

Loving His Commandments:

A Sermon Series
on the
Ten Commandments

Paul Viggiano

*Loving His Commandments: A Sermon Series on
the Ten Commandments*

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This volume was compiled using the notes from a 26-part series of sermons on the Ten Commandments that Pastor Paul delivered to his congregation at Branch of Hope OPC in Torrance, California.

At the end of each of his sermon notes, Pastor Paul has included a section of “Questions for Study and Meditation.”

We hope the reader will find these helpful in their study of and meditation on the Word of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

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Part One: Liberty in God's Law

Psalm 119:127

January 21, 2018

Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold (Psalm 119:127).

A Question for Jesus

People often wonder what they would ask Jesus if given the opportunity. What would *you* ask Him? Would it be about UFOs or why is there suffering in the world? Perhaps you would ask Him why there is so much bickering among Christians or theologians, or why evil people prosper. The thing about questions like those, however, is that they don't really make a difference in your actual life.

One day, a religious lawyer approached Jesus and asked Him a question. The question this man asked makes all the difference in the world when it comes to your actual life. I would say that this particular question would have to rank pretty high on anyone's list. He asked, "**Which is the greatest commandment in the law**" (Matthew 20:36)? In other words, "According to God, what is the most important thing that a person should actually do?"

To this, Jesus gave the well-known answer,

Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40).

The Love Criteria

So the most important thing a person can do is love God and love his neighbor. Let's ask another question: What are the criteria by which we determine whether or not we indeed love God and our neighbor? How do I know if what I have done, or will do, is an act of love?

Adorned with Law

There is a portion of Jesus' quotation that is often neglected. We see it in verse 40.

On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets (Matthew 22:40).

The way a door hangs on its hinges or articles hang on a nail, the law of God is somehow hanging on the command to love God and love our neighbor.

It's as if the love of God is the Christmas tree and the laws of God are the ornaments. Or the love of God is the body and the law is the clothing with which we adorn ourselves. I certainly cannot say I am well-dressed if I am not wearing any clothes, nor can I say that the tree is decorated if there are no ornaments. I therefore should not say that I am loving God or my neighbor without adorning my behavior with the law of God.

As we embark upon our study and devotions regarding the law of God, a good way to look at this is to view these laws as the behaviors which constitute love. The first four commandments are how we are to love God and the next six are how we are to love each other. We are not suggesting that love is accomplished with mere externalism. But we would be foolish to think the external behavior is not some accurate reflection of the internal sentiment and conviction.

Law—Burden or Blessing?

Viewing the law of God as the criterion for love may help diffuse our natural difficulty with the entire subject before us. For many, the word 'law' (or more specifically 'the law of God') evokes a very

negative response. The law of God and its role in the life of the Christian is very misunderstood. The law has become something that many Christians feel burdened by, even though we are told by the Apostle John that the law of God is not burdensome (1 John 5:3).

James also gives us some insight on the way Christians should view the law of God:

But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does (James 1:25).

The law of God liberates and blesses. Let us seek to share the disposition toward the law that David had when he penned,

The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver (Psalm 119:72).

Let it be our prayer that this becomes our attitude toward the law of God!

Liberated From What?

James calls the law of God the “**perfect law of liberty**”. This brings up the question: ‘*From what* does the law liberate us?’ Liberty means freedom. If we have been liberated we have been set free. In what respect does the law accomplish this? Ultimately we must acknowledge that, as we have learned, it frees us from improper views on how to love. Along with this, however, the law of God frees us from a great many things. You can add to the list, but among the things the law of God frees us from are:

Legalism and Manipulation

The law of God frees Christians from *legalism and manipulation*. Christians know they should behave differently from the world. When the Holy Spirit enters a person they will seek to walk in the statutes of God (Ezekiel. 36:27). In other words, we will

seek to love God and our neighbors. Apart from God's law, however, we do not know specifically¹ of what our behavior should consist. This opens up many Christians to guilt-trips and manipulation through legalism² (man-made miss-interpretations of God's law). Paul writes to Timothy:

For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 3:6,7).

