

Learning to Love God's Law

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It's almost impossible for young people today to grow up with a positive sense of authority, particularly Church authority. **Our society exalts the freedom of the individual as the *summum bonum*, and nothing may impede it. Laws and rules, in this view, are inimical to freedom, and therefore viewed with disdain.**

Given the Church's opposition to modernity's primary exercise of freedom – unrestricted sexual license – society perceives her laws as the height of oppression. Most people show their displeasure by simply ignoring the Church's laws. Hence Cafeteria Catholicism is about more than religious preferences: it is about the freedom of the individual versus the “constraining” Church.

This perspective is completely at odds with that of the Psalms, which praises God's law as a blessing. **“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;** the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.” (Psalm 19:7-8)

What does God command? Not oppression, not misery. “By day the Lord commands his steadfast love.” (Psalm 42:8)

The best way to reclaim God's law in our antinomian society is to link His law with His love. Love is society's second greatest value after freedom. Most Catholics hear about God's love in Catholic schools, religious education, and homilies. **But every mention of God's love must include His law in the same breath. For God expresses His love for us through His laws.**

Psalm 119, the longest in the Psalter with 176 verses, sings the glories of God's law and the drama of the soul clinging to it as persecutors surround it. God's laws are "righteous ordinances" (v.62) that serve as "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (v.105) As a light, that is, a guide for action, His word "imparts understanding to the simple" (v.130) for "your law is true." (v.142) **Through God's law we know what good to do and what evil to avoid. And following this law delivers a highly sought after good: "Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble." (v.165)**

Having acquired peace of soul, we can begin to comprehend what God's law does for us. "I find delight in your commandments, which I love." (v.47) **"I will never forget your precepts; for by them you have given me life."** (v.93) If God's commandments bring life, then the alternative is clear: "If your law had not been my delight, I should have perished in my affliction." (v.92)

Psalm 1 paints a similar picture: **blessed is the man whose "delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night.** He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in due season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers." (v.2-3)

The Psalmist is in complete harmony with Jesus. "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15:10-11)

If God's commandments lead to love and joy, why do so many, Catholics included, oppose them?

Because we gullible creatures routinely fall for the serpent's lies that trick us into believing God's commandments restrict our freedom rather than are the

foundations that enable us to be fully free. Today the serpent has so many spokesmen – media, smartphones, pop culture, government schools and universities, “Nones” claiming no religious affiliation – that he can almost slither into retirement. **People believe his lie and think what’s true is false.**

When we believe the serpent’s lies, laws appear external and foreign. They are imposed from the outside, and thereby put us in opposition to God.

By contrast, **if we can see with faith that God’s law is God’s love since the former is the perfect expression of the latter, then we can internalize the law and see that it is a deep truth about ourselves.** This was St. Paul’s advice to the Galatians: “For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God.” (Galatians 2:19) And also to the Romans: “For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified.” (Romans 10:4)

Like so many other aspects of the spiritual life, **integrating God’s law within ourselves requires constant diligence and perseverance** [2]. **Our pride will regularly rise up to assert itself over God’s law. We need, therefore, to hear repeatedly that God’s law is the expression of – and means to – His love.**

Only with a humble heart, cognizant of our sinfulness, and need to receive God’s forgiveness, can we pray with the Psalmist, who reminds us that to follow His law is to bathe in His love, which is our true happiness.

Finally, **we have to recover the understanding that the Church is the custodian of God’s laws, so to obey the Church is to obey God.** This is perhaps the tallest hurdle today. But if the Church is Christ’s bride, surely her laws must help us, her children, participate in the joy of their marriage.

Mr. Spock of *Star Trek* issued a valediction with his Vulcan salute: “Live long and prosper.” The Psalmist offers God’s benediction: “Live God’s law and prosper.” That is our joy, Jesus reminds us, because it is God’s love for us.

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