

No Etch A Sketch Commandments

Do any of you remember when you first drew pictures with an Etch A Sketch? If you wanted to change your mind, you could simply shake it. Everything would disappear, and you could start all over again. It's one of the most popular toys in history and the Classic is still on sale for \$19.99 at Walmart.

Unfortunately, too often our society writes its moral standards on its own Etch A Sketch. Our cultural sense of right and wrong is based on societal consensus, not on the unchanging Word of God. In abandoning the absolute standards of a holy God, we've become a world in which morality is relative; it's whatever people want it to be.

As Christians, we take a different view. The Lord didn't write His Commandments on an Etch A Sketch. They were carved in stone, indicating their durable and permanent value. The commands of God flow from His character and establish the moral baseline of the universe. No matter how hard it tries, this world can never erase the truth of God's Word or the moral imperatives of His Ten Commandments. They are rock solid, and we can base our moral codes on the tablets of His holiness.

And yet repeatedly we have a bias to do everything we can to treat God's Holy Will and Words like an Etch A Sketch.

Just think of how the leaders of the Jerusalem Temple in the time of Jesus had this Etch A Sketch mentality. Consider the Money Changers. The issue wasn't that there were tables of the Money Changers present in the Temple Precinct, nor is there any indication they were charging an inflated exchange rate. The issue was where they chose to set up their tables in the Temple Area.

They were doing their selling in the temple complex itself, and that's why Jesus says,

“Stop making my father's house a house of trade.”

They set up their tables in what was called the outer court of Herod's Temple. This outer court was for the Gentiles. These non-Jews were called God-fearers, who believed that Yahweh, Israel's God, was the real God. Therefore they would come to the Temple to worship and adore Him. There the moneychangers were taking from the Gentiles the ability to come and pray in the house of the Father. Jesus drives them out and says stop making my father's house, a house of trade. A person can't pray in a marketplace. You can't pray whenever you're surrounded by oxen, and sheep, and goats bleating, and just the noise, and the busyness, and the bustle of a marketplace.

Here is the point I want you to please grasp, it is always our tendency to profane what is to be holy.

Now think with me about this word “profane”. “Pro” is a prefix that means “in front of or before” and fane comes from Latin for “temple”, fanum. Profane literally means:

“in front of the temple”,

like the money changers. The court they were in was literally in front of the Temple, and although they were in a Holy Place, they did not recognise it as such – in other words, they profaned it.

Now let's take this a step further. Jesus says later in this passage:

Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

The Jewish leaders thought he was talking about the building, which had taken 46 years to construct and they hadn't yet completed. Then John's tells us, Jesus wasn't talking about the Temple but his body. What can be more holy than Jesus Christ, who in John's Gospel repeatedly equates himself with Yahweh, who revealed himself to Moses as: "I am who I am". Jesus attributes the same name to himself when he says in John 8:58

"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

The profanity taking place in the Court of the Gentiles paled in comparison to the obscenity of Good Friday, when they would destroy the true Temple, Jesus Christ. Even though they thought the Etch a Sketch of the Cross erased Jesus from the world, it was just the beginning. From the Temple, that is Jesus' body St. Paul would take this same language years later in 1 Corinthians 6, and write:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.
(1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

How do we live so as to glorify God in the temple of our body? It is here that the 10 Commandments written on stone, and not an Etch A Sketch, come into play.

Why does the commandment against idolatry have associated with it the punishment of the children to the third and fourth generation? What happens when we lose sight of God's holiness, not putting Him first? So many other things, which deeply harm us and those closest to us, take God's place. Think of addictions and the driven need for success can have such a devastating consequence on all associated with that person. When we place something or someone before God we erase from our lives the one who is most important, God himself, and others are devalued in turn.

The second commandment is about profaning God's name or to put it positively about sanctifying God's name. When we treat God's name as Holy we will increasingly be able to treat God's person as Holy, the first Commandment and in turn treat God's Day as Holy, the third commandment.

It is with the keeping of the Sabbath Day, or for us the Lord's Day, that we see such a close parallel to those setting up tables in the Court of the Gentiles. Increasingly Sunday is seen just like any other day and we enact commerce as if it were Monday through Saturday. Today's Gospel should invite us to re-assess what kind of commercial transactions we do on Sunday.

We live in a time where everything is secularized and Sunday is just like every other day. The root of the word “secular” is *secula*, meaning “world” or “age”. Secular people conclude that this world and this age are all we’ve got. As Catholics we have a different view of time and see Sunday, the Day of the Resurrection, as a holy day, one that is set apart. It is because of this it is called a Holy Day of Obligation and therefore to wilfully not come to Mass on Sunday is a mortal sin. For you see if we treat the Lord’s Day as if it’s just any other ordinary day, what we are doing is desecrating it, we’re profaning it. And so this commandment is trying to show us that there’s more to time than just this world. There’s an eternity waiting for us, and so God gives us Sunday as a kind of foretaste of the eternal rest that we hopefully will all enter into!

Just as we are to recognize the sanctity of God’s character, God’s name and God’s Day, we are to also see our relationships as sacred.

Why should I honor my father and mother? Well because fatherhood and motherhood is holy. Your father and mother are set apart. They’re the ones who gave each of us life. No one else has ever given you a gift like that. So they merit your respect, they merit your honor, because of the sanctity of fatherhood and motherhood. Same thing about the commandment against murder. Why shouldn’t I kill another human being? Because of the sanctity of human life. This is something that’s set apart. It’s different, from animals, it’s not like the plants. We don’t have the right to take it and treat it as if it’s profane and treat it as if it has no meaning, or it has no value. Is not this what we have to justify for instance when aborting a baby in the womb? We profane that life, saying it has no value.

What about adultery? Same thing. The reason it’s a sin is because of the sanctity of matrimony. When a man and a woman marry one another, they set themselves apart for the other. What adultery does is it desecrates the holiness of marriage. Same thing with theft. It’s about the sanctity of private property. If something belongs to someone else, it’s set apart for that person and I don’t have the right to just take it from them because I want it.

So too with bearing false witness. This is about the sanctity of speech. God has set apart humanity, given us the gift of speech, so that we can speak the truth. There’s a certain holiness to speech. It’s unique to us as human beings and we have to use it for the sake of the truth, and to use it to lie is basically to take this holy gift and desecrate it, to adulterate it, to use it for something God never intended it to be used for.

Finally the last commandment is against coveting and sums up all the other ones, by telling us there’s a sanctity to everything that belongs to someone else. Whether it’s someone’s spouse or someone’s possessions, we are not to let that desire to covet even enter into our hearts.

Although the Commandments were originally written on stone and for so many today they have been erased like an Etch A Sketch drawing, not so for us.

Three of our psalm verses put it like this:

***the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
More to be desired are they than gold,***

*even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.
¹¹ Moreover by them is your servant warned.
in keeping them there is great reward.*

In learning to live the commandments our lives become rightly ordered towards God, our home and our world. When this happens the heart does rejoice because these words are no longer written on stone but on our hearts. When this happens we discover nothing is more beautiful or valuable than these Ten Words and we discover these are no Etch A Sketch commandments but words that endure forever.