

Consider how cultural mores have changed as we think about what was acceptable many years ago and what is acceptable now! Which have been appropriate and helpful, and which do you wish had never happened? There are movies and books which were used in school for many years that have been banned today. There are lifestyles and customs commonly accepted today that our great grandparents would have no way of even comprehending why such behavior would be considered.

Every religion or culture has norms or rules about what is acceptable or not. And what is acceptable to one religion or culture might be offensive in another. Judaism was no different, and some Old Testament laws dealt with what could and couldn't be eaten, who could and couldn't be associated with, and what was acceptable in everyday living. They were not arbitrary but intended to assist in keeping focus on God rather than me.

Because everything had to do with one's relationship with God, everything was considered an act of worship. How one saw the world, their diet, their behavior was all to be understood in terms of how every moment kept God first and gave him the glory and the credit for his creation and loving care. The rabbis had the responsibility for determining what was clean or acceptable, based on the law, and what was OK was called kosher, which meant proper or lawful in the eyes of God. It sought to match the words of the law with daily living and was concerned with a faith-dilled daily walk with God.

Our culture has appropriated the word "kosher" to mean anything proper or acceptable according to our standards. And we now use a new term called politically correct which has the same approval stamp of our culture. So, what is kosher or politically correct? Well, it depends on what law you live by. We begin by remembering God's rules are meant to *reflect* a relationship, not establish one! They are always in response to God rather than efforts to make God happy with us! Much of what we follow and live by is more arbitrary and can change from decade to decade or election to election. For the people of faith, God was always the object of worship -- not the law. But too often that was forgotten in a zealously to do it right! *In the same way, we worship the God which the Bible reveals but not the Bible itself. Sometimes we get that confused.*

That leads to many of our struggles today -- who can take communion? Who can get married? What about cloning? Should assisted suicide be legal? Should abortion be accepted in every circumstance? Should genetic engineering be used to guarantee the sex or hair color of a child? Who should be pastors? What should worship look like? What immigrants should be allowed in the country? And the lists and differences of opinion go on and on ...

*Jesus changed the rules so that the relationship and God might be what was lifted up rather than the rules themselves.* That got him in hot water with those for whom law more important than relationship, who followed the letter of the law but didn't know why and had little love for God or neighbor.

Jesus broke rules and did what was not kosher. He was always judged to be politically incorrect and a threat to the powers that be. His crimes were to heal on the Sabbath, touch lepers, eat with unclean people and outsiders, and he even touched dead bodies. That made the keepers of the law angry because Jesus was not following their rules.

The Law had been given at Sinai, to keep people close to God. They were rules for the family and made sense because everyone in the family had faith in God. The rules didn't create the family but guided how the family lived so their relationship with the God of creation would be celebrated in every facet of living.

The intent was not to obsess with what was kosher, not to worry about every action and whether or not it was on the approved checklist, but to remind faithful people that every breath of living revealed who is the object of our love. Do I love God? Do I love neighbor? Or will selfish living push God and neighbor away? For if my love for God the most important guide in my living, there should be no need for any law. But because God gets forgotten in moments of selfishness God gave the law as a guide.

This is heart of Gospel. God loves us no matter what. However, because he loves, we then are called to live in a new way – to model that love – to reflect that light!

Peter struggled because he was sent to people who had no idea of a covenant or God! They didn't know Moses and had never embraced Ten Commandments. Rather than make them good and faithful Jews, Peter instead was inspired by God to make them good and faithful children of a loving God. By this incredible vision God inspired him to *understand the law was never THE path to God but a means to proclaim that God makes me different!* God is love! If we give value to relationship, we will love.

Some stories are overused, but I love this one and some may have never heard it. After American soldiers landed in Normandy, several brought the body of fallen comrade to a little country church to have the priest bury their friend. The priest gently asked them he had been a baptized Catholic. They said they didn't know. The priest said he could bury him, but not in the church cemetery. So, they dug a grave on the other side of the church cemetery fence and the priest did the burial. They returned the next day with a headstone they had carved out of wood, but the grave was no longer by the fence! They ran to the priest and asked what had happened. The priest replied he thought about what he had done, couldn't sleep and spent the entire night digging up the fence and moving it, so their friend was inside the cemetery. That is the law of love.

As with Peter's vision of food, or the temple curtain torn at crucifixion, the Gospel proclaims that we are no longer subject to an Old Testament covenant or ritual laws for worship, yet God's law same as ever. Jesus explained it was simple: "love God/love neighbor." Any law that comes between me and God or a neighbor is one in which we might be suspicious as to its intent or how it glorifies God and his love.

Remember, it isn't our living that establishes a relationship with God, it is Christ who

brings us into a relationship with God. But in that relationship, we seek to live our love for God and neighbor as daily worship!

Our goal should never be to condemn a world that doesn't know God but proclaim God's love by how we live so that others know God! In John 13 Jesus is recorded as telling his followers, "*I give you a new command, that you love one another, by this everyone will know that you are my disciple.*"

If we are dependent on the world to tell us how to live, we are in trouble already. What is Kosher today? What is correct? What is legal and good and right? It depends on WHOSE you are! It depends on how important God is in your life and what his love means for you! Is the law a fence or is it a love that moves fences?

Our life is to be about what will lift our love to God and reach out with love to neighbor – not because we are forced to but because that is who we are!