

FROM THE PULPIT

Move beyond the Law of Minimum

By Brad Bryant
FOR THE PANTAGRAPH

Human life... We're born as a baby. We grow, learn, give and die, a cycle that began with Adam and will continue until "the end of the age."

But human life is not merely physical. ... You are a spiritual person, created by God in His image, and designed to live with Him eternally. You have an important role in His plan. According to God's timing, your pre-created spirit was joined with a physical body through the miracle of birth. This is the creation of a "soul": the body and spirit united.

Throughout life, your spirit is learning and growing too! God's plan allows your spirit to continue living, even after your body dies. At death, your spirit returns to God, who created you, and is assigned to a temporary learning place: either paradise or hell, depending on the choices you make during life.

God's desire is that you make choices that prepare you to live with Him eternally. Because He loves you, God offers guidelines to help you with everyday choices that affect

you in eternity.

In the Garden of Eden, God gave Adam one simple rule: stay away from the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." This rule was broken, and physical death entered our world. Choices got Adam and Eve kicked out of this perfect place, where they walked and talked with God. Now, there was separation between God and His children ... not God's doing, but the result of human choices.

Adam and Eve could still hear God's voice, but were no longer in His presence. God gave two new commandments to Adam: Love one another and choose me to be your Father. Adam taught his growing family these simple truths, and (like today) some listened and others ignored.

Later, we have Noah's story: "a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God." Noah and his family chose to follow God's teachings of love and worship. But Noah found himself in the midst of a broken and sinful world, because others chose to not follow God's instructions.

Still later, Moses was called into God's presence, and led to

offer another path toward God. After freeing them from Egyptian captivity, and purifying them in the desert, God presented the 10 Commandments.

This list serves as a "starting place" for anyone wanting to move toward God. It is a "minimum expectation" starting place. It is as if God is saying to us: "If you can't keep my spiritual law of love, at least recognize that I Am, and get along together: don't steal, kill, lie..."

Following the Law of Moses is one step to improve relationships with God and others. But God says: grow beyond that "minimum." Centuries after Moses, God took the next step in our "education": He came among us as Jesus - Immanuel: God with us. Jesus' life showed us it is possible for humans to follow God's commandments.

Jesus lived a fully human life, growing through childhood and teen years, and began public ministry around age 30, after his baptism in water and spirit. Jesus "fulfilled" the Law - following, demonstrating and teaching it. Not only did Jesus model "right living" and "choosing not to sin, even when tempt-

ed," but he intentionally invited each of us to move beyond that Mosaic law into God's law of love.

When Jesus was asked to name the greatest commandment, he responded clearly: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself."

This is Jesus' message to you today: God loves you unconditionally, and wants you to find him and show love for everyone. It may be hard, but find ways to grow in love. You may not like what people do or approve of their habits, attitudes, lifestyle. But we are each brothers and sisters in God's family. Our heavenly parent asks us to choose to love, in spite of our differences and difficulties.

May we each recommit to God's love-based path, and be blessed by the peace and hope that comes through a growing relationship with the living Jesus!

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