This is not a principle merely applied to women but to anyone who wants to obey God while finding himself or herself ignorant of God's law. Instead of being led by God's truth, we're led by various impulses. Some will actually interpret these impulses as the Spirit of God.

Common forms of legalism might involve things like going to the movies or dancing or drinking wine—things that are not necessarily unbiblical. It could go, as with one gentleman I know, to the point where the pastor has you mowing his lawn in the name of the Lord.

I remember, as a young Christian, a conversation I had with a man who was very influential in leading me to the Lord. He told me in no uncertain terms that it was God's will for me to go to a popular youth conference. I didn't go and felt very guilty about it. My impulses told me to go to the conference. My mentor told me to go to the conference. Looking back on it now, and what I know about this particular conference, I'm glad I didn't go.

Knowing the law of God frees Christians from the guilt manipulators and legalists. If you know the law of God you know what is righteous in His sight. If you don't know the law of God you are fodder for any high energy individual who calls himself a

¹ I use the term 'specifically' because some people, at this point, will refer to the law of God written upon our hearts (Romans 2:15). But we must keep in mind that the law of God written upon our hearts will in no way be inconsistent with His written law. And since we have a sin nature, it is only the written law that we can know to be the flawless word of God.

² The term 'legalism' may not be completely accurate. In its classic sense, legalism is a teaching that involves salvation by works. In this sense I am using it (as is common these days) as a sort of man-made code of ethics apart from, but perhaps similar to, the teachings of the Scriptures.

Christian, especially a Christian leader, who wants something from you. Or even a well-meaning friend who might give poor or ungodly counsel. The Westminster Confession of Faith says it nicely in XX, 2:

God alone is Lord of the conscience, (James 4:12, Rom. 14:4) and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in any thing, contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship. (Acts 4:19, Acts 5:29, 1 Cor. 7:23, Matt. 23:8–10, 2 Cor. 1:24, Matt. 15:9) So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: (Col. 2:20, 22–23, Gal. 1:10, Gal. 2:4–5, Gal. 5:1) and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also. (Rom. 10:17, Rom. 14:23, Isa. 8:20, Acts 17:11, John 4:22, Hos. 5:11, Rev. 13:12, 16–17, Jer. 8:9)

Consequences

Knowing and seeking to keep God's law frees us from consequences. One of the great misunderstandings of grace is that there are no consequences for the violation of God's law. Fortunately, when Christians stand before God on judgment day we will not be judged according to our works³ because of Christ's atoning work on the cross. But this does *not* mean that in this life there are no consequences for sin⁴.

There *are* consequences for sin and we all know it. No genuine Christian thinks that he can lie, cheat and steal without it somehow affecting his life. We know that doing these things will result in terrible damage in our lives. Conversely, if we obey the law of God it will result in blessings. Remember again what James writes:

³ Our works will be judged, but we won't be (1 Corinthians 3:14).

⁴ 'Sin' is defined by John as disobeying God's law (1 John. 3:4). Some suggest that sin is merely unbelief. This is incorrect. Unbelief is sin, but sin is not unbelief. We know, for example, that God is love, but love is certainly not God.

But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does (James 1:25).

The WCF, XIX, 6 teaches:

It (the law) is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin: (James 2:11, Ps. 119:101, 104, 128) and the threatenings of it serve to shew what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law. (Ezra 9:13–14, Ps. 89:30–34) The promises of it, in like manner, shew them God’s approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof: (Lev. 26:1–14, 2 Cor. 6:16, Eph. 6:2–3, Ps. 37:11, Matt. 5:5, Ps. 19:11) although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works. (Gal. 2:16, Luke 17:10) So as, a man’s doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law; and not under grace. (Rom. 6:12, 14, 1 Pet. 3:8–12, Ps. 34:12–16, Heb. 12:28–29)

Knowing and seeking to obey the law of God liberates us from the reality that our sin will find us out (Numbers 32:23). The idea that there are no consequences for sin is a popular, yet tragic, misperception for today’s Christian who doesn’t completely understand the nature of God’s grace. David had his sins washed away, but there were still some very real consequences for his adulterous and murderess affair with Bathsheba. Read of the judgment on David from 2 Samuel.

Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his

wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon.

Then he lists the consequences:

Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ “Thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. ‘For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.’ So David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. “However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die.” Then Nathan departed to his house (2 Samuel 12:9-15).

Although we cannot assume that God always works exactly the way He did with David⁵, we do see here an example of God judging⁶ a man under grace⁷ who had violated His law.

Bondage

Hear, O earth! Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people—The fruit of their thoughts, because they have not heeded My words, nor My law, but rejected it (Jeremiah 6:19).

⁵ For example, Job went through horrible trials and yet was considered blameless and upright, fearing God and shunning evil (Job 1:1).

⁶ Not eternal judgment.

⁷ Some think that David was under law and not grace. This comes from a misunderstanding of the old covenant, which was a covenant of grace, not works. Read Psalm 51 and see if you don't come to the conclusion that David was a man under grace.

The law of God liberates from bondage. The United States is at a very interesting place in history. We can actually see what happens to a people who at one time had respect for God's law but no longer do. The calamity that we see in our nation is a calamity that God promises to those who reject His law. At times the offenses and the judgments are the same thing.

Within the borders of the United States we are witnessing a blatant lack of respect for human life: whether it be abortion, euthanasia, gang violence, children killing parents, parents killing children, etc. Sexual promiscuity is ruining households and creating diseases for which there is no cure. We have a national debt in the trillions and the church of Christ, instead of being viewed as light, salt and a place of beauty, wisdom and substance, has become an object of ridicule. All of these sins and judgments are warned of in Scripture.

A cursory reading of Deuteronomy 28 reveals what happens to a people who reject the law of God. Although we haven't reached that level of calamity, the fire is clearly at our feet. The prophets in the Old Testament would be crying for God's people to repent. Repenting involves both trusting in Christ and obeying His law. Repenting involves loving God and loving our neighbor.

Pride

What shall we say then? Is the law sin?

Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet (Romans 7:7).

The law liberates us from pride, or an undue love of self. It was the law of God that humbled Paul and made him realize that he was a sinner. At one point Paul thought he was a law-keeper (Philippians 3:6). A truthful study of God's law will relieve any honest person of that sort of self-delusion. We are all clearly law-breakers.

If we seek to remove the law of God from the equation of Christian living we will not so acutely perceive our need for Christ. Seeking to obey God's law keeps us desperate for Christ. If we lessen or water down God's law we can become self-confident.

The Westminster Larger Catechism #95:

Question: Of what use is the moral law to all men?

Answer: The moral law is of use to all men, to inform them of the holy nature and the will of God, (Lev. 11:44–45, Lev. 20:7–8, Rom. 7:12) and of their duty, binding them to walk accordingly; (Micah 6:8, James 2:10–11) to convince them of their disability to keep it, and of the sinful pollution of their nature, hearts, and lives: (Ps. 19:11–12, Rom. 3:20, Rom. 7:7) to humble them in the sense of their sin and misery, (Rom. 3:9,23) and thereby help them to a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, (Gal. 3:21–22) and of the perfection of his obedience.

When we dispose of the law, our need for Christ will not appear as desperate as it truly is. The law must be ever before us and we must continually seek to walk in it; in doing so we will maintain a keener perception of our need for Christ.

The law must also be brought before the unbeliever (as with Paul) that they might see their need for a Savior. In this respect the law works in conjunction with the gospel to bring salvation (or liberation from damnation). As the Psalmist writes,

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul (Psalm 19:7).

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What is the greatest thing people can do? How do we know specifically?
2. How do you feel when you think of God's law? How does the Bible describe God's law?
3. How does the law of God liberate us from guilt manipulation and legalism?
4. Are there consequences for disobeying the law of God? Explain.
5. Discuss the law's relationship with our own pride.

