

Orthodoxy - The Law

New City Catechism Q.8: What is the law of God stated in the Ten Commandments?

Answer: You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below—you shall not bow down to them or worship them. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Honor your father and your mother. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. You shall not covet.

“You shall have no other gods before me.” - Exodus 20:3

Once upon a time there was a grand and glorious kingdom ruled by a righteous, wise and good king. Those born into this kingdom were the welcome subjects of their king. They enjoyed the beauty and glory of the kingdom as they were carefully loved and served by their king. The king, in his love, gave his subjects particular commands to treasure and obey as they treasured and obeyed him. His commands came from his deep wisdom and were for the good of all who lived in his kingdom. These commands would guide and protect his subjects. However, if these commands were not obeyed, if the subjects of the kingdom failed to trust their king in all his goodness and wisdom to them, then they would bring great harm to themselves and others, as they dishonored their king. Therefore, the greatest dread came from the certainty that anyone who transgressed the king’s command at any time in their life would be subject to the penalty of death, which resulted in an everlasting separation from the goodness of the king and his kingdom.

While the king’s commands were for his glory and the good of his subjects, they did not have the ability to trust and obey him. Their original parents had failed to trust and obey and plunged all their progeny into their plight. Therefore, the subjects of the kingdom lived with an awful dread. They knew when they failed to obey his commands at any one place at any one time in their lives they were guilty of violating all his commands. These people lived in fear of the death they deserved. There was no escape. They could not flee to another kingdom, for even there they would be guilty of having broken the commands of the king. They could not negotiate lesser demands on their lives by deleting his commands. The commands of the king were set in stone as they were a reflection of his nature. Therefore, though the law of the king was a beautiful display of wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, it was to the subjects of the kingdom like chains that they drug around reminding them constantly of their guilt and impending death.

The king of the kingdom was just and loving, righteous and merciful. Therefore, while his commands said to the people of his kingdom what he required, his commands were not his final word. What the king required of his subjects he promised to fulfill for them. The king had a son who was just like him. If you saw the son you would say you had seen the king. But no one ever saw the king. Yet the king sent forth from his throne his son to live with the subjects of his kingdom to do for them what they could not do for themselves. This is how the king promised his subjects he would save them from the death they deserved and give them a life in the way of his pleasure.

The son of the king lived according to the king’s commands perfectly. Everything that was the king’s pleasure the son did. And he did this not for himself, but to glorify his father the king, and for the good of the subjects of the kingdom. But then after a short life of perfect obedience the son suffered a horrible death. It was not an accidental death. It was the king’s will that he die. He died the death that the subjects of the kingdom dreaded. He died before the king as though he was guilty for breaking all the king’s commands. But he was not guilty at anytime in his life of not obeying the king. He died in this way to satisfy the king’s justice, and that the king might give his undeserving subjects his mercy. For when the king looked on his son’s death he saw him as a substitute dying in the place of his subjects, and he forgave them any and all of their transgressions against his commands. Also, when the king looked upon his guilty subjects he did not see their guilt. He saw instead, the righteousness of the son that he accomplished in their place. And he was able to do this because the son did not remain under the power of death. The king raised him from the dead because he accepted his sacrificial death in

place of his subjects and his person as a perfect righteous son. His son had done everything he required in his law so he could give his subjects everything he promised them in his mercy.

Therefore, the subjects of the kingdom lived putting their trust, not in their ability to keep the king's commands, but in the king's son who died the death they should have died and who lived the life they should live. And now the life the subjects live in the mercies of the king through faith in his son, is a life in the goodness, power, and wisdom of the son, so that they have the son's heart and will for the pleasure of the king. The subjects are not the perfect son of the king, but they are those who the king's son is not ashamed to call brothers and sisters. So they live like him in the love he shares with them to do what the king requires. The requirements of the king are not a burden to his subjects, just as they weren't and aren't to his son. They are not chains rattling in their ears reminding them of their death. They are adornments to the life they have been given in the son so that they can live forever in the presence and pleasure of their king. The pleasure of the king is that his subjects live in love to him and all the people in his kingdom. This is his son's life and it is his subjects' life who live by faith in the son.

Today in Church History

The Roman church commemorates Frumentius, the Bishop of Ethiopia on October 27th. Frumentius was trained and ordained as a leader in the church in the 4th century under Athanasius. He was sent to carry the gospel to the people of Ethiopia. He died sometime around 383.

Frumentius had studied under his uncle a Christian philosopher. They were from Tyre, a region of modern day Lebanon. His uncle took him on a trip to Arabia, and it was on this trip that their ship, harbored on the Red Sea, was attacked and all on board were killed. Ethiopians captured Frumentius and his cousin Edisius and sent them as slaves to Ethiopia where they served as cupbearer and secretary to the king. After the king died his sons were too young to rule. Therefore, the queen insisted that they stay and help lead the kingdom and educate her sons. They agreed and stayed on in Ethiopia sharing the gospel, educating the king's sons, and encouraging Christians to worship openly. When the young king, Ezana, came of age to rule, both of the men left Ethiopia and went to Alexandria. It was here that Frumentius was trained and ordained by Athanasius so that he could return to minister to the Ethiopian church. Frumentius was able to see the conversion of a Jewish priest, Anbaram, during his ministry in Ethiopia. He and Anbaram worked to see the church strengthened and fruitful in Ethiopia. They began a mission work spreading the gospel to Nubia and Yemen. Though the Roman Emperor, Constantius, favored Arianism and insisted the king of Ethiopia remove Frumentius and replace him with an Arian, he would not. King Ezana and his brother were converted to faith in Christ, were baptized and became an integral part of the church in Ethiopia.

Shame

The gospel is for sin and shame. In Christ alone we receive the forgiveness of our sins. This is how we know the love of God. However, it is sin and shame that make us feel unlovable. Shame makes us appear unacceptable, dirty, and disgraced. Even Christians who experience shame feel sent away from people and even God's promises. For those experiencing shame life is more like death. We feel unacceptable because of our own sin and things connected with death like weakness, disease, and the sins of others. When sin-death gets its hands on us, it brings shame, and shame needs the right remedy.

The woman plagued with the shame associated with persistent bleeding (Luke 8:43-48) believed that only Jesus could cleanse her from her shame so she quietly and confidently approached him. Ed Welch writes, "Her faith—her connection—to Jesus was symbolized by human touch, which indicated that she was now brought close into his holiness and was no longer identified as one-who-bled. Jesus could have said, your sins are forgiven but here he said, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." The paralytic man heard the words from Jesus, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven" (Matthew 9:2). These words told him that with the forgiveness of sins he was also forcibly taken from death and all its associates. His lame body was not to be blamed on his sins. But the forgiveness of his sins was shorthand for a full redemption and cleansing that came from his association with Jesus.

Jesus is the right remedy for those who experience shame. Jesus rescues and releases people from those things that once polluted. His words to the shamed are beautiful—"Come," "receive a new name," "come near," "look, touch," "believe", "your sins are forgiven." – These words extend to all our guilt and shame, welcoming us into his purity as beneficiaries of his love. When Jesus died on the cross he bore our shame in his body, so that we, the unloveable, dirty, and disgraced, because of the wrongs done to us, or the wrongs we have done, could be loved and accepted.