

## Desiring God's Ways

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Scripture: Psalm 19:7-11,14

<sup>7</sup>The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple; <sup>8</sup>the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes; <sup>9</sup>the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. <sup>10</sup>More to be desired are they than gold,

even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

<sup>11</sup>Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

<sup>14</sup>Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

A distinct memory I have when I think about rules and laws was when I was quite young. Though I learned that there were some rules that were more like guidelines or household rules, it wasn't until my family took a trip to a farmer's market and I did more than have a few free samples. Of course, in my mind I was just doing what it looked like everyone else was doing. What did it seem like everyone was doing? Well, when it came to the amazingly delicious looking grapes, I saw people just eating one to see how they tasted. Well, what does a little boy do but enjoy what seems like the great opportunity to enjoy free samples of grapes? Now, I can imagine some saying that it is not a big deal, and that in fact some people do so. I can also hear others saying that it is not only not very clean but also a real problem if everyone going through the produce section sampled a grape, a strawberry, blueberry, etc. Of course, I hardly ever see that happening. I also have taught my children who when very young wanted to take and eat everything they saw in the store.

Going back to when I was a child and freely sampling away, I have to admit that though I saw an adult or two try a grape before buying a cluster of grapes I actually was trying to not be seen sampling away. I guess my spy skills were not developed well enough at that young age because when we got home my dad asked me if I took any grapes from the stand without asking. I should have figured out at that point that the best option was to honestly answer my dad since by not doing so I'd be breaking a rule that was also another one of God's commandments. Not only did I steal but also lied. Let's just say I learned a few important lessons that day that I do thank my dad for reinforcing since it saved me from future pains and hardships had I not only thought I got away from it, but that there were no real consequences for myself as well as others.

Do you ever feel like rules and commands are more of a pain rather than helpful or even loving? No doubt there are rules and laws that do not make sense and even seem unfair, depending on how you feel they help or hurt you. In a previous sermon I listed all the laws that were outdated or seemingly not bothered to be changed. Go ahead and search for the laws that include it being, as least as of 2019, "a misdemeanor crime to use 'indecent, immoral, obscene, vulgar or

insulting language in the presence or hearing of any woman or child.”

([https://www.mlive.com/lansing-news/2015/08/10\\_outdated\\_michigan\\_laws\\_the.html](https://www.mlive.com/lansing-news/2015/08/10_outdated_michigan_laws_the.html))

However, there are laws that were made that in some form another have carried advantages and disadvantages to certain people. Look back at the history of the creation of laws and you will find some that seemed to have little to no bearing on various groups of people to those that have created systemic problems that seem to be permanent and unchangeable.

So our views of rules, commands, and laws can vary depending on what we are talking about. We are surely grateful for laws that help protect those who would otherwise be more easily taken advantage of and abused. We appreciate laws that help communities and our entire nation stay accountable to what has been deemed of God and that strive to uphold as well as fight against deeming others as less valued, not equal, or anything that demeans and even dehumanizes.

This is what not only what pains us, the seeing of others suffer when there are not rules or laws in place to protect, but also when laws were made by those who could make, enforce as well as serve sentences that intentionally do more harm than help.

When we look to God's laws, the commands in the Bible, there so many it seems impossible to follow them all. Some of the laws were for specific circumstances, times, contexts, as well as for a certain people to know and to follow. So the people of Israel were making so many sin offerings, over and over again, because they were not able to keep God's commandments.

So, how is it that we can come to find what the writer of Psalm 19 describes God's laws as soul-reviving and desired more than pure gold and the sweet honey directly from the honeycomb?

When's the last time you looked forward to reading the 10 Commandments as if you were going to enjoy your most favorite meal or dessert, or were about to be given something you greatly desired?

Well, they were a source of how to live according to God's ways, to know what they were to avoid, and to find guide them in life as individuals and as a community.

Though we desire to have freedom, there are times when we wish we knew what to do. There are times when we want guidance some kind of guidance or directions. And there are indeed times when we want to know and even demand what it is that we are supposed to do in certain situations. We may even ask something like, "What's the answer?" or "What exactly am I supposed to do?"