Part Two: The Commands of Christ - No Other Standard

James 1:25

May 10, 2009

Preface: No Other Standard

The late apologist and theologian Dr. Greg Bahnsen, in one of his many appearances on the radio show, *Religion on the Line*, was confronted with a bitterly caustic caller. The man was blatantly anti-Christian and accused Dr. Bahnsen of being an intellectual Jimmy Swaggart—something he clearly meant to be an insult. His attack on the Christian faith was based upon a hideous picture he had seen at his job, in a court-house evidence exhibit room, involving an abused baby. He asked Dr. Bahnsen how he could worship a God that would allow such a vile thing to take place.

Dr. Bahnsen took an interesting approach in his answer. He asked the caller how he came to the conclusion that the picture he just described was vile. This question seemed easy enough, but the caller had a difficult time coming up with an answer. After all, it should be obvious to anyone. Dr. Bahnsen also asked how he came to the conclusion that a God who would allow such things shouldn't be worshipped. Again, the answers weren't readily forthcoming. The caller finally gave the answer that he simply thought it was wrong. Dr. Bahnsen then asked, "So you set the standard?" The caller then took a deep breath and answered, "Yes, I guess I do."

Dr. Bahnsen's response was stupefying! "Let me tell you what happens in a world when people think they can set the standard for what is right and wrong," explained Dr. Bahnsen. "You have just described a pretty disgusting picture to me. That disgusting act was done by a person who thought he could set the standard for what is

right and wrong. And the thing you must realize is that your criteria and his criteria for setting standards are the same...yourselves.”⁸

At the conclusion of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus gives the Great Commission. Christians are to bring the good news of the gospel to all the nations that men might believe and be baptized. But the grace of Christ’s gospel is always accompanied by the grace and wisdom of Christ’s law. Jesus would not leave His followers in the ethical vacuum of this caller. We are certainly saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. But Jesus also rescues us from moral and ethical ambiguity with the instructions **“teaching them (disciples) to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20—parenthesis mine).**

We previously discussed how the commands of Jesus, as the eternal Son of God, began at the beginning of history. It’s a mistake to restrict our study of God’s law to the New Testament. Certainly many modes have changed; for example, we no longer kill lambs. But *the heart of that law* (even in the ceremonies) still remains. There is still the need for the shedding of blood for the forgiveness of sins.

The unbelieving world never has had any objective basis for morality. This is repeatedly unearthed in our current culture by the absurd arguments that seek to rationalize abortion, homosexual marriage, pornography, etc. And though we will eventually address these political issues as they surface in our discussion of the Ten Commandments, the ungodly nature of our government is not my initial concern here.

My initial concern, at least as it relates to this morning’s message, is with Christians and the methods that have become popular in terms of determining how we ought to think and determine our values. Certainly if the church has no objective⁹ standard for ethics, the culture which the church is to influence has no hope at all. So our first concern is the church. I would, therefore, like to turn our thoughts toward a phrase which, in my opinion, has become one of the greatest enemies of Christian ethics and the peace and harmony

⁸ This is a rough interpretation from Dr. Bahnsen’s appearance on the *Religion on the Line—Does God Punish & Reward in This Life?* (Covenant Community Tape Ministry, 434 Greenwood Ave. Nash, TX 75560). #00928.

⁹ The difference between objective and subjective is the difference between fact and opinion. That two plus two equals four is a fact—chocolate is better than vanilla is opinion. We live in a culture that approaches ethics the way they approach ice cream.

which naturally rests, at some level, within a people who know right from wrong. The phrase is “led by the Spirit.”

I. Led by the Spirit

With all charity, I am not suggesting that sincere Christians who use the phrase “led by the Spirit” are knowingly arguing against God being the ultimate source of human ethics. I think there would be uniformed agreement among all Christians that the almighty, all-wise, ever-present God is, and should be, to be the giver of good standards!

Yet, as we examine the role of God’s law (i.e. what is right and wrong—moral and immoral) in the life of a Christian, we see a very subtle method of determining morality creeping into the church and supplanting God’s law. This method is very similar to the method of the aforementioned caller. Many who name the name of Christ dismiss God’s law as the standard for love and righteousness, and replace it with the notion of *being led by the Spirit* (Romans 8:14, Galatians 5:18).

