

Is Jesus' reduction of the commandments of the law to the moral demands of the decalogue (Mk 10:19), or to the twofold commandment of love (Mk 12:28 ff.), liberation from a burden?

Yes—and no. Yes, in the sense that the individual is thereby given back her or his own responsibility before God and is no longer dependent on human authorities who must first teach and explain all the many things that God's will requires. But this is a wholly different sense of "liberation" from that which modern persons take to be involved in being freed from a set of commandments that are burdensome and inconvenient. The demand of love does not require less of a person, it requires more. Therefore, while Jesus' reduction of the law to God's one demand for love is indeed liberation in the sense just explained, it is experienced as such—as liberation—only by a person who understands that one is inwardly liberated when something greater is demanded of one, when what is demanded is *one oneself*. For the average Jew of Jesus' day, however, just as for the average person today, this would not signify liberation but bondage. For her or him, external correctness and blind obedience to authority are much easier—in spite of all the inconvenience they may often bring with them—than radical personal responsibility before God. The natural woman or man's real response to the reduction of the law's demands to the commandment of love is not to breathe a sigh of relief, but to be terrified. And one who does not know this terror neither senses the seriousness of the demand nor understands the meaning of liberation.

Therefore, Jesus' turning to the rejected, to sinners, to tax collectors and prostitutes, by no means expresses a relaxation of the strictness of the demand, but the exact opposite. For those who are rejected are, in truth, not worse than those who are correct and self-confident, but rather better. They better satisfy God's demand—although only, of course, when they "repent," i.e., when they become aware of their nothingness before God. When Jesus juxtaposes the repentant publican to the self-confident Pharisee, or the "prodigal" son to the correct elder son, he makes clear who the real sinner is—namely, one who does not at all see the seriousness, the radicalness, of God's demand, who supposes that, because of her or his correctness and accomplishments, she or he is able to stand in God's presence, and does not

understand that God demands the *entire* person. Just this, however, is what the publican knows who beats his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" (Lk 18:13).

But this is exactly Paul's view as well—namely, that all that one who is correct and self-confident looks upon as gain is really loss (Phil 3:4 ff.), that the basic sin is to want to boast before God, to take pride in one's accomplishments. The only difference is that Paul explicates theoretically, in the form of a "philosophy of history," what Jesus presents without any such theoretical reflection.

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