

The Ancient Law of the Pledge

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"If you lend your companion something, you shall not go into his house to get the pledge. You shall stand outside, and the person to whom you lend shall bring the pledge out to you."

Deuteronomy 24:10-11

Our sermon today is ...

- about honoring and respecting boundaries...

- about learning how to stand outside the "house," the mind, of another person and not enter in...

Right now w/the crisis in Europe, the world is witnessing the flagrant, shocking disregard for the **boundary** of a peaceful nation

- and so we we are praying
 - praying for a *peaceful* resolution
 - praying that this may stop

This is obviously an extreme example, and one that is deeply worrying

But this physical act of aggression illustrates an important point...

When boundaries are crossed

- when people don't stand outside the house but enter in...

...boundaries are violated

- and a **FUNDAMENTAL**, unspoken rule is broken

- **the will of one person is imposed on another**

- so much so, that *one person is compelled to think and believe as the other*

- and their freedom is taken away

RESPECT FOR THE FREEDOM OF OTHERS...

is one of the highest forms of charity

In all relationships, it must be given the highest seat of honor because this is what the Lord does with us...

The Lord respects boundaries

The Lord respects our freedom

The Lord never *compels* anyone to do anything, even that which is good and true (see AC 1947).

- instead, left in perfect freedom every waking moment of our lives

- only what we *freely* choose becomes our own

- this is how we're saved, by freely choosing to shun evils and follow the Lord

- this is what makes us human, gives us our autonomy

An important topic because we all want HARMONY in our lives

- we want harmony, agreement, a "meeting of minds" in all our relationships

- at home

- at work

- with family

- with friends

- neighbors

- in the church
- in our country

We certainly don't wake up in the morning looking for conflict, looking for *disagreement* and yet this is the world we seem to find ourselves in...

- no matter where you turn, the world seems "poised," "positioned," ready to argue a point, *any* point, to win an argument
- to convince the other side it is right

What happened to friendly debate?
Friendly disagreement?

"Oh, I see what you're saying. I look at this way..."

These days, public debate seems to have gone one step further where it is no longer acceptable to agree to disagree.

Now, you must declare who's side you're on...

Why is there so much upset?

Could it be that boundaries are being crossed and we don't even know it?

Could it be that people are feeling their freedom being taken away?

"Boundaries" comes in all shapes and sizes:

- physical ones like property lines/markers, counties, states, etc.
- our own "personal or physical space" - right in someone's face (violate boundary)
- and then there are mental or spiritual boundaries (which is what the Law of the Pledge is all about)
 - these are invisible "boundaries"

- not seen but we know they exist
- because we can feel when they are violated or crossed, when someone trespasses on our space
 - feel pressured to do something
 - or guilts or shames us
 - or bullies us into doing something we don't want to do

We gain tremendous spiritual guidance on this topic by considering the **Ancient Law of the Pledge** recorded in the book of *Deuteronomy* which...

...lays out the "rules of engagement" between two parties, the lender & the borrower

1. *The Israelite lender (the one offering to lend money) wasn't permitted to enter the house of the borrower to claim his pledge (deposit) but was required to wait outside.*
2. *Leave the borrower in freedom (in the safety of their house) to either accept or reject the terms of the loan.*
3. *If the borrower decided to accept the loan, he or she would bring out to the lender a "pledge" which may have been a verbal or written contract, or a valued article as collateral.*

A "pledge" in this Biblical context means a commitment, a duty and responsibility.

It carried a moral obligation.

For example, Israelite law prohibited lenders from charging interest on their loans to the poor and needy.

In fact, the lending of grain or money to the poor and needy was considered ***more a gesture of goodwill than an opportunity for profit!***

Also, a lender couldn't take a widow's garment
 - or a carpenter's tools
 - or a millstone as a pledge (collateral)
 - or anything else that was needed for that person's livelihood or survival.

It becomes obvious that an Israelite lender didn't have much to gain by lending money if money, or profit, was the goal, the objective!

Clearly, this ancient law was not about the money.

This is further confirmed by the fact that every Sabbatical year (every 7th year) all outstanding debts were to be cancelled (see Deut. 24:10-11).

The underlying "spirit" behind this law was one of goodwill...

- and respect for the neighbor.

We're taught that...

Lending = communicating
 Pledge = response

Basic communication - we say or do something and the other responds...

Role's switch:

sometimes we are the "lender" offering a viewpoint or opinion to another person

sometimes we are the one inside the house, deciding whether or not to bring out a "pledge" - engage or not

But good, healthy communication is not that simple, is it?

Kind, useful, helpful communication is a life-long project - it takes a lot of *spiritual* work!

Specifically, it means "***not pressuring or inciting anyone to affirm our truth but listening to the other person's response and taking it as the person experiences it...***" (AC 9213:6).

The command to wait outside to receive the pledge is about respecting the freedom of others to think and decide on their own.

Calmly "stating our case" to a loved one or friend while not compelling them to agree with us can be very hard to do at times...

...especially when we feel passionate about the topic and consider it to be urgent, the truth!

[A word about the Doctrine of Spheres...]

Our "sphere" sets the tone as to whether someone will listen to us or not

One way to think about our "sphere," is to think about the "quality of our presence" - **does it invite or repel?**

Point is, we might think we're standing outside the house, the mind, of a loved one or friend, making our case, "lending" them our opinion, our viewpoint...

But think about it...

How inclined are you to listen to another person's point of view...

- when they raise their voice at you?
- express impatience?
- come accross as manipulative?
- or angry?
- or unkind?

They might have perfectly true and important things to say but we typically...

- don't want to be in the same room

- as to our spirit, we may **"shut down,"**
- **"tune out" because that person**

- **has walked right into our house, our mind, without permission**
- **we no longer feel free...**

But just as the Lord does not use His "almighty force" to compel belief in us, neither should we compel each other (see AC 5854).

Rather, like the ancient Israelite lender, we offer our thoughts and ideas and wait patiently for the recipient to respond.

If our offer is rejected, we come back another time.

If it's accepted and a pledge is brought out, there is joy, not because we finally got our way, but because similar ideas, values and beliefs were exchanged.

When this happens, there is harmony.

The desire for harmony is a desire for heaven's peace, like minds join together for a common purpose, to serve the Lord and our neighbor

Just as the law of the pledge wasn't about making money,

- neither is our daily interaction with others about winning an argument or imposing our will on them...

To stand outside the house to await the pledge is to respect the freedom of another and enjoy the free exchange of ideas...

It's about being willing to wait...

- being willing to save that heated debate, that difference of opinion, for another day

And let us not forget the sacred use of boundaries.

- Boundaries provide safety, order, and structure.
- Boundaries safeguard our peace and security.
- Allow us to live in true freedom.

They speak to a sacred rule - this is my space, the dwelling place between myself and the Lord.

AMEN.

Lessons: Deuteronomy 24:10-13; AC 9213:4,6; AC 5854:2