

BENEFITS

So many people today see the Ten Commandments as a set of restrictions, a list of "thou shalt nots" that somehow keep us from doing all we'd like or being as happy as we could be. They see God as a vindictive judge, keeping his people bound by narrow parameters. Is this the way we should view the Ten Commandments? I was challenged by a devotional I read this morning to review the Ten Commandments with an eye to how each one carries with it a specific benefit for mankind. Here goes!

The first Commandment is to worship no other god besides Him. God is not some self-absorbed narcissist who just wants everyone to worship Him for his own aggrandizement. As Creator of all that is, and man specifically, He knows how things are to function. He knows what every molecule of his creation needs to be sustained and flourish. To look to some other god, whether of His creation (sun, moon, fertility, weather) or ours (material goods, power, influence) is to settle for vastly less.

The second Commandment instructs us not to make an idol in the likeness of anything to worship it. Making an idol is an act of willful disobedience. God's stated desire in the final clause of this commandment is to show loving kindness to those who love and obey Him. Why would we choose punishment for not only ourselves but our descendants, as well, when we could have God's favor instead?

The third Commandment proscribes taking Gods' name in vain. No one likes to be spoken ill of. When we trash God's name, or even use it flippantly, we diminish Him in the eyes of others. When we speak well of God, we reveal our own reverence for Him and magnify His good character to the watching world. Proverbs 22:1 says, "A good name is to be more desired than great wealth." If we want to have a good name, how much more the One who created us in His image?

The fourth Commandment enjoins us to observe the Sabbath. Many people see this as not being allowed to do certain things on the Sabbath. I prefer to see it as God giving us a day off, a day when we can do anything we want. It is a gift to us, not a burden we have to bear. Jesus said the Sabbath was made for man, not vice versa.

The fifth Commandment charges us to honor our parents, with the promise (as Paul says in Eph. 6:2-3) of a good, long life as a result. God is the only perfect parent, but most human parents do want the best for their children. And in general they know what is best. Immaturity can lead us to many bad choices. We are safer when we look to our parents for advice. And doing so honors them and honors God as well. Strong, healthy, loving families make for vibrant societies.

The sixth Commandment prohibits murder. The benefit to mankind seems obvious here. Life is precious and not to be destroyed wantonly or negligently. Our God is the one true living God and Jesus said, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). He also said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Life is what God desires for us, not just physical life here on earth, but eternal life with Him.

The seventh Commandment forbids adultery. Broken relationships are the source of much pain, especially broken marital relationships. If we want to be whole inside and produce offspring who are whole, we should take our marital vows seriously and strive to fulfill them maximally by cherishing, serving, and honoring our life partners.

The eighth Commandment bars theft. To take what belongs to another is to violate his right to his own property. It also says that the thief is not looking to God to meet his needs. Jesus taught that we should not worry about what we are to eat or drink or wear, for God knows what we need and can be trusted to provide for us (Matt. 6:25-33). How happy mankind would be if we all sought the kingdom of God first and let God provide everything else.

The ninth Commandment disallows lying, or bearing false witness against a neighbor. If we care about our neighbors, we will not want to deceive them or spread malicious gossip about them. In his first letter, the Apostle Peter said, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8). How much more civil would our civilization be if we all heeded Paul's admonition to "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) with and about one another.

And the tenth and final Commandment excludes coveting, or wanting what someone else has. This is as close as God ever comes to making something a thought crime. But He knows that what we harbor in our hearts is very likely to come to fruition in our actions. Jesus clearly taught that the letter of the law can be fulfilled even as we break it in our hearts. In the Sermon on the Mount, He said that anger makes us as guilty as murder and lust is as bad as adultery, so surely coveting is as serious as theft. To be content with what we have is a great blessing, preventing many sins against God and crimes against others.

If only those who want to ban all mention or display of the Ten Commandments could see how freeing they are, how much better life on earth could be if we honored God by loving and serving Him and following His precepts!

© J.H.Nichols 2013