

February 17, 2020

Imagine there's an elephant in the room. It would be hard to miss! The space it occupies, the smell it makes, the broken furniture and floorboards. Imagine ignoring all that just because you don't want to deal with it, or maybe because there doesn't seem to be a solution to the situation.

Does Scripture ever seem to be sending a mixed message between what is God's role in Salvation, and what is our role? Does there ever seem to be a contradiction between the simplicity of the Gospel and the commands 'to do and not do' found throughout the Bible? Enter the elephant in the room. If our only role in salvation is to believe in Jesus and accept His gift of righteousness, then why is it important to keep God's commandments? If our good deeds can't save us, then why do they matter? If I am saved, why do I need to keep the Sabbath, or do I? When I am saved, why is it important that I not cheat on my taxes, that I not covet my neighbor's wife, that I faithfully return tithes and offerings?

No one wants to talk about the elephant in the room. Thankfully, Jesus Himself answered this question. An expert in Jewish law attempted to trap Jesus asking *"Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?"* Jesus replied, *"You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."* Matthew 22:37-39.

It is important to note that these two commandments are not described as a summary of the entire law; rather, the entire law is based on them. Therefore, when God spelled out the ten commandments on Sinai, He was just providing more detail, more specificity, regarding the two great commandments. God was saying, this is Me, this is who I am, and specifically this is how you should relate to me and to one another.

Was God saying: This is what you need to do to be saved? Get to work! You do want to go to Heaven, don't you? No. The "good enough to go to Heaven" ship had already sailed for them as it has for us. We have all sinned and deserve the penalty of death. Furthermore, we continue to mess up and, in spite of our best efforts, our righteousness continues to be as filthy rags. The option to secure our salvation by living perfect lives was never an option at all. At Sinai, God was not providing an impossible task with the giving of the Ten Commandments; **The purpose for keeping the Commandments, for obedience to God and His Word, is relationship**—relationship between us and God, and relationship with our fellow humans.

We were created for relationship—it is what God, our Creator, the sovereign God of the universe wants with us. Our sin separated us from God, but He has taken care of that; He has saved us from our sins by covering us with Jesus' righteousness. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" John 3:16 NIV. This love and His saving grace make the relationship possible and then draw us into the very relationship God wants. This is the good news of the Gospel!

The thing about the elephant in the room is that as soon as you start talking about it, it no longer exists.