

People of Distinction

Intro:

As you probably know by now, we are in a series called “The Bible: 66 Books in 52 Weeks.” It’s been a great series so far, I know I have enjoyed it. Since we’re going to be talking about the law this morning, I thought it would be fun to see what kind of strange laws are still on the books in the state of Michigan. According to www.dumblaws.com, the following laws are still in effect:

1. Persons may not be drunk on trains.
 2. The last Sunday in June of every year is to be named “Log Cabin Day.”
 3. Cars may not be sold on Sunday.
 4. It is illegal to kill a dog using a decompression chamber.
 5. A woman isn’t allowed to cut her own hair without her husband’s permission.
- Here’s a law that was repealed in 2002, but I think it should be reinstated...
6. You may not swear in front of women and children.
I’m all for gun rights, but this is a little concerning...
 7. Any person over the age of **12** may have a license for a handgun as long as he/she has not been convicted of a felony.
 8. In Detroit, willfully destroying your old radio is prohibited.
 9. Also in Detroit, it is illegal for a man to scowl at his wife on Sunday. Some of you would be in big trouble!
 10. And lastly, in Grand Haven, no person shall throw an abandoned hoop skirt into any street or on any sidewalk, under penalty of a five-dollars fine for each offense.

Some of you might be wondering if since Jeff isn’t here you’ll get out of the “through the Bible hand motions.” Nope! We’re going to do it this morning. It’s a great way to summarize the Bible. If this is your first time with us today, let me review our summary with motions for you and then we’ll all do it together.

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|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Creation | Euphrates | Jews |
| Fall | Haran | Egypt |
| Flood | Terah Dies | Bondage |
| Nations | Jordan River | Moses |
| 4,000 years ago | Sea of Galilee | Let my people go |
| Ur | Mediterranean Sea | No |
| Persian Gulf | Israel | 10 Plagues |
| Salt | Ishmael | Passover |
| Sarah | Isaac | Red Sea |
| Abraham | Esau | Mt Sinai |
| Lot | Jacob | The Law |
| Terah | Joseph | Tabernacle |
| Tigris | Egypt | |

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Body:

Our reading for this week was Exodus chapters 13-34, and there are a lot of great stories within these chapters—The Crossing of the Red Sea (14), Manna (16), water from a rock & the battle with the Amalakites. Do you remember that story? As long as Moses held his staff above his head, Israel would win and as soon as he lowered them, they started losing. What an unusual story! That's in chapter 17. Then, we come to Mt. Sinai where God gives The Law to Moses, and that is going to be the focus of our time today.

This morning, we will see that **when God gave the Law to Israel, the desired outcome for His people then—Israel—is the same for His people today—us**. In other words, there was a reason that God gave The Law to Israel, and if we understand what The Law was supposed to accomplish for Israel, we will better understand what He still desires for His people. Last week, Jeff talked about “The Peoplehood of God” and that God’s desire is to have a people for Himself. The Bible is the story of God creating His people, and then pursuing and redeeming His people after they have fallen. We’ve already seen how God chose Abraham and his descendants—the Jewish nation—to be His people. And we’ve seen how they ended up in slavery in Egypt, but God sent Moses to deliver them out of bondage. If you have your Bibles, turn with me to Exodus 19.

Read Exodus 19:1-8

Do you see that? **God wanted His people to be distinct**—different or set apart from the other nations. There’s a very crucial word in verse 6—“holy.” I’m going to need a little help from you here. What do you think of when you hear the word “holy”? (responses) Yes, it does mean “without sin,” “perfect,” “blameless,” “set apart.” But what about “different”? Why did God want His people to be distinct? Turn with me to Ezekiel 37.

Read Ezekiel 37:26-28

God wanted a “**treasured possession**” a “holy (different) nation” so that the nations will come to know God. His selection of a people is **not exclusive**. It is the most **inclusive** thing He could do! He does love the whole world and the proof is that He selected a people to reveal Himself to so He could redeem all the nations! Remember the Abrahamic covenant? “All peoples on earth—literally “all nations”—will be blessed through you. That’s Jesus!

