



the Christian Decalogue and Discipline in Society today: A Prefatory Analysis

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT *The Christian Decalogue in essence, is the Ten Commandments that were given to Moses. It signifies the bond of Yahweh's covenant with His people, the Israelites. Shield confirms that, "our Lord endorsed each one of the ten commandments", they explain the basis of man's duty towards God and his neighbours, and are the basic tenets of the Jewish faith. "Christians accept the Christian Decalogue together with Christ's examples and teachings as the basis of morality". This paper examines the 10 commandment, its significance in the life of Israelites, the life of Moses who brought it down from mount Sanai and the impact these laws have in the life of present generations.*

Introduction

The ten commandment is one of the most important biblical concepts. It reveals the character and standards of God and marks the way in which human beings can express love for God and for each other. The law also condemns. No human being except Jesus Christ has ever kept its requirements. The law (ten commandment) reveals the righteousness of God but has never been able to produce righteousness in human beings.

For many people, the ten commandment seems terribly restricting and standards designed to apply to everyone seem cold and impersonal. Some years ago, the idea emerged that rules were unnecessary; all an ethical person needed to do in any situation was simply to determine the "loving thing to do". But how does a person tell what is loving? How can a man fallible as he is, look ahead and determine the result of his possible choices and select the course which will lead to his own and others good.

The Bible says that love sums up the whole law (Rom 13:8-10). Love is the very foundation of law. Love is at the root of its restrictions, just as love is at the root of rules. A good parent imposes on a toddler too young to know what is best for him. The difference is that, rather than you and me to look ahead to determine the loving thing to do, God has looked ahead for us! And in the ten commandment has expressed principles of morality that leads us to what is good.

For instance, Deut. (15:4) promises that if Israel will only obey the law "there will be no poor among you". The law God gave to Israel was to a just society and to eliminate poverty. Yes God does know "the loving things to do" it therefore means that you cannot separate his law from his love.

The Christian Decalogue highlighted spiritual and moral issues and were divinely affirmed. "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery", as written in the Bible. The law was to teach the people of Israel how God wanted them to live when they were free. It was supposed to discourage sin, on one hand and to protect them on the other hand. Physical signs like thunder and earthquakes revere the law. Obedience of the ten commandments would ensure continued enjoyment of the privileges which resulted from their redemption from Egypt (Exodus 19:3-6).

Covenants before Moses' Decalogue

According to Harrison (1997), covenants were used widely in the Near East during the second millennium B.C. both at international and personal level. Long before Moses, the suzerainty treaties of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries B.C. existed. It was a treaty between political unequals, the suzerain or paramount ruler and the verbal or subservient power. It defined the obligations which the suzerain wished to impose on the vassal state. It embodied stipulations along with prohibitions imposed against the vassal engaging in any form of foreign alliances. The vassal state was obliged to keep the document carefully which was read publicly at intervals to the people. The structure of covenants was familiar throughout the ancient Near East.

History of Moses' Decalogue

Moses had several experiences and contexts within and outside Egypt which influenced him a great deal. It is suspected that he was familiar with the maxims of renowned Egyptian sages as Atah Hotelp. Moses was credited as the originator of the Christian Decalogue. Peakes argues:

...but in spite of the similarity between Psalm 104 and the Egyptian hymn to the assumption associated with the heretic pharaoh, and in spite of other sometimes striking indications of Egyptian influence in Israel's wisdom literature, there is no trace of Egyptian influence in anything which may be reasonably assumed to have formed part of the religion of Moses.

Asides this, to further buttress the fact that Moses religion didn't have Egyptian influence was the unknown divine name, Yahweh, that Moses presented. Another person who believed that Moses got all he had from outside is Darling-ton (1968). According to him;

"In their moral character, the Mosaic laws, like the myths that accompanied them could have been, and probably were largely taken from Babylonian and Egypt".

However, Yosef Hayman thought differently. He affirms that Moses got his law from Egypt when he adds that; in 1998 Friedrich Schiller, proposed in an elaborate essay that Moses as the foster child of an Egyptian princess and was initiated into purely monotheistic Egyptian mystery religion which he subsequently taught the Hebrews.

Events/Conditions before the Christian Decalogue

The Birth of Moses

The Bible Exodus account tells us that Moses was born in Egypt to Israelite parents who were slaves in captivity along with other Israeli during the reign of pharaoh Ramses II of Egypt. Around this time there was a draconian decree promulgated that all male children born by Hebrew women should be killed by the Egyptian midwives. His loving mother devised a means, to save him in a basket of bulrushes kept beside the river where Ramses' daughter (Merri) used to bath. She adopted him and ensured he was instructed in all the wisdom of Egypt.

