

OH TO BE TRULY FREE

“If you choose you can keep the commandments.” These words were spoken by God to Yeshua ben Sira about 2200 years ago. If you choose you can keep the commandments. This means that our freedom is real, not pretend. This means that God has placed his commandments before us because they are necessary guides for us in the way we are to live our lives here on earth. God gave the commandments to Moses and the People of Israel over 3200 years ago. God has not gone back on any of those commandments. God has not removed any of the commandments. God has not changed the Divine Mind on what the commandments are. What was placed before human beings long before God’s Word became flesh has never been revoked. Not up to the present moment.

Jesus himself, whom we believe to be the Word of God made flesh, the Holy One of God, the beloved Son of the Father, Jesus himself says that he did not come to overturn the commandments but to bring them to fulfillment. Put God first in your life. Revere and respect God’s name. Keep holy the Lord’s Day. Honor your father and mother. Do not kill. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not covet or look with lust at your neighbor’s spouse or possessions. Pretty straightforward stuff. Still required. Still possible for us to embrace, obey and live.

But there is more. If we could keep the commandments on our own then why do we need Jesus to come? Why does the beloved of the Father take on our flesh? There is something missing in our freedom. Our freedom has been weakened. Our freedom is not as strong as it was. Our freedom has been darkened. Our freedom is not as clear as it was. Our freedom is confused. What is really good and what is really bad is difficult to discern. How did our freedom get negatively affected like that? By the result of sin. The first sin and all the subsequent sin. Sin distorts, clouds, confuses, twists and weakens our resolve.

So what Jesus brings is a renewed way of living. He restores our original innocence, our original freedom. He shows us and models for us personally. He lays down his life sacrificially and extends God’s hand of forgiveness to all who have sinned or live with the negative effects of sin. And then Jesus returns to the Father who sent him and together they breathe and bestow their very Spirit upon all who believe. It is this Spirit which empowers us to keep the commandments and to live the way of Jesus.

It is this Spirit that calls us beyond our anger into a life of harmony always seeking a way of connecting, of reconciling, of turning the other cheek, of finding a way. It is this Spirit that enables us to be faithful especially in our marriage vows and in the way we look at others—not with lust in our hearts but with compassion and care. Choosing to look at our spouse with respect and regard despite slights, failures or foibles or weakness. It is this Spirit that enables us freely to choose to keep the commandments as ben Sira said in the first reading.

Jesus shows us that we cannot get there on our own. But we can get there. We need help. He gives help. We need support. He gives support. We need encouragement, he gives encouragement. My friends there is no area in your life that is not connected to God. Not your thoughts or your memories or your emotions or your feelings, not your hopes or your desires, not your aspirations or your goals, not your sadness or your brokenness or your wounds. Not your sins. All is connected to God. We can leave God out of the picture, out of our decisions. We have the freedom to do this, to live this way. BUT. There are consequences to such decisions. Real consequences. Lasting consequences. Unless we turn back to the Lord and ask for his forgiveness and his help. It is our choice. We have the freedom. But pretending it will go away will not make it go away. And living in denial about the consequences will not prevent the consequences from befalling us. There is no playing God for the fool.

This is part of Jesus' fundamental teaching from his Sermon on the Mount. It is not a take it or leave it proposition. What he wants is for us to be truly and radically free. But the way to that is through the commandments—the ten and the two. We are also to love God with everything we have and are and our neighbor as ourselves.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.