

By: Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow

Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow is Vice President of the American Baptist Churches of New York State Board of Missions.

### The Law of Love

Hebrews 10 begins: *Since the Law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of [heaven], it can never...make perfect those who approach.*

Now the author is talking about the law as stated in the Torah - the first 5 books of the Hebrew scriptures. It includes the sacrifices that the Hebrew people are to offer at their yearly celebrations, festivals, and remembrances, as well as the 10 commandments and laws governing how to live in community. What the author of Hebrews affirms - and what we have yet to learn - is that *laws* do not change *hearts*, and *nothing* really changes without a change of heart.

We can make all the laws we want - and have made them. And we can try to enforce those laws with the power and might of guns, swords, and bombs; billy clubs, choke holds, and tear gas; courts of law, judges, and jail cells. But using fear and intimidation and even pain to defend the law will not change the hearts of the people - except to harden them further against one another, and against the *enforcers* for whom often times the law does not apply. Upholding the laws in this way, therefore, obstructs the very peace and order that the laws are supposed to instill!



No, the only law that will make change is the law that changes the heart, the law that seeks justice, loves at all cost, and fulfills righteousness as Christ Jesus modeled for us in his daily life. It is the law he followed from his own scriptures. For in the Hebrew Scriptures he heard God say again and again:

- Isaiah 51:7 - Listen to me, you who know righteousness, you people who have my teaching in your hearts...
- Jeremiah 31:33 - The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be

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like the old covenant which they broke...But this is the covenant I will make...I will put my law within them, I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people.

- Jeremiah 32:40 - I will make an everlasting covenant with them...and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, so that they may not turn from me.
- Ezekiel 11:19 - I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from them and give them a heart of flesh.
- Ezekiel 36:26 - A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh...and you shall be my people and I will be your God. (28)
- Psalm 37:30-31 - The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak justice. The law of their God is in their hearts, their steps do not slip.
- Psalm 40:8 - I delight to do your will, O God. Your law is within my heart.

What the author of Hebrews affirms and what we - as The Church - have yet to learn, is that the covenant and the law that God wishes to make with his people is this: "This is the covenant I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts and I will write them on their minds." (Heb. 10:16)

I believe we are in "those days." The Messiah has come, and *he has shown us, O Mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness* - and most importantly - to **walk humbly with our God.** (Micah 6:8)

When we are the Lord's people, then people who encounter us living our daily lives shall *see* the law of our Lord lived out from our very hearts. When we truly live the love that Jesus taught us: "Love one another as I have loved you." (John 13:34) "You have heard it said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But *I say to you*, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous..." (Matt. 5:43-45)

And let us not fear our enemies, let us try to understand them. Let us not fear persecution, but pray for our persecutors and count persecution as the cost of living in Christ Jesus. Let us not fear evil, but conquer evil with good. Jesus says more than anything else "do not fear:" Do not fear for I am with you always, do not fear only believe, do not fear those who can kill the body, do not fear.... We must not fear to follow Jesus' way of love and unity and forgiveness and inclusion.

When we live *that* kind of love - from the very depth of our being - from our hearts so full of the law of God's love that it is the only law we know - then we will have peace. Amen.

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