I would like to convey this gently but also very forthrightly. Those who use this method are in danger, like the caller, of setting their own standards. The unbelieving world has no fear of setting their own standards, but the idea should be appalling to Christians.

Proverbs teaches, **“There is a way *that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death*” (Proverbs 14:12)**. Solomon doesn’t write that there is a way which seems “wrong” to a man but what seems “right” that is the way of death. Keep in mind that just because you think, feel, or are convinced something is right—even as a Christian—that doesn’t make it right.

Universal and Transcendent

Of all people on earth, it is the Christian who should recognize that there are objective moral standards. These moral standards are universal and transcendent. In other words they apply to everyone and are above and independent of anyone. If I replace the law of God in the name of being led by the Spirit, the standards becomes neither universal (they only apply to me) nor transcendent (they originate with me).

Someone might argue that the law didn't originate with them, but rather that God granted this information to them. If this is the case, they are putting themselves in the place of a prophetic law-giver. And in the same way all of mankind was obliged to respect and obey the law given to Moses, we are all obliged to respect and obey the law given to those who are led by the Spirit. You can imagine the can of worms this opens. All you need are two Spirit-led law-givers who disagree before this whole system falls apart!

The Sins of Others

Furthermore, people who determine right and wrong through the unmediated (without the benefit of the written law) leading of the Spirit have no basis for determining the sins of others¹⁰. I know of a professing Christian woman who believed that God, by His Spirit, led her out of her marriage (without sufficient biblical warrant) into the arms of another man. She praised God for this. We might say that's wrong. But how do we *know* it's wrong? By the leading of the Spirit in us? If this is the case then we merely have dueling spirits and we're at an impasse. Rather, we know it's wrong because *the law of God declares it to be wrong*. What she did was not an act of love for her husband or for God.

By now we must begin to realize where this method leads. It's all hypothetical when we discuss the actions of an unnamed woman, but what if you were the husband or wife? What if another Christian were to lie to you or gossip about you? To what standard could they possibly be held? The 'led by the Spirit' method easily and almost inevitably leads to lawlessness.

In all of this I don't wish to sound harsh or critical. All I am trying to show is that if we genuinely desire to love God and love others we must have a standard that extends beyond our own impulses. We ultimately have only two options: our own law or God's law.

¹⁰ The value of determining the sins of others comes into play when we, as loving brothers or sisters, seek to correct (Galatians 6:1).

What does ‘Led by the Spirit’ Mean?

A fair and necessary question should be asked—what does it mean when the Bible speaks of being led by the Spirit? What do we make of Romans 8:14 and Galatians 5:18? Briefly, a study of Romans 8 reveals that Paul is pitting walking in the flesh (*sarkos*) against walking in the Spirit. Walking in the flesh means doing what you feel like doing, regardless of what’s right. Conversely, walking in the Spirit means doing what God wants you to do, regardless of how you feel. Walking in the Spirit does not mean rejecting the law of God. Paul goes so far as to describe the carnal mind as one that is not subject to the law of God (Romans 8:7).

In short, being led by the Spirit means, by God’s grace, you will, and to a certain extent can, walk in righteousness and put to death the deeds of the body (Romans 8:13). And as discussed earlier, the only objective standard for righteousness is the law of God. Paul teaches in verse 14 that those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God. In other words, seeking to walk in the law of God is how I can begin to have assurance of my own salvation. As John writes,

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments (1 John 2:3).

Similarly, in Galatians 5 Paul is pitting walking in the flesh against walking in the Spirit. What is interesting here is that Paul describes what walking in the flesh actually is. Paul, right after telling them they’re not under the law, gives them a list of laws they are to keep.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:18-21)

We'll discuss being under the law in a moment. But again, we must emphasize that being led by the Spirit does not mean we are allowed to somehow conceptualize (out of our own minds or hearts) what is right and wrong. What it does mean is that, by God's grace and power, we will seek to walk in what God has revealed to be right.

