

Jesus the Lawgiver

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By Lenny Cacchio

LEE'S SUMMIT, Mo.— After Israel left Egypt it made a stop at a place called Mount Sinai where God delivered to the Israelites 10 rules. They were simple things like "Don't lie," "Don't mess with other people's stuff," "Watch your mouth," etc.

These are the same kinds of things that your mother told you when you were a kid. You probably learned early that these 10 simple rules of life might be simple, but they aren't easy, and, although they are simple, they are huge in making life work. In fact, they have the power to transform the culture if kept by society as a whole.

The scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day honored the Ten Commandments. Like us, they did not keep them perfectly.

But when Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 5:20), He was alluding to something well beyond keeping these laws to the letter. That's quite a challenge, given how hard they are to live by.

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder,' and 'Whoever murders will be in danger of judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:21-22).

A follower of Jesus must go beyond refraining from murdering someone. Harboring anger and hatred is just as bad in Jesus' eyes because it gets to a problem of the heart, which is where the act of murder begins.

Root out the seed of bitterness and the weed cannot take root. Purge out the leaven before it leavens the whole lump.

Take a look at Matthew 5:27-28.

Matthew 5:27-28—"You have heard that it was said of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery in his heart."

You're not running around on your spouse? Good! But remember that these types of sins begin in the heart.

The #metoo memes circulating these days would be completely unnecessary if the world would heed the words of Jesus and His expansion of the intent behind that commandment.

We should also consider the wrecked psyches and stunted relationships of those who engage in the voyeurism of the day, not to mention the resulting lack of respect and trust in our relationships and friendships regardless of the sex of those with whom we come in contact.

Root out the seed, and the weed cannot take root. Purge out the leaven before it leavens the whole lump.

We can do this type of analysis with all the Ten Simple Rules for Living, and in fact Jesus essentially does. Read the four Gospels and you'll see that.

But that leads me to a question that is even harder to answer: If the Ten Commandments when understood and kept to their full intent would lead to better lives and a better culture, why do so many insist that they have no place in the public square?

How can anyone argue that the commandment against murder plus Jesus' exegesis on that command is a danger to the Republic?

How, if we were to publish Jesus' warning about planting the seeds of adultery through objectification of the opposite sex, are we somehow imposing our religion on someone, even though secular feminists would agree with what Jesus instructed?

Who wouldn't want to live in a world where everybody else is living by the words of Jesus?

To be honest, most people have no objection to most of the commandments as given through Moses, nor with the expansion as taught by Jesus. Most of the commandments.

The problem arises with the first few commandments.

Example: "I am the Lord your God . . . You shall have no other gods before Me."

For many people, that's asking too much. Put God first in your life? That's asking a lot. That flies against the modern trend of personal autonomy. It challenges the idea that we are masters of our own fate and that we, without God, can mold the progress of history and create our own perfect world.

Most of all, it allows us to make our own interpretations of the Ten Rules, interpretations that often go in the opposite direction from Jesus' teaching.

People like what the serpent promised: "Ye shall be as gods." We get to decide what is right and wrong for ourselves, including which tree's fruit we are to sample in our search for what will make us wise.

"They did not like to retain God in their knowledge," wrote Paul in Romans 1:28.

If you are looking for the seed, for the root, for the little leaven behind the coarsening on our culture, you'll find it there.

We like the commandments that keep other people from violating our autonomy. We don't like those that reveal a Higher Authority who demands the same of us.