

COLLEGE CHAPEL TALK

TOWARD THE AS OF SELF

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Readings: Apocalypse Explained 971.2

Why did the Lord give us the Ten Commandments? Think a moment. Why did the Lord give us those basic laws of moral and religious life that most of us learned as little children and that we just recited again this morning?

There are many reasons: to show us how to be good and how to get to heaven; to tell us what things in life are evil and what we have to stop doing if we don't want to end up in hell; and to show us that the Ten Commandments are *His* laws, and not just the laws of people. (At a child's baptism, the parents are enjoined to teach the child the Ten Commandments, so that he may learn to shun evils as sins.)

All these reasons are true; and there's even some truth in the idea that the Lord gave us the Commandments to keep us from doing a lot of things that most of us like to do, in one way or another. But there's no truth at all in what sometimes seems to be the case: That the Lord gave us the Ten Commandments to keep us from having any fun.

Why *did* the Lord give us the Ten Commandments?

Thinking seriously, which would you prefer—to find happiness for yourself, or to have someone give you what he believes will make you happy? It's obvious that if his idea of happiness didn't agree with yours, you wouldn't be happy with what he gave you. But even if his ideas did go along with yours—even if he could make you truly happy—would that be as satisfying as finding the same happiness for yourself, gaining it by your own efforts? Doesn't the deepest, most lasting sense of satisfaction come with personal achievement?

Or (to put these same questions in what merely sound like another way), suppose you absolutely had to change your ways of life. Would you rather make the necessary changes yourself, or have someone else make the changes in you, perhaps against your will, perhaps simply without your own free cooperation?

The Lord has one purpose only in your creation: To make you truly, eternally happy. That's what heaven is: true, eternal happiness. That's what He wants to give you. But He knows that you'll never be really happy with the life of heaven unless you understand for yourself what it is and unless you then achieve it by your own efforts. Then it will be a happiness that you will feel to be absolutely your own, a thing you will enjoy forever.

And that is the underlying reason that the Lord gave us the Ten Commandments, the basic laws of moral and religious life. We can learn what they mean. Not one of them is beyond our comprehension. And we can (with His help, of course) obey them. Not one of them is beyond our power to obey. Why would the Lord ask us to do something impossible in order to gain what He wants to give us? We can understand them; we can (with His help), obey them. And when we do, we build up in ourselves what is called "the heavenly proprium"—a heavenly life that seems just as truly our own as the life we're leading now.

That's why the Lord gave us the Ten Commandments: So that we can build up in ourselves what the Writings call the "as of self" which is the life of heaven.