So we understand that God desires a people for Himself, but how does a holy, righteous God dwell among sinful people? Well, that’s where **The Law** comes in.

In Exodus 20, God gives Moses The Law on Mt. Sinai. This includes The Ten Commandments, but there is more to The Law than just The Ten Commandments. He also gave Moses **religious and ceremonial laws** that laid out the sacrificial system. There were health laws—remember, they didn’t have antibiotics, immunizations or hand sanitizer, so many of these laws were intended to prevent illness or the spread of

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disease. And lastly, included in The Law were civil laws which included guidelines for a functional society.

Through the years, many people have debated about whether or not Christians today are to obey The Law as given to Moses. The short answer to this is “yes and no.” Remember, there are 4 different types of laws included in The Law. I believe the Ten Commandments are still in affect. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus said that He did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it, and, that not even the smallest part would pass away until all is accomplished. In fact, Jesus raised the bar on just about every one of The Ten Commandments. He said that hate was equivalent to murder and lust was the same as adultery.

The Ten Commandments really weren't new when they were given to Moses. They are God's timeless laws that govern the universe and have been in affect since Creation and, I believe will be in force through eternity. God established the Sabbath in Genesis 2 when He rested and made the 7th day holy—different, set apart. When Adam and Eve sinned, they broke the 2nd commandment by choosing to serve and obey Satan instead of God. When Cain killed Abel, he broke the 6th commandment, “you shall not commit murder.” Ultimately, God destroyed the world because of wickedness—idolatry, murder, adultery, theft, dishonesty, jealousy, envy. God held people accountable for breaking His laws. The Ten Commandments were in force long before God gave them to Moses. And, yes, The Ten Commandments are still in force today, but Jeremiah 31:31-34 says that instead of having the law of God written on tablets of stone, He has written His law on our hearts and our mind. Our salvation is by grace and not by keeping the law, because as we all know, keeping The Ten Commandments is impossible for us to do. One day, that prophecy will be fully realized and we will all know God and keep His commandments.

The other three parts of the law are not in effect. The religious and ceremonial laws dealing with the sacrificial system were fulfilled by Christ's once-for-all sacrifice. Some of the health laws might be insightful to us today to prevent illness or the spread of disease, but we are not obligated to follow them, and the civil laws don't apply to us any more than the civil laws of any other country.

But, God intended Israel to be a **theocracy—God would be their King**, and The Law was given by God to Israel to define how a fallen people could relate to a Holy God as their King. **It has always been God's desire to dwell among His people**, but sin makes it impossible for this to happen without some very specific provisions put in place to make the people holy. **God would dwell among them if they obeyed His laws.** Included in The Law was a set of instructions for the Tent of Meeting or The Tabernacle. This was a special structure where God's presence would literally come down and dwell among the people of Israel. It was in the very center of the encampment and all their tents were to face The Tabernacle. This is important! It is symbolic in that **God intended to be at the very center of their lives!** Turn with me to Exodus 29.

Read Exodus 29:44-46 & 33:12-16

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What made Israel distinct was that God's presence was with them and as long as Israel kept The Law, God would dwell with them. At this point, God is still setting Himself up as trustworthy to His people. He is proving Himself as the One who delivered them from Egypt so He could dwell among them. The people of Israel knew of the promise given to Abraham and God identifies Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God gave them The Law to make it possible for Him to live among them. Keeping The Law was the condition for God to dwell among them.

The Law was given to Israel to make them holy, different, set apart, clean. As long as Israel lived according to The Law, God would dwell among them, they would be His treasured possession and all of the other nations would know God as a result. But what happened? **Israel didn't want to be distinct.** They wanted to be like all the other nations. Turn with me back to Ezekiel chapter 20.

Read Ezekiel 20:9-14, 32-38

Israel didn't want to be different, set apart from the other nations. **They wanted to be like the all the other nations** that surrounded them. They rejected God's laws that brought them life—life with God the way they were intended to live. God desired to live among them but **they rejected Him as their King.** Look at 1 Samuel 8.