His Early Life

He was brought up in the palace but he was still aware of his heritage. He was sympathetic to the plight of his people. He once killed an Egyptian task master who maltreated an Israelite slave, despite being treated favourably. He was ruled by tribal sentiment. He fled to Median to escape judgment. As a result of this he was separated from his loved ones. As a result of his self-exile, he became a wanderer. The need to have a sense of belonging made him to settle down and even take a wife in Median. It was there in the wilderness that he had the theophanic manifestation, his anointing and commission with divine authority.

The State of Israel

Joseph invited the entire Jacobs family on his own authority to settle in Goshen. After his death, the Israelites at last came under Egyptian servitude. Most of them were uninformed about the god of their fathers in addition to the oppression. Their male babies were being slaughtered by some Egyptian midwives according to pharaoh Ramses' legislation. At this time they lost all idea of a saving God until when Moses appeared from self-exile.

A Breakdown of the Decalogue

The first – four commandments focuses on the human relationship with God. The remaining six focuses on our relationship with each other.

Relationship with God

- 1) No gods before me.
- 2) No idols.
- 3) Do not take the name of the Lord in vain.
- 4) Keep the Sabbath holy.

Relationship with each others

- 5) Honour thy fathers and mothers
- 6) Do not kill.
- 7) Do not commit adultery.
- 8) Do not steal.
- 9) Do not give false testimony.
- 10) Do not covet.

The relationship with God and that of man make the Christian Decalogue a moral law. Most people in the world are guilty for their disobedience and sometimes, some excuse their indiscretion by blaming others for their faults. We cannot escape God's wrath by excuses.

1) **Thou shall have no other gods before me (Ex. 20:3):** God alone has the exclusive claim to our allegiance. No rival is to exist for the believer. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son..." John 3:16. The least man can do to reciprocate this love is to give Him an undivided allegiance. God looks out for such people who worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). Having

any other god suggests that God can be compared with another, but God cannot be compared with any other being. He is the source of every living thing and none can be compared to him. He has all wisdom, power and might, the I am that filleth all things. (Isaiah 40:18-31, Ex. 3:14, John 1:1-5, Matt. 28:18, Eph. 1:22-23).

2) **Thou shall not make unto thee any given image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the waters under the earth; (Ex. 20:4):** God said to the Israelites that they must not bow down to them not serve them. In the new testament, Jesus said in Matt. 6:21 "For where your treasures, there will your heart be" whatever it is that takes the place of God in a man's heart is an idol. We are not to respond to idols but to the WORD and spirit of God.

3) **Thou shall not take the name of the LORD thy GOD in vain:** For the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain (Ex. 20:7). Yahweh means One Who is Ever Present. To take his "name in vain" means to consider the name empty or meaningless; to deny or doubt His presence and power.

4) **Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy (Ex. 20:8):** The day of rest honours God and is to benefit God's old testament people. To keep the Sabbath involved remembering God. This is the only commandment not expected in the new testament.

5) **Honour thy fathers and thy mothers (Ex. 20:12):** Respect of parents leads to knowing God. It is worthy of note that it is the first commandment with promise (Eph. 6:2). This commandment centres in the family unit and upbringing of children. This is the bedrock of a sane society. Children who learn to honour their parents grow up to be responsible citizens in the society. The world system is deprived of moral value because of the violation of this law.

6) **Thou shall not kill (Ex. 20:13):** The right of every person to life is protected. Any set which might rob another's life is included in the prohibition.

7) **Thou shall not commit adultery (Ex. 20:14):** Here the value of faithfulness in personal commitment is stressed. "Sex is not an animal function" but an expression of deep personal commitment between one man and one woman.

8) **Thou shall not steal (Ex. 20:15):** Respect for persons extends to their property. We do not "exploit" people for personal gains.

9) **Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbour (Ex. 20:16):** Do not give false testimony. An individual's reputation is to be guarded with his life and property.

10) **Thou shall not covet (Ex. 20:17):** We are to care for persons not property. God's value system should also be our own.

The Roman Catholic Version

- i) I am the Lord thy God, thou shall have no strange gods before me.
- ii) Thou shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.
- iii) Remember that thou keep the Sabbath day holy. Honour thy father and thy mother. Thou shall not kill.

Thou shall not commit adultery.
 Thou shall not steal.
 Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
 Thou shall not covet thy neighbour's wife.
 Thou shall not covet thy neighbour's goods.

Israel after Moses

There was moral regression in Israel after the death of Moses as highlighted in Joshua (24:14-15) and Judges (2:6-33). The moral decadence affected all aspects of their socio-cultural lives. They did not remember all the things that Yahweh had done for them. The name of the Lord was profaned as altars were built to other gods. This made Yahweh to chastise them from time to time by subjecting them to several attacks from their neighbours. Anyone or nation that forgets God pays dearly also. Sin always has its repercussions. The evidence of non-Godfearing leaders can be seen in our society today.

