It has been a while so it is probably time for me have one of my occasional rants concerning the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Not all of Hegel just the part that got Karl Marx worked up like a Melanesian Cargo Cult. Incidentally since I have already made one crack about Karl Marx let me share my favorite assessment of him which is this: Marx read Plato’s Republic and didn’t get the joke. But enough making fun of Marx; let’s get back to making fun of Hegel. The part of Hegel I have the beef with is his seeming belief that the stuff of humanity is getting better. Now in fairness to Hegel it seems like he only thought the Prussians were getting better, but it did lead to this idea that humanity, through nothing more than the timing of our birth are able to be better people than those born in a time prior. And what I mean by getting better is that because of being born at a later time we are morally superior to those who came before us. Similar to the belief that having royal blood or being of Aryan stock somehow makes you genetically a better person, Hegel felt that modern people had modern blood which made them morally better than their ancestors. Now I never sat down with Hegel or with Marx to ask them where they got this idea but I think it comes from the time in which they lived, the industrial revolution. Why I say this is because it was a time of monumental technological advances. And if you went from having to use a horse to using a steam engine or from mailing letters to using a telegraph it could be easy to get caught up in the idea that everything was undergoing a massive shift for the better, including us humans. For after all, it wasn’t Cro-Magnon man who came up with the screw cutting lathe, it was the people you were surrounded by, which led many to believe that there must be something special about those people. In their minds, advances in loom technology also meant advances in the stuff of humanity. But the thing those living in the nineteenth century missed was that while inventions and progress and technology can be taught quite easily to the next generation, advances to our moral and ethical behavior contains no such mechanism. We have the same moral material as a second century goat herder or tenth century blacksmith. We all come with the same programing and changing it takes a lifetime. In other words, just because my father is a good and decent man does not mean that I get to start there, rather I start in the same place as Cro-Magnon man. And so, the words that God speaks to the Children of Israel in Leviticus today are just as relevant to us as they were to the original hearers. God says this, “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the Lord. You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.” A lot of good advice and advice that we have all probably heard before, but we have to keep repeating it because it is not our natural inclination. Our tendency and desire is to do the opposite of what God commands – to render unjust judgement, to slander others and bear a grudge against those we dislike.

And I would say the most frightening thing today might be the fact that many don’t even see the problem with doing any of these things -- it’s okay to slander people who are in a different political party, it’s okay to hate people with whom we disagree. In fact, in many circumstances it is not only okay it is expected. Not to pick on one political party but did you see the backlash that Diane Feinstein received when she had the audacity to thank Linsey Graham and give him a hug after the Amy Comey Barrett hearings? Amongst those in her own party there were calls for her to be thrown out of the senate for this act of little civility and good will. When we forget the commands of God, society inches a little more towards *Lord of the Flies*. Not only must we disagree but we must destroy everyone who is not like us.

I was in an Air Force class this past week and one of the more interesting discussions came on the topic of ethics. I will not go into all the details but much of the discussion centered around how you convince people to follow an ethical system. And this can be difficult when you live in a society steeped in post-modernism and relativism, which believes truth is a private matter. And while there are various strategies about how to teach ethics to people who do not agree on first things, fortunately this does not really apply to us who are sitting in church (well most of you are sitting in your bathrobe watching this on your computer but you get the point). Since we are in church, we have already made a decision. A decision which says we believe there is something greater than ourselves. And because we have made that commitment there is little more justification needed for why we should behave in the ways God instructs us than because God instructs us. Now that being said God does not ask us to do things that are unhelpful or unloving. They may be difficult and unpopular but that is a much different thing. As G.K. Chesterton said, “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.” And the reason for this goes back to my original point. We all enter this life with the same programing. As Hannah Arendt stated, “Every generation, civilization is invaded by barbarians - we call them 'children'.” We all come into this world wanting to do our own will and wanting the world to conform to that will. I don’t want to be over dramatic here but to go back to my opening about Hegel and Marx have you ever notice what happens to a society that believes the idea that humanity is getting better? Here is what happens within a few years you get gulags or re-education camps or whatever it is you want to call them. The Uighurs in China are experiencing this right now, because unfortunately they are not as advanced as the their communist overlords need them to be. Societies that rely on the dangerous fiction that humanity is somehow made of better stuff than it was in times past, by default believe that they can bypass the difficult work that God calls us to today. And sadly, the inevitable results come and a lot of people die because when there can be nothing wrong with their theory there can only be something wrong with 45% of the population.

Unfortunately, there are no easy ways out for doing the work that God calls us to today. Being holy and set apart will be difficult, it might make us unpopular and may often fight against our instincts. But often the most worthwhile things are the most difficult. There are not short cuts to walking in God’s ways and delighting in his will. It is a series of choices to be just in a world that loves injustice, to forgive when we so enjoy hanging onto a grudge, it is loving people who are really not all that loveable. It is incredibly hard and we will all slip up we will all revert to our original programming at times, but that does not mean we should give up or create fantastic theories that we are really better than we appear to be. Rather we need to repent and return to the Lord ask for his forgiveness and his strength so that we may do his will now and forevermore.