Read 1 Samuel 8:4-8, 19-20

Do you hear that? "We want to be like all the other nations." And that is exactly what Israel became. **God withdrew His presence from among them** and exactly what Moses said happened. **They lost their distinction as God's holy people.** Eventually, He sent conquering nations to oppress them and carry them off into captivity. The story of Israel is one of missed opportunity of experiencing life with God. As a result, **Israel was ineffective in displaying the benefits of life with God to all nations.**

But the story of Israel is our story. Christ came and fulfilled the demands of The Law by offering Himself as the sacrifice for our sins so that we can have a relationship with God again. **He made a way so that we can be His people.** But too often, **we don't want to be different. We want to be just like everyone else,** don't we?

You see, the intent of The Law—even though Hebrews tells us it was insufficient—was to create a holy people—different, set apart so that God could dwell with them and all the nations would come to know God. The intent for saving His people is the same today—to create a holy people so that we can display the life that God intended for all people to experience. 1 Peter 1:13-16 says,

"Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

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2 Corinthians 5 says that we are Christ's ambassadors of reconciliation and that God is making His appeal through us: Be reconciled to God! God wants His people to be holy, different, set apart so that others will come to know God through our lives.

Ultimately, when Jesus came to earth as God incarnate, He demonstrated how this is to take place. He became one of us to connect with us, yet He was distinct, different. If you put this on a **matrix**, Jesus demonstrated high **connection** AND high **distinction**. He left heaven and put on flesh and blood, yet He never sinned. He remained distinct, different from us. That is how we are to live. The Apostle Paul also modeled this. Turn over to 1 Corinthians chapter 9.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Paul demonstrated a high degree of connection while also remaining distinctly different. This is a challenge, but it is something we are called to be as God's people—highly distinct, yet also, highly connected.

Read 1 Peter 1:13-16

When we live a highly connected, yet highly distinct life, we live an **incarnational** life—we embody the Gospel—and we will be effective ambassadors of the message of reconciliation.

But, like Israel, we can become ineffective at making God known to those around us. How do we know when we've lost our distinction and become ineffective? Look at Galatians 5:19-21.

Read Galatians 5:19-21

This list of behaviors is often called "the works of the flesh." **When our connection with the surrounding culture is high but our distinction begins to slip, these behaviors will become evident in our lives, and we become ineffective.** If you look closely at this list, it is essentially the opposite of The Ten Commandments. Almost every one of these behaviors has a direct opposite as one of The Ten Commandments.

I believe this is the biggest danger we face in the American Church today. We have people who want their "fire insurance" to keep them from hell, but they want to "be like everybody else." They don't want to be distinct. Our churches have become safe places to "come as you are"—and they should be. But they've also become safe places to "stay the way you are" and not places to be transformed to be more like Christ. Frankly, I'm appalled at the behavior of many people in the church today—even among people who are leaders! From posts on Facebook with bad language, or conversations about what happened Saturday night or so-and-so's bachelor party. We're embracing the surrounding culture's morals. I'm shocked by Christian parents who don't seem concerned with their kids' open promiscuity! I ask myself "where is the distinction? how are we any different from the lost culture around us?" We fool ourselves into thinking that if we lower our distinction—if we become more like them, if we do some of the same things they do (the works of the flesh)—we will be more effective at reaching

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them. It's the same trick that Satan used to make Israel ineffective and we are falling for it hook, line and sinker!

Don't misunderstand me! I'm not suggesting that we need to develop a long list of things that we do or don't do to make us distinct. What I am saying is that what is on the inside will work its way out. If our hearts are centered on God, we will walk in the Spirit and the fruits of the Spirit will be evident in our lives. But, if our hearts are not centered on God, it will work its way out in the works of the flesh. Our behavior is an indicator of where our heart is. Galatians 5:16 says that if we walk by the Spirit, we will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

There's another danger. **We can become so distinct that we lose connection with the surrounding culture and become isolated.** I grew up in an environment like this. It was distinct, it was different, it was "holy," but it was so isolated from the surrounding culture that there was no connection. In fact, we had a long list of things that we proudly didn't do that made us distinct. We didn't play cards, go to movies, drink alcohol, listen to rock music, and the list went on and on. At the Christian school I went to, girls were forbidden to wear pants—only skirts or culottes. True story: my sister's class at the Christian school we attended was going sledding. One of her classmates asked their teacher if they could wear snow pants. The teacher's reply? "Only if you wear your culottes on the top of them."

