

The Big 10

These last few Sundays we have been sitting at the feet of Jesus as he delivers the great Sermon on the Mount. Jesus engages the “Law of God” and shows us what a life with God looks like when we wrap flesh around what we call “The Ten Commandments.”

This list of the “Big 10” has, in many ways, become a backdrop to our life with God. And for Christians we more often quote Jesus’ summation of the Law and the Prophets—what we might call the “Cliff Notes version”--- saying that the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and the second is like it, that you should love your neighbor as yourself. It’s that simple. The way to serve God is to love God with all your heart and to love your neighbor as yourself. The Ten Commandments are often alternately discarded for seeming “old fashioned” or perhaps at times seen as a fundamentalist tool for oppressive religion.

But when we hear “Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind, body, and soul, and love your neighbor as yourself” what we are hearing are words of direction and caution from a loving creator. At the heart of understanding these commandments is to see them as a gift from God. In the original Hebrew these ten sayings are not called “Commandments” at all.

The Hebrew word is *davareem*, meaning words, things, or matters. The best translation is “matters,” as in “concerns.” Just in case you wanted to know what life with God is about, God tells us right up front, “Here are ten things you can keep in mind when deciding whether something is close to God’s hope for how we will care for one another; want to know if something is following God’s will; consider these ten concerns of mine.”

This is very different from seeing these as harsh commands of a judgmental God who is just itching for us to cross the line so that God can smite us down. Instead, God says I have these ten concerns you should know about. Make no mistake, these are BIG concerns and there are deep consequences in our life when we ignore these concerns of God. Not following God’s desire in these matters leads to serious problems, the consequences might well destroy your life or community.

We might not be able get everyone to agree on what is right or wrong or even if there is such a thing as an absolute right and wrong. But as wars, oppression, and poverty and their subsequent effects, for instance, roll on

and on, we can know ignoring these commandments can lead to disaster for the human family.

Wars, bigotry and oppression of all kinds, and poverty--- with their horrific attendant destructiveness would be eradicated if everyone would live as God asks us to live. Going to war is one extreme result of humanity's inability to follow God's desires for our lives. Yet what are we to do? We can't control world events. How can we? In the chaos of our current divide and living in a world at the brink war in any moment, we must begin at the only place where we have the power to make a change. We must begin within our own hearts.

We can endeavor to love God with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves. What would that look like in your life? Well there are ten concerns God has, but sharing them would be redundant at this point. Instead, I'll just add that trusting God in time of personal, social, political, or global conflict means going back to that first concern—the commandment to have *no other gods*.

Don't give that God-spot in your life over to personal fears, popular culture, a political ideology, America's military might, or that amorphous, all consuming fear that everything is just hopeless. These are all small, pitiless "little g" gods that lead us into pain and division.

Trust God by grounding and surrounding your anxiety in the deep love and hope of God for all. Trust God by letting go of fear, tearing down the "little g' gods, resting in the assurance that God can show us a better way through the challenges of this life---grounding your anxieties and cares in God is only the first step. Trusting God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and truly loving your neighbor as yourself, well that's where grace, healing and hope will happen---in our lives *and* in our world.

Grace and Peace, Stephanie+