The Significance of the Christian Decalogue

It stands for a Divine covenant.
 The Race of Israel was made divine.
 God's divine name was revealed.
 It is for moral guidance.
 It is of spiritual significance.
 It grants the nation eternal security.
 It provides divine protection.
 It is a sure universal political domination.

Divine Covenant

Here, Yahweh is directly involved. Because God is divine, the Christian Decalogue has thus been conferred with a divine nature.

Divine Race

Israel was distinguished as a nation the moment they had the covenant with God. Israel also became a chosen people of God.

The Revelation of a Divine Name

While the people of Israel were in captivity in Egypt, they worshipped as many gods, hence the need for the Almighty to reveal His name to his people and eventually to the whole world. The divine name is represented by VHWH or JHVH.

Moral Guide

The Christian Decalogue is a moral compass. It is a code of conduct for God's people.

Spiritual Significance

It serves as a spiritual guide to the people of God. Harrison (1997) puts it this way: "The central theme of the covenant relationship was an unquestioning loyalty and devotion to the God who had ministered His superiority over heathen deities and had delivered His people."

Divine Protection

The Christian Decalogue guaranteed divine protection to the people of God. As long as they abide by the terms of the contract, God continuously delivered them from their enemies.

Political Domination

God is a jealous God and desires to be worshipped exclusively. He does not want his honour and glory to be given or ascribed to another. He had to establish his authority through the Christian Decalogue.

An Assessment

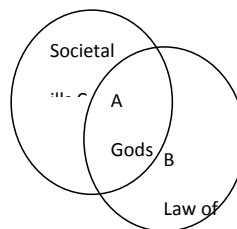
Moses was the divinely appointed agent for the revelation of a legislative system that was to be the basis of Israelites' lives and polity in subsequent ages. God had spectacular love for him. The Bible says that Moses was the meekest man on earth. Harrison states as follows;

"Without the genius of Moses, it is doubtful if the Israelite tribes would have attained such a consciousness of National and religious unity as that which resulted from the experience of wilderness wandering. Some people argued that Moses did not have any prior experience but from God directly. This is the position of some Moron authors," Peakes commentary and others. Harrison rejects this position until the discovery of other ancient legal collections in the Near East, the Mosaic code was thought to be the only representative of its kind. The discovery of the code of Hammurabi at Susa in 1901 made it clear that Israelites legal enactments were anticipated by a number of other codes in ancient Babylonia.

However, no argument has changed the position of Moses' Decalogue. Without it, we may have been practicing some aspects without the enlightenment which has been made more apparent by it. The Christian Decalogue is far superior to the suzerain code. The Christian Decalogue, with its divine cord lives forever.

Most traditions and religions have adopted the Christian Decalogue in part or in its totality. Even religions that existed before the Christian Decalogue. The nation of Israel's salvation plan is unveiled, politically, morally, spiritually, socially and economically in the Christian Decalogue. Though total salvation had not been attained, the scripture had decided on it already. God wants every nation on earth to live free and well with her neighbours through the Christian Decalogue. These moral instructions have implications for everyone, even in these contemporary times. As the law was to discourage sin, corruption and evil vices. The application of the Christian Decalogue to our daily lives is bound to remove us from the grip of societal ills, while supplying us with the blessings attached to obedience of God's laws. It emphasizes rules for living, worshipping God and relating with others. It offers blessings and security from God.

This is simply represented below as follows: Those who follow Gods law and are subsequently blessed A, while those outside A, that is those in B and C have condemned themselves to the ills of society by living according to man's dictates and emotions.



In our contemporary setting, it increases patriotism, it highlights how to maintain a good rapport with the international community. It helps to build trust and good business relations. People who follow the law would not steal public funds or lie to the public. There would be nothing like armed robbery, bribery, rape, sexually transmitted diseases and others. Poverty and unemployment shall be

wiped away in our society as we individually and collectively engage in the practice of the Christian Decalogue. Nigeria would be a far better country to live in if we make the Christian Decalogue our guide.

Conclusion

Any country or nation that observes the Christian Decalogue to the letter have improved qualities of lives. They also enjoy the blessings of God and avert societal ills and disaster. The implication of this is that the ills of society and the predicament faced by society today are attributed to the neglect of the Christian Decalogue as was brought down from mount Sanai. God had earlier promised man that if man desist from evil and worship him, he will heal their land, eliminate sickness and poverty.

It is pertinent on us as a people to do the will of God, obey the Christian Decalogue, by doing what is right in his sight so we can inherit the Kingdom of Heaven and have life fuller. It is hoped that man would learn and turn from evil, so he can save himself from sorrow, hardship and sudden death.

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