

# REFINE US, part 5

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*Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, March 8, 2015*

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## Promise to Transform

Let me recap: God gives us promises to transform our lives. When embraced in faith, those promises will be put to the test—in us—by the elements of our human nature and our life experiences.

Personal trials or persecutions arise *“on account of the word.”* You have embraced God’s words in your life and God is now putting His promises to the test. Your life is the crucible in which the test takes place.

*Psalm 12:6* *The Lord’s promises are pure, like silver refined in a furnace, purified seven times over.*

“But if it’s God’s word, why does it need refining?” you ask. Great question! Because it comes to us as raw ore. In the Scriptures, you may catch a glimpse of raw ore, mixed with and obscured by other materials (historical, cultural, and linguistic context). It needs to be refined in order to reveal and release its potential for our lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

What do the tests reveal? They reveal the Word’s truthfulness, its durability, its superiority, its enduring power.

What is the intended takeaway? Glory for God. And victory for you.

A month ago I asked you to engage a process of embracing God’s words:

1. **Read the Word.** Gather those chunks of raw (and precious) ore from the Bible. Highlight them, write them down, commit them to memory, or share them with a trusted friend.
2. **Be prepared.** God’s words will be tested in your life. Be ready to trust Jesus for wisdom and direction, for protection and provision.
3. **Practice the Word.** Learn to put God’s word into practice. You won’t master it the first time, but with practice, it will become second nature.
4. **Stand fast.** All you have to do to pass the test is *hold on*. Don’t abandon your faith that God’s words will adjust you and your circumstances.

How are you doing with that?

## Divine Expectations

Most of God's promises are *conditional*; that is, there is a condition that activates the promise—without meeting the condition, the promise is fruitless. These *conditions* may also be regarded as *commandments*, because they are necessary for the desired results.

We may refer to God's promises more often than His commandments, but both express God's expectations. His promises are His expectations *for us*; His commands are His expectations *from us*.

*Matthew 5:17* "Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. <sup>18</sup> I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved. <sup>19</sup> So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God's laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

<sup>20</sup> "But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!"

We are not leaving behind the God of the Old Covenant (He hasn't changed), and we should not leave behind the words of the Old Covenant (which is why our Bible contains both), but we must change the way we demonstrate our faith in Christ, going deeper, if you will, into the spirit of God's commands, or, in Jesus' words, understanding why He came.

## The Spirit of the Law

Jesus was very clear about raising the bar from ritual to relationship, as the deeper motive of Christianity (and the reason we need the Holy Spirit to live in us). This transition was the core message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-48): "You have heard it said... but I say to you."

God has not changed, and His expectations have not changed. God's laws are neither outdated nor irrelevant. If there is a problem, it is with our response to His commands.

We may **reject** them.

We may **ignore** them.

We may **go through the motions** of keeping them without faith.

Or, we may **practice them in conversation with God**. (This is His desire.)

Jesus raised the bar from ritual to relationship. He neither removed nor changed God's commands. In fact, He underscored them. But He addressed something deeper than external ritual

obedience: He asked us to think about our actions in different terms. He asked us to examine our thoughts and motives for saying and doing what we do.

Apostle Paul wrote, “*Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves.*” (2 Corinthians 13:5)

Do your words and deeds express a *relational faith* in God?

## **Obedience is Necessary**

God’s commands have been given to order our steps and firmly establish our lives in the ways of the Lord, under the canopy of His gracious blessings.

A commandment implies an obligation. Obedience is the desired result.

You and I may have three possible responses to the Law of God:

- Lawlessness (obedience rejected)
- Legalism (obedience imposed)
- Love (obedience embraced)

Which do you think God wants?

Galatians 5:6; AMP

*What is important is faith that is activated and energized and expressed through love.*

But the Bible is not a rule book; it is a revelation. A revelation of God’s character, majesty, and beauty. A revelation of His justice. A revelation of His rightness. A revelation of His sovereignty. A revelation of His heart for mankind.

In relation to the commands of God, we need two things. First, we need to properly *understand* the Law, so we can fully embrace it. Second, we need to properly *practice* the Law, from the inside out.

For the rest of this morning, and next Sunday, we will consider these two requisites.

## **Obey with Understanding**

We need to properly understand God’s Law—what it is, what purpose it serves, and how it accomplishes its aim.

What is God's law? To get a broad overview, just read Psalm 119, which David wrote to extol the glory and the impact of God's words. Some of the terms you will find (depending on the translation you read) are these:

- Law
- Testimonies
- Ways (of truth) – the how
- Precepts
- Statutes
- Commandments
- Rules
- Word (of truth) – the what
- Ordinances

You will see that David included one of these descriptions in nearly every verse. To these descriptors of the Law, Jesus adds “the prophets” as guardians and proponents of the Law.