There are so many books, classes and videos on how to do almost anything; how to manage your time, your business and your money; how to improve your talents, your planning and your relationships; how to navigate difficult situations and circumstances. And people seek after the best they can find to help reach their goals and desires. Some of you are or have been experts in certain fields where people sought you out, paying for your knowledge, experience and all that you can offer to help in reaching their goals.

For those following God, they yearn and seek not to gain for themselves, but find ways to live a life of love for God. Yes, that includes through following rules, commands and laws.

God's laws are perfect, they make one wiser, enlighten and open minds, and rewards those who follow in God's ways.

As I mentioned earlier, the problem wasn't that the laws of God were not fitting or appropriate when they were given for the people and context, it was that people couldn't or wouldn't follow them.

Go back to time when the 10 Commandments were given to Moses. At one point while Moses was taking too long in the minds of those who thought a party should have already begun, there was a group that decided it was a good idea to make an idol in the shape of a calf. (Exodus 32)

There are so many moments when the response to why they did such a seemingly foolish things was something to the effect of "I don't know. It seemed like a good idea at the time."

Then you can see it from a different perspective when God's laws were misinterpreted and even used by those who had the responsibility and authority to make sure people were following God's laws as best interpreted for the time and circumstances. Even Jesus said this to the experts of the law in Luke 11:46, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them."

When Jesus was challenged about breaking God's laws, Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Matthew 5:17)

And when it came to summing up all the Law and answering the question about what is the greatest commandment in the Law, we read Jesus' response in Matthew 22:34-40:

<sup>34</sup> Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. <sup>35</sup> One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: <sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

<sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>40</sup> All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Sometimes we forget that Jesus was unpopular. Surely, we know Jesus was crucified as planned by God for the gift of salvation. We know it was because of various reasons, including how some of the religious leaders called for Jesus' death because Jesus made statements that equated himself to God. Sure they were jealous of Jesus and how it seemed like everyone would end up following him because of all the miracles he was performing, people he was healing and raising from the dead.

We must remember that Jesus was not only unpopular but also hated to the point of wanting to harm and kill him multiple times, from wanting to stone him to throwing him off a cliff. The reasons included how Jesus was actually helping those in need rather than burdened even more by those who had the power to help when they chose to either ignore or make things worse for some reason. Jesus spent time with those who were labeled as sinner by those in power, those who not only taught and interpreted the law, but also enforced them. Jesus taught in ways that went against how they judged and condemned others because of where they were born or from, such as being a Samaritan or some other Gentile. Jesus showed what God's love looked like, and it was too radical for the experts of the law to accept. They could not see how the God they knew and learned about, and whose laws they studied and followed meticulously so that they could be the teachers, leaders and enforcers. Most surely did want to do as God commanded, to follow in the ways that were written as they interpreted them. The butted heads with Jesus multiple times, including on several occasions on whether one should do work on the Sabbath, and how upset they were at Jesus for helping and healing people on the Sabbath. It infuriated many of the teachers and experts of the law who said there was no way Jesus could be a teacher, prophet or anyone who stood with God, let alone sent by God.

When it comes to desiring God's ways, it is more than trying to follow every rule, command and law of God. It is even more than trying to please God by following every law applicable to you and your life. As Jesus said, it comes down to loving God and loving others.

We can have the heart and desire as the psalmist who wrote the verses in today's Scripture reading when we think of God's ways for us, our lives, our communities, our churches, our nation, and the world!

When we do so, when we look at how Christ taught and showed us how to live in desiring God's ways, we can find the desire that flows not from trying to interpret and attempting to follow every single command we can find in the Bible or that we decide applies to us, but rather from following our Teacher and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Among the many of Jesus' teachings that seem to be simple to understand and follow, always remember that when it comes to God's rules, laws, and commands that Jesus summed up all the Laws with these two commands: 1) Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind; and 2) Love your neighbor as yourself. Amen.