

Text: Exod. 20:6

Title: "The lawful life is a life of true love"

Time: 3/28/2021 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: One of the nice things about visiting my dad is that he lives in a neighborhood that includes their own activity center, complete with two full-sized pools. I have not been bringing my swimming trunks on recent visits, because no visitors have been allowed in the pool with the pandemic threat. This past week they opened the pool up, so next time I go see Dad I am going to jump in the pool, Lord willing.

Now if you are like me, before jumping into any pool, I like to just dip my toe in first to test the temperature of the water. That helps me to know what to expect when I dive in wholesale.

We are about to dive in wholesale into the theme, "A believer's life is a lawful life," in our study of the Book of Exodus. In our last message, we dipped our toe into the water with some introductory understandings. As believers, we are not under the law in the same way that unbelievers are under the law, because unlike unbelievers, we are under grace. When God's Spirit brought us to the cross, and we repented of our sins and trusted Christ for salvation, the need to fulfill the law to justify ourselves before a holy God came to an end. The need to fear the penalty for the many times we have failed to do so also ended. Jesus obeyed God's law perfectly for us, and He paid our penalty for us on the cross.

This morning I want us to dip our other foot into the water before we jump into our study of the Ten Commandments.

Our text this morning contains a linkage between God's law and love that we find throughout Scripture - "love Me and keep My commandments." It is important for us to understand not only that the life of a believer is a lawful life, but also that the lawful life is a life of true love. Keeping God's law is love in action. Violating God's law is unloving.

The Ten Commandments are divisible into two primary sections. The first commandments deal with our relationship to the God who gave them, and the second section of commandments deals with our relationship to our neighbor. It turns out that all the commands of the Bible can be summarized in that way (Matt. 22:34-40).

So before jumping into a study of God's law, I want us to see that the pool of God's law is a pool filled with the water of love for God and love for our neighbors. We live in a world that is lawless, and a lawless world is a very violent, selfish, and unloving world. Jesus said there would be times like these in our age: "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt. 24:8-12). We study God's law together so that, when it comes to our lives, iniquity would not abound, and our love would not grow cold.

In view of that cause this morning, notice with me three ways in which a believer's lawful life is a loving life.

I. The lawful believer loves God's law (Ps. 19:7-11).

Application: The Psalms are filled with expressions of love for God's law. This psalm describes God's law as perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, enduring, true and righteous altogether. The psalmist speaks of its power to convert the soul

and make the simple wise, and to bring joy to the heart and light to the eyes.

For him, reading God's law is better than possessing gold and sweeter than eating honey, and obeying God's law is the most rewarding thing he has ever experienced.

The author of Psalm 119 felt the same way about his Bible. The whole Psalm, the largest chapter in the Scripture, reads like a love letter to the Word of God. Just notice with me the verses that explicitly mention the psalmist's love for God's law:

Ps. 119:47 - "And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved."

Ps. 119:48 - "My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes."

Ps. 119:97 - "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day."

Ps. 119:113 - "I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love."

Ps. 119:119 - "Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love thy testimonies."

Ps. 119:127 - "Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold."

Ps. 119:140 - "Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it."

Ps. 119:159 - "Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O Lord, according to thy lovingkindness."

Ps. 119:163 - "I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love."

Ps. 119:165 - "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them [make them stumble]."

Ps. 119:167 - "My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly."

Illustration: The U.S. tax code is a body of statutes, regulations, and case law, which taxfoundation.org puts at over 70,000 pages of content. What is a bit odd about that to me is the fact that someone had to be dedicated enough to that topic in order to produce all that material so that our society could be changed by it. Obviously, money was a powerful motivator in this regard. People got paid handsomely to produce these pages, and others are paid to master them.

Application: One thing God's law has in common with the U.S. tax code is that both contain law. In a way, the Scripture is a body of statutes, regulations, and cases demonstrating how these are lived out. For that reason, many believers are tempted to love reading their Bibles about as much as they love reading the tax code. Did you read your Bible more than you read the U.S. tax code last week? For many, the answer in many weeks is "I read them the same" - not at all.

The lawful believer's life is the life of love, and that love begins with loving the law. You may remember my reference to Neil Postman's book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business*. The author asserts that we live in an age of show business, no longer in an age of exposition. The enemy has modified our culture to wire our brains to have more trouble than past generations loving something in the format that our Bibles are in. But how needy is our world for this love - the believer who loves his Bible the way the Psalmist did. Perhaps we must repent of our lack of love for God's Word and ask the Holy Spirit to change our wiring and enflame us with a passion for it.

