

**Some may like to play with fire but when they get burned,
they realize that all the warnings were right, and true,
and for their own benefit.**

**That's how Moses is presenting the law to Israel
in today's first scripture.**

Remember how he put it?

**"Hear the statutes and decrees I am teaching you to observe,
so that you may live and may enter into and take possession"
of the Promised Land.**

Moses promises Israel

**that if they faithfully obey the Lord's 10 commandments,
other nations will stand in awe of them
as a wise and intelligent people.**

**And there is a wisdom, an intelligence, a logic, a sensibility
to the 10 commandments:**

- honor, reverence, and worship your Creator**
- don't waste any time on false gods**
- honor those who gave you life**
- honor your neighbors by taking care
not to steal from them, or lie to them,
or hurt them in any way**
- honor yourselves with a healthy self-acceptance**

rather than envying your neighbors
and their possessions.

Could anyone go wrong living this way?

These laws were intended as a gift to Israel, not a burden,
and they are intended as a gift to us, too.

There are court cases in our own nation testing the constitutionality
of whether or not these same 10 commandments
can be displayed on public property.

Today's scriptures don't give a legal answer to that controversy
but they do offer a spiritual answer.

The scriptures today are clear
that the place where God's law is to be enshrined
is in our hearts
and that the Lord's word is to be sculpted in our deeds:

As James put it in our second scripture:

*"Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you...
Be doers of the word and not hearers only..."*

Jesus, too, is clear on this point that external traditions are meaningless
if they fail to mirror, to image what is in our hearts:
what we inscribe on monuments is worthless
if our hearts are far from the One whose gift that law is.

Which brings us back to the "the law as gift..."

Do I understand the law as a boon from God? or as a burden?

Do I understand God's commandments as an outline

of a simple, wise, intelligent plan for living – or as a curse?

First I need to study the law and discover, or rediscover,

its simple goodness and its potential benefit for me.

Then I need to study myself and ask,

“What is it about my life

that leads me to think of God's law as a burden?

What's the difference between the two?

between my life and the divine law?

And, if my deeds are contrary to God's law,

what needs am I satisfying in myself - and at what expense?

What do I need to understand about the law

that I might “enter in and take possession”

of the peace God promises those who live by his word?

Of course, the whole of God's law is summed up

in the life and the words of Jesus who tells us,

“Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

And there is no greater tradition to observe,

no greater worship to offer,

than the love of Jesus himself in the gift of the Eucharist.

At this table we share in the gift that is even greater than the law:

**the gift of Christ whose fulfillment of the law of love
is our hope.**

**Come to the table and be nourished by the Word made flesh
that we might enflesh in our lives
the law of love which brings us life.**

- Rev. Austin Fleming