

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday November 17, 2019. "The Most Excellent Way: You have heard it said".

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work thru from the message this past Sunday. Whether you were able to attend the worship service or not, this devotional is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. Take as long as you need to dive into this material and feel free to share it.

II Recap.

Two weeks ago, we started a new series, "***The Most Excellent Way***", a look at how to live like a believer in America. Most of us can feel the tension between being a good citizen, and living out the teachings of Jesus. If we're truly honest, we have to admit those two don't always overlap. In fact, if we can push ourselves to 'fearless, brutal introspection', we would have to admit that a lot of what we consider spiritual is actually justification of living in our culture. And we're ALL guilty of this. So the purpose of this series is to realign our hearts, and actions with the teachings of Jesus, and begin to even more, move the direction of our lives towards this "***Most Excellent Way***". So far we've talked about the understanding there is this "*third way*" Jesus lived and calls us to live, that doesn't fall into the binary aggressor or doormat roles the world tries to force us in. This "*third way*" is based on love, inverting power, and caring for others generously and graciously. It is the harder way, but a fuller and more meaningful life. And last week, we said it is respectful and honorable to follow the laws of our country, but that's not where our loyalty or heart is. We are just ambassadors in this place.

III Sunday.

Sunday we were fortunate to have Kristen back to preach, and give us an even bigger more compelling picture of what it means to live "***The Most Excellent Way***". Again Kristen touched on the motivation behind our choices, and what do the scriptures teach about how we're supposed to live. Is the law the foundation? Or is there a higher calling that compels us to live a certain way. So, as always some discussion starting questions.

How do you view, understand, feel about the need, use for laws to control people and society?

What are their purpose?

Are there too many or not enough laws?

Do laws do what we want them to?

Just like last week, there was an abundance of scripture Sunday morning. We'll give you each of them with a little bit of context. There is a lot of scripture, so you can decide which ones you want to focus on for this devotional, based on the brief description of each.

Matthew 22:34-40. Jesus talked about the greatest commandment, which we know ended up as two, and their relationship with the law. All of the law is summed up in these two commands.

Romans 13:1-13. There are rules for and orderly functioning society. But we have to decide when we may be placed in times of moral conflict between laws and our higher calling, which direction we will go. Since this is not where our loyalty lies, what has the priority voice in our daily life?

Luke 13:15-16. Jesus gives us an example, which he did on several other occasions, in which the forced enforcement, (yes we just emphasized it twice), actually did more harm than help.

Acts 5:26-32. The apostles, followers of Jesus, were arrested for not following the law, which seems to be a direct teaching challenging blind obedience to government laws. We have to wrestle with that.

1 Samuel 8:10-18. God warned the people through the prophet Samuel, what life would be like if they want to depend on the government and ruling authorities rather than God, for how they're supposed to live. This passage is interesting because all of the warnings of what life would be like under a government authority seems to be more true than we want to admit.

Isaiah 10:1-4. We have to recognize the shortcomings of government and societal laws simply because they're made by humans. They are an attempt at justice, but can do as much harm as they do good. What we want deep down in our souls is the biblical definition of justice. We get punishment.

Matthew 5:21-22. Jesus was placing himself over The Law, the set of rules given to Moses **by God**. ***Those can be complicated and messy and Jesus was calling people to a higher ethic... "The Most Excellent Way"***.

Here are some of Kristen's final points.

So what do we do? What is the most excellent way, as it pertains to laws?

-Recognize the limitations of man-made laws

-Learn more about issues so we can see their complexity, avoid voting for people or laws that will cause suffering to our fellow man.

Consider the issue from the perspective of people in situations different from ours. What would seem if we were in their position?

-Resist the urge to see people who feel differently about what laws would be best as our enemies - they're probably focusing on different aspects of the issue. Both of us can learn more about the topic.

-Follow the laws that do not conflict with God's law: loving God and loving one another.

-Be engaged—if we see side effects of just laws leading to injustice, unjust laws, unjustly applied laws, we need to do what we can to help. Personal action (Safe Families, foster parenting, volunteering at the warming center, donating or helping collect donations to a good cause, donating to organizations that provide legal help to those with less access to good representation, protesting/demonstrating, contacting representatives)

-Resist the urge to see people as good people versus bad, law-abiding versus criminal, and resist the tendency to lose our empathy for people in the category we don't belong to.

-Remember that no law is going to make people love God, and no law will make people love each other. They have a purpose, but we don't want to focus on laws over people.

These are great principles to help us live as a believer in a world that seems confusing and chaotic.

What are things you could do to move from a law based to a higher calling way of life?