No one in this world is going to pay us more money to study God's word the way they do to study the tax code. We must be motivated by the motivations of the psalmist of Psalm 19 - conversion of souls, wisdom for the simple, joy

to the heart, and light to the eyes of our own darkened hearts and of people all around us. The lawful believer loves the law for these reasons. Do we have this love?

II. The lawful believer loves the God who gave the law (Josh. 22:5).

Illustration: Some of us have been blessed to be parents. We have a house in Greer, SC and some old tenants are moving out to make room for the new ones. In the garage of our house, we have markings on the wall of the heights of our kids at different ages, and these are memories for us of what it was like when our kids lived in that house and were the same age as the children of our tenants are today.

When my kids were that age, I think I felt most loved by them when they willingly, happily, enthusiastically, and faithfully obeyed one of my instructions or commands. When they disobeyed me, I felt robbed not only of the outcome I desired, but also of their love. All of us as parents know that feeling.

Application: Our Lord is no different when it comes to the obedience of His children. When He gives a command like "Thou shalt not bare false witness," He is not just trying to eradicate lying in the world, He is looking for the response of love from His own.

Here in our passage, Joshua is sending the two-and-a-half tribes back over the Jordan to Gilead and their inheritance. The conquest of Canaan has been completed, and God has blessed.

Joshua's last concern for these tribes is that in the midst of their great blessing, they would continue to love the Lord, and that this love would be expressed by loving service and

loving obedience to the Lord. He wanted their obedience to God's law to be the obedience of the heart, and not just the body. The God who gave us His laws is the worthiest object of our love, and it is through obeying His laws from the heart that we put feet to our otherwise empty and hypocritical claim to love Him. Jesus's question for us is, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Later in this chapter, Joshua and other leaders became concerned about the love of these brothers when they built an altar on the banks of the Jordan river. Their worry is that the tribes were falling into a state of disobedience, that they would not be making the trip to the house of God, the tabernacle, to worship there, that they would be worshipping other things instead. Such idolatry invited God's curse on them all. They get that worked out, but their dilemma and its potential for danger for the entire nation made me think of how we need to communicate with our brothers whom we do not see coming to the house of God for worship.

Scripture mentions many things that compete for the love that we should give to God, and when we love those things instead of God we become disobedient. Paul speaks of the love of self, the love of pleasure, and the love of money as competitors against the love of God we ought to have. John describes the same things as the pride of life, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes. How has our work suffered here under the withdrawn blessing of God, simply because we do not love Him enough to truly obey Him? What command must you next obey in love for your God to invite His blessing on our church? May the Holy Spirit speak now and awaken us to the right answer as only He can.

III. The lawful believer loves his neighbor (Rom. 13:8-14).

Illustration: Perhaps you remember the Good Samaritan of Luke 10. Jesus told the story of a man assaulted by thieves and left injured on the side of the road. A Levite and a priest walked by with indifference to the plight of the man. But then along came a Samaritan who was good, because he met the man's need.

Application: Do you remember why Jesus told that story? He did so because a certain lawyer had asked him how to get eternal life. Jesus asked him what he found in the law about that, and the man correctly quoted the law as saying, "Love God and love your neighbor." Jesus told him he had the right answer, but then the lawyer, evidently under the weight of a growing appreciation for what it really meant to obey these laws, asks Jesus a question in order to justify himself: "Who then is my neighbor?" The lawyer desired to escape the guilty verdict he was feeling on a technicality. He would have been a man who hated Samaritans especially. Jesus drove the guilty verdict home.

And so the lawful life is a life of love for our neighbors, and Jesus taught us that the least attractive neighbor we have is still to be loved by us. The second table of God's law is God's way of showing us how to best love other people.

But this morning I want to see also the special sense in which this love for neighbors is intensified when it comes to fellow church members, both here and in sister churches: 1 Pet. 1:22 - "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:"

1 John 4:21 - "And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also."

As important as it is for me to love God in obedience to His command, like the one that brings me to church this morning, it is also important for me to be here as an expression of love for you. Do not let your love for brothers and sisters turn cold. We are often unlovable, like you are, but may we see to it that we love one another with pure hearts fervently. The lawful life is a life of love.

Conclusion: The lawful believer is a Christlike believer, a believer who loves God's law, the God who gave the law, and his neighbor the way Christ did. As we close this morning, I would like us to read of the Savior's obedient love again in Phil. 2:1, 5-11. The lawful life is a life of true love. Is this your life? Jesus lived that way for you. How can you be content to do less for Him?

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*