

The Ten Commandments and the County Court House

Every now and again, as I listen to a public debate over some issue, I come to one simple conclusion: EVERYBODY TALKING IS WRONG!

That's my feeling about the 10 commandments in the Montgomery, Alabama courthouse.

Judge Roy Moore, if the public reports are correct, had the monument built and installed on his own initiative unbeknownst to his judicial colleagues. Sorry Judge – you occupy the office, you don't own the building.

Now, my fundamentalist and evangelical brothers and sisters have taken up the fight, seeing the removal of the monument as emblematic of what is going on in our nation as a whole. The loss of that monument is just another proof that the country is going to hell in a handbasket. Somehow, if they can prevail, it will be throwing a sandbag into the breaking dike of morality and truth. Sorry folks, but Jesus never taught us to grab the reigns of political power in order to bring in his kingdom. Seems to me that those who tried it in his lifetime got a fairly stern rebuke.

Then there is the federal judge, Myron Thompson, who gave the ruling that the monument needed to be moved. Citing the Establishment Clause of the Constitution, he said such a religious artifact could not reside in a governmental building. Such a ruling could be a real boon to the industry that manufactures sandblasting equipment and supplies. Walk around Washington DC and read all of the religious inscriptions on government buildings. Multiply that concept by 50 and it will apply to government buildings of any type in any place in the Union. Do these all need to be removed? Should we re write the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence? And what about the rights of states? The Establishment Clause is addressed to the Congress, and by implication the Federal Government. But this is a State issue, not a federal issue. Does the Federal Government have jurisdiction here? If it does, what rights and jurisdictions do states have outside of federal control? If the answer is none, is it time to disband the states, and reconfigure our nation into 50 different regions of Federal jurisdiction, and simply allow Washington to decide everything? I generally favor less federal government, as I think the Founding Fathers did. Sorry Judge Thompson– this wasn't your fight to rule on.

Lastly, there are the people who filed the original lawsuit. What exactly is it, that people find so offensive about the 10 commandments? The assertion that they are not a law unto themselves? The requirement to obey things that are at times onerous? Those problems won't go away by disavowing the Ten Commandments. Every state trooper with a radar gun will remind them of that.

Consider what the 10 commandments assert:

1. There is a power much bigger than you at the center of the Universe. Admit that.

This is hardly a novel idea. This is what is declared at the beginning of every AA meeting, among other places. Our Enlightenment arrogance wants us to be at the conceptual center, even as we discover we are not at the physical center. Time to get over our juvenile insistence that everything revolve around us.

2. Don't take the material stuff of this life and make it the focus of your existence.

The one who dies with the most toys still dies. It's not about how much you can accumulate, and there is precious little in this life that can not be lost. So don't make knowledge, appearance, money, influence or toys the focal point of your existence.

3. Watch your language.

Words have power – you can build with them, and destroy with them. You may be talking at times and in ways when it would be better to hold your tongue – most of all when angry and issuing oaths and invective. Respect the implications of command #1 when it comes to how you talk

4. Take one day a week off, to rest and to remember and think about command #1.

It's been proven as far as work and productivity are concerned, less is often more. Taking a day off is good for everyone. Thinking about command #1 on your day off keeps a lot of things in perspective

5. Respect and care for your parents

Okay – they weren't perfect, and made some mistakes when raising you. Maybe even some major errors of judgement. Their failures don't relieve you of your responsibility to live your life well. Forgive them. It will be a gift to you and them. Besides, one day your kids will need to forgive the mistakes and some fairly egregious errors you made in their upbringing

6. Don't get revenge when you think you've been wronged

Whether the revenge is out and out murder, or just killing by rumor and innuendo, don't do it. Let cooler heads and wiser minds prevail when you think you've been wronged.

7. Don't sleep with someone you're not married to.

No one, by missing an opportunity to have sex, destroyed his or her life. But how many lives have been destroyed, literally and figuratively, by violating this command? Sex is a wonderful thing, when used properly. Misuse it, and its destructive power is awesome to behold.

8. If it's not yours, leave it alone.

How much simpler can it get? I just wish more Planning Commissioners, Legislators and teenagers roaming about town after hours understood it.

9. Tell the Truth

Even if the stars fall, tell the truth! Don't quibble and be disingenuous. Don't tell me "it all depends on what the meaning of the word "is" is". Don't slant things so it puts you in a better light. Just tell the truth – let your yes be yes, and your no be no. Period.

10. Keep a short leash on your desires

We hear "you can always look, even if your not buying" or "its okay to look just don't touch". Listening to our culture, one might conclude that the mere existence of a desire somehow generates the right to have it satisfied. We've lost the understanding that, sometimes, the very wanting is wrong. Wanting becomes the first step in the path to doing or getting – doing what we ought not do, getting what we ought not have.

Sorry plaintiffs – but this is an ethical and moral system you find offensive? Could you suggest a better system that somehow can escape your own definition of religion?

A few thousand years ago, there was a group of people living on the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. They had the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets, stored inside a gold box, and the box was kept in the center room in a magnificent building. These folks were convinced that as long as they had the commandments, and the gold box, and the magnificent building, they could pretty well live however they liked, and God would protect them from those “godless pagans and infidels” of the ancient world, the Babylonians. But they were wrong. Because the God who gave these commandments isn’t very interested in who’s making stone monuments out of them. He cares immensely about who is living by them. Better that the monument was moved out of the Montgomery courthouse and the commandments inscribed on the hearts of the people of Alabama, than every courthouse in every state have them on its walls, and people ignore them.

Better that we should have them inscribed on the hearts of the people in Lake County, than such a legal battle take place here.