

The Lord's Message: Do No Harm, Do Good and Stay in Love with God

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Where: Tilghman UMC

Scripture Reference: Matthew 22:35-40

We have laws and rules in our country for the safety of people and to protect property. If we did not have laws and rules, then we would have a chaotic mess. Take for instance, we drive on the right-hand side of the road. In England and other former British colonies, the people drive on the left-hand side of the road. Can you imagine the chaos if I decided to drive one day on the left-hand side of the road?

Please do not worry, I will be driving on the right-hand side of the road. That law is easy for us to remember. Now, there a lot of laws that are not so easy for us to remember. New laws are being passed every time Congress, state, and local governments meet. For instance, on April 13, 2021, Governor Hogan signed 66 new laws for the state of Maryland. I am sure these laws were necessary, but I have no idea what any of these laws are about. I could not begin to remember these 66 laws or the countless other laws that have been passed. I am starting to believe that we may have too many laws.

Maybe, we should stick with just ten. I am talking about the Ten Commandments. Let us see if we can name all ten. Someone want to try to name one and then we will see if we can name the other 9? Maybe, we should stick to two: Love God and Love our neighbor.

Let us pray.

If you turn to your pew Bibles to page 1535, **Matthew 22:35-40**. This begins with an expert in the law, or who we would call a lawyer, questioning Jesus. This takes place in the temple in Jerusalem. If we look back at **Matthew 21:23**, the chief priest and elders are questioning Jesus on His authority. Instead of Jesus saying, I am the Son of God, Jesus turns the tables on them and asks them a question. Who gave authority to John the Baptist to perform baptism in the Jordan River? Jesus puts them into a difficult situation, because if they say God, then Jesus is going to say why did not you believe him when he told you who I am. If they say anything disparaging about John the Baptist, then all the people will be angry at them. The people believed John was a prophet. So, the chief priest and the elders say, "We do not know." At which Jesus replies, "if you will not answer my question, then I will not answer yours."

Jesus goes on and tells three parables. These three parables are directed at the chief priests and the elders. If the crowd does not understand, the priests and elders certainly do. So, they tried to trap Jesus with the law.

You might not know this, but in the Torah (the first five books in the Bible) Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, in addition to the 10 Commandments, there are 603 commandments or laws. Making up a total of 613 commandments. That is a lot to remember. Only a person well versed in law could even begin to be familiar with all of these commandments. An ordinary Jewish carpenter would not.

You can see the reason why an expert in the law is questioning Jesus by asking, "What is the greatest commandment?" Jesus' answer shows that He knows all the 613 commandments. Jesus says in **verse 37-40**, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Jesus has taken all the ten commandments along with the other 603 commandments and condensed them down to two commandments: love God and love neighbor. I can remember that. How about you? If I do anything that does not show love to God or love to my neighbor, then I am breaking God's law.

I seem to be full of questions today, please indulge me. With a show of hands, how many of you have either been attending this church or a member of this church for at least a year, 5 years, 10 years, 20 years, 30 years, 40 years, 50 years, 60 years, 70 years? Do you know the difference that sets us apart as Methodists from other Christian denominations? Notice I said Methodists. We became the United Methodist Church when in 1968, the Methodist Church joined with the Evangelical United Brethren Church. In this country, we were originally established as the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784 in Baltimore City at Lovely Lane Church. As you can see, I love history.

Back to the reason that we are Methodists. John Wesley and his brother Charles, along with other men, formed the Holy Club in 1729 at the Christ Church, Oxford, England. They were satirically called "Methodists." This is because, they were methodical in their worship of God. They establish times to meet for prayer, Bible study, attending church services and works of charity. I guess you could say that there was "a method to their madness." When John and Charles Wesley were forming a new movement in the Anglican church, they called this movement "Methodist."

This information is not generally taught in the Methodist Church. The reason being that John and Charles Wesley wanted the church to not focus on them, but on God and His Son Jesus. I think that we should know our Methodist history. If you would like, we could do a study beginning early next year on our Methodist history.

In establishing the Methodist movement, John and Charles Wesley established the General Rules. *First:* By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced, such as: The taking of the name of God in vain. The profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work therein or by buying or selling. Drunkenness: buying or selling spirituous liquors, or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity. Slaveholding; buying or selling slaves. Fighting, quarreling, brawling, brother going to law with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing; the using many words in buying or selling. The buying or selling goods that have not paid the duty. The giving or taking things on usury—i.e., unlawful interest. Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation; particularly speaking evil of magistrates or of ministers. Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us. Doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as: The putting on of gold and costly apparel. The taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus. The singing those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God. Softness and needless self-indulgence. Laying up treasure upon earth. Borrowing without a probability of paying; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them. It is expected of all who continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Secondly: By doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men: To their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison. To their souls, by instructing, reproving, or exhorting all we have any intercourse with; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine that "we are not to do good unless *our hearts be free to it.*" By doing good, especially to them that are of the household of faith or groaning so to be; employing them preferably to others; buying one of another, helping each other in business, and so much the more because the world will love its own and them only. By all possible diligence and frugality, that the gospel be not blamed. By running with patience the race which is set before them, denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and offscouring of the world; and looking that men should say all manner of evil of them *falsely*, for the Lord's sake. It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Thirdly: By attending upon all the ordinances of God; such are: The public worship of God. The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded. The Supper of the Lord. Family and private prayer. Searching the Scriptures. Fasting or abstinence.

Now you got all of that. You can memorize and tell each one of these rules to another person. If you can, then you are a lot better than I. Any person being ordained in the Methodist Church has to review these rules and explain what each one of these rules mean and how they incorporate these rules in their lives. That is a lot to remember.

In 2007, United Methodist Bishop Reuben Job condense these rules to three simple rules: Do No Harm, Do Good, and Stay in Love with God. Just as Jesus condensed the 10 Commandments and the 603 other commandments to two simple commandments to love God and love neighbor, Bishop Job took the General Rules and condensed them to three simple rules: Do No Harm, Do Good and Stay in Love with God.

Now, I do not want you walking out of this church, thinking that you can have a list of good things. Every day, you can check off your list of good works. By completing this list, then God will save you. That is works theology. You save yourself by your good works. If this was true, then the agonizing death that Jesus suffered on the cross for our benefit was unnecessary. Your sins are forgiven, because of Jesus' death on the cross. Peter speaking to the Jewish Council in Jerusalem said this about other ways of salvation, **Acts 4:12**.

We follow the commandments to love God and love our neighbors and the Wesleyan Way of living by the Three Simple Rules to do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God as evidence of our thankfulness to God and Jesus Christ for what He did for us on the cross.

Amen.