Consider the Decalogue (one commentator called them the “Ten Commandments for the Covenant Community”) or Ten Commandments. They are first found in the Book of the Exodus.

#### Exodus 20:1-17

*Then God gave the people all these instructions:*

*2 “I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery.*

*3 “You must not have any other god but me.*

*4 “You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. 5 You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. 6 But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those\* who love me and obey my commands.*

*7 “You must not misuse the name of the LORD your God. The LORD will not let you go unpunished if you misuse his name.*

*8 “Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 You have six days each week for your ordinary work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.*

*12 “Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you.*

*13 “You must not murder.*

*14 “You must not commit adultery.*

15 *"You must not steal.*

16 *"You must not testify falsely against your neighbor.*

17 *"You must not covet your neighbor's house. You must not covet your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor."*

These gradually expanded into the Law of Moses (the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch or Torah), composed of 613 specific rules for daily and spiritual life.

## **Purpose of the Law**

The Ten Commandments may also be considered as the Ten Revelations: A Portrait of God, for they reveal ten aspects of God's character:

- No other gods, only Me. (God is singularly sufficient, self-existent, above all.)
- No carved gods of any size, shape, or form of anything whatever. (God is not manufactured; He is real and alive and relational.)
- No using the name of God irreverently. (God is worthy of our reverence.)
- Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. (God is holy, set apart, as we must be to fellowship with Him.)
- Honor your father and mother, and you'll live a long time. (God is honorable and responsible, as our divine parent.)
- No murder. (God is united, three-in-one, with no division, nor conflict.)
- No adultery. (God is faithful, keeping covenant with His people.)
- No stealing. (God is loyal and generous; a Giver, not a taker.)
- No lies about your neighbor. (God is trustworthy, speaking beneficent truth.)
- No coveting anything that is your neighbor's. (God is peaceful, not grasping, or needy of anything.)

The Ten Commandments are a picture of God's righteousness at work, in the human spirit and in human society.

They boil down to just two streams:

1-4: Love God

5-10: Love Others

"On which," Jesus said, "hang ALL the law AND the prophets." Everything we need to know and obey is found under one of these two categories.

God's Law is also a revealer of our deviation from His standard.

2 Timothy 3:16

*All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.*

- What is true (instruction).
- What is wrong (conviction).
- What is better (correction).
- What is right (discipleship).

## The End of the Law

Romans 10:4

*Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

What does that mean? It could mean that the Law was terminated by the ministry of Jesus. But the fact that both Jesus and His disciples refer to the Law in positive terms, affirming its holiness and endurance should lead us to another explanation: it means that Jesus Christ is the goal of the Law, the fulfillment of its purpose—not in the sense of closing the book, but of writing the final chapter. Jesus is the embodiment of the Law of God, or, in other words, Jesus is everything a law-abiding human should be. He is our Example.

The New Living Translation puts it this way: *Christ has already accomplished the purpose for which the law was given.* (Romans 10:4)

When God gave the commandments to Moses and he brought them to the people, they cowered and backed away.

Exodus 20:19-20

<sup>19</sup> *And they said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen. But don’t let God speak directly to us, or we will die!”*

<sup>20</sup> *“Don’t be afraid,” Moses answered them, “for God has come in this way to test you, and so that your fear of him will keep you from sinning!”*

God purposed *initially* that their fear of Him would preserve them (“keep them from sinning”).

That was then. That was Kindergarten.

Now, God has come to us in a new way: in the person of His Son, Jesus.

Hebrews 1:1-3

<sup>1</sup> *Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets.*

<sup>2</sup> *And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. <sup>3</sup> The Son radiates God’s own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the*

*mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven.*

If I may rephrase Moses' words for our day, "Do not be afraid, for God has come in this (new) way to *assure* you, and so that your *love* of Him will keep you from sinning."

Now, we have a better understanding of the continuing purpose of God's law. Initially, to show us our sin and develop a healthy fear of God, in order to keep us from sinning rampantly.

Jerry Bridges expressed the transition to college level faith: "We obey God's law, not (in order) to be loved, but because we *are loved* in Christ."

Jesus has shown us the Father's love. He has given us the Father's love; it is our inheritance in Christ.

### **John 15:9-12**

*<sup>9</sup> "I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! <sup>12</sup> This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.*

Next week, we will consider how we *practice* God's law—how that is different when living under the New Covenant in Christ.