

I had the joy of giving instruction on the Ten Commandments to my last confirmation class. It was a fun time as we waded through the “thou shall and shall nots” of the commandments. As I prepared for the class, I thought about how often the Ten Commandments are misconstrued. They have come to have almost magical power for some. If we paste them on the walls of courthouses and schoolhouses, life will get better. Students in school will act better. We’ve yet to give up the idea that keeping the commandments has something to do with being a good Christian, and by being a good Christian, being saved.

The commandments weren’t given as a magic moment; they were given to protect relationships. The first relationship the commandments protect is our relationship with God. There is a vertical dimension to the commandments. It flows from God to us and back again. God should be our greatest love. God’s name should be used in productive manners. We are invited to rest in God one day in the week, and to stay connected in worship. We don’t do these things to gain a relationship with God. We do them because God has already claimed us, and God wants our relationship to continue.

Perhaps, it would be enough for God to have stopped there. After all, keep those three are hard enough, but God didn’t. God adds a horizontal dimension to the commandments. The commandments not only protect our relationship to God, they protect our relationships to each other. While those relationships include family, parents and children, spouses, they soon spiral out to everyone else. We are to be concerned with protecting our neighbor’s property and reputation. We are to respect their spousal partnerships.

Jesus recognized the heart of the commandments. When he was asked to state them as one, he said it simply. Love God; love your neighbor. No exceptions. No excuses. It’s not about being a good person. It’s not about getting a pat on the back from God. It’s not about a magic moment that will poof the world. It is about the very difficult task of keeping our relationships intact. The only way that is done is by loving God and loving one another.

Pastor Parnell