My parents weren't sure they wanted me to go to Liberty University, which was founded by Jerry Falwell, because "he was one of those liberals." Growing up, my family was very involved in the music at the church. It was a very small church and we never even had a sound system. In fact, I had never held a microphone in my hand until I went to Liberty. One Easter during my sophomore year of college, I came home to be with my family and they asked me to sing in church. My church had just recently tripled in size because a much larger Independent, Fundamental Baptist Church in the next town over had split and half of their people ended up at our church. So, the church was now meeting in the local high school auditorium which had a sound system. I arrived early that Easter Sunday to practice my song and picked up the microphone. A man who used to attend the other church and was now a deacon at my church came up and took the microphone out of my hand. He said, "We don't use microphones here! They are sexually suggestive because we can hear you breathe!"

My dad still attends that church and well over 20 years later, that church still has only about 100-150 people attending. Many churches are guilty of propagating this type of isolated, fortress-mentality among Christians. "We're going to hold up in here and keep the big, bad world out there. Then, every once in awhile, we'll send a raiding party out to go knock on a few doors, hopefully, grab a few new converts and then run back into our fortress. I don't know much about their theology, but an extreme example of this is the Amish—very high on distinction, but almost no connection to the outside world. As a result, they are isolated from the surrounding culture and have very little impact.

Notice how the things that bring about this isolation are typically external characteristics—things we do or don't do. The Pharisees were guilty of this and Jesus addressed their hypocrisy in Matthew 23.

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Read Matthew 23:23-28

Circumcision was an outward sign of The Covenant—someone who was under The Law. Romans 2:29 says that circumcision must be of the heart, by the Spirit, and not by the written code. Paul is saying that now, because of Christ, we can have our hearts “circumcised.” In other words, change comes from the inside out, not the outside in.

If you're low on both connection and distinction, you're basically irrelevant. In Revelation 3:16, Jesus said to the church of Laodicea, “you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” I honestly don't think I've ever met anyone who would fall into this category. The previous two options are the more prevalent in our day and age.

Reflection:

As we go into reflection today, I would like for you to think about Israel. God desired to be at the center of everything they did. As long as God was at the center and the people followed His law, they experienced the blessing of life with God and other nations heard about the God of Israel. Ask yourself: “Is God at the center of my life? Do I live an incarnational life by living a life of distinction while remaining connected to the surrounding culture? If you have children, are you raising them to be distinct, yet connected or just mainstream?”

It is difficult to live a connected, yet distinct life. It is only through living a life that is centered around God that this is possible. He is our anchor in the midst of the wind and waves that constantly tries to move us one way or the other. He invites us to come to Him. He will be with us. We have to keep our eyes on Him.

Come To Me

Reflection Explanation

Worship Set

Closing Comments:

So, where are you on this matrix? If you put yourself in the ineffective quadrant—high on connection but low on distinction—the path to incarnational living is through **obedience and holiness**. It's not about living by some legalistic list, but knowing God's Word and being obedient to it through the power of the Holy Spirit.

If you put yourself in the isolated quadrant—high on distinction, but low on connection—the path to incarnational living is through **love and grace**. We are called to be salt and light, but that means we gotta get out of the salt shaker, we gotta go into the darkness! Christ's love and grace must compel us to leave our isolation and live out a life with God among those who need it most.

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If you're irrelevant, you need a lot of help! You need obedience and holiness to make you distinct and you need love and grace to make you connected.

Let's strive for connection AND distinction so the people we come in contact with this week with know that Salvation Is Here! God bless you, have a great week!