It's also worth noting that, at least in the above passage, Paul is not telling Christians to be led by the Spirit or how to be led by the Spirit. He merely informs them that if they "are led" (*agesthe*—passive, indicative) they are not under the law. He then gives a list of laws that give evidence of the spiritual versus carnal man. This is not to be understood as some secret intuitive pursuit.

Two words of caution

Two words of caution: First, this does not mean that those who profess to walk in the Spirit versus the law are not saved. For it seems very clear that people who utilize the 'led by the Spirit' method, will almost all try to walk in God's law whether they admit it or not. Second, if you have been presented a brand of Christianity which suggests that the effort to walk in God's law is of no consequence, and you take it seriously, you're soul is in great peril. Again, read the Apostle John:

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments (1 John 2:3).

If you're not seeking to walk in His commandments, you don't know Him. These are very sobering words. It's important to note here that John is not expecting his readers to keep the law perfectly. This is obvious when we read verse one of the same chapter:

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1).

There is an expectation, regardless of how feeble the effort, that a true believer will begin to seek to walk in God's law. Now another

question must be asked, ‘If we seek to walk in God’s law, or encourage others to walk in God’s law, are we seeking to put ourselves or others under God’s law (by this, I mean in the negative sense which Paul writes against)?’ This is the common accusation against those who freely use God’s law as a system of ethics.

II. Under the Law

Let’s discuss what it means to be under the law. I believe it was Martyn Lloyd Jones who said something to this effect: “If a preacher is not, once in a while, accused of being a legalist¹¹ he must not be preaching the law. And if he is not, once in a while, accused of being anti-nomial (anti-law) he must not be preaching the gospel.”

In other words, the law should be preached with such great obligation to keep it that the listener might (mistakenly) begin to think he needs to keep the law to be saved. We see examples like this in James and in the parable of the unmerciful servant, as well as many other places including the Lord’s Prayer. Yet at the same time the gospel can easily be preached in such a way as to make the listener (mistakenly) think that obedience to the law is totally unnecessary at all in any respect. We see this through most of Romans.

Am I a Legalist?

So I must ask myself if I am a legalist. As Christians, I don’t think we should shrink back from using the word ‘law’. It’s used over two hundred times in the New Testament and almost always in a positive sense. Yet I must say, that even though I believe we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, my continual usage of the word ‘law’ has caused many to accuse me of seeking to put people back under the law. If I am doing that, I most certainly need to repent. But before I can determine whether I am seeking to put people under the law, I must find out what that means.

Under the Law?

Am I to understand that if I, as a Christian pastor, teach a brand of Christianity which suggests that we ought not follow other gods,

¹¹ A legalist is one who believes you’re saved by your own law-keeping.

make graven images, use God's name in vain, neglect the Sabbath, dishonor our parents, murder, commit adultery, steal, lie or covet, that I am trying to put people back under the law? Does merely trying to obey what God commands mean you're 'under the law'? Let's briefly examine the 'not under law' passage in Romans 6:12-16.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness (Romans 6:12-16)?

Are we to understand Paul's words here to mean that if Christians try to obey the law of God, that they are putting themselves under the law? How does that jibe with the main point of Paul in this passage, which is to be obedient? Verse 16 seems to indicate that obedience will evidence who your master actually is. Similar to the words of Jesus,

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me (John 14:21).

Obedient to What?

It would seem a bit inconsistent of Paul to tell us we're not under the law, while in the same paragraph give us all sorts of admonitions to be obedient. Obedient to what? Our own hearts? A new law? Are we to look to Paul for our law? Are we to look to the New Testament (which wasn't even written yet in its entirety) for our law? But the law was given through Moses, grace and truth through Jesus. Why

would we go to Jesus for law when it was already here? Jesus didn't come to bring the law.

Under the Terms of a Covenant

So what does it mean to be under law? A study of Romans and Galatians (as well as other epistles) reveals to us what was taking place. In short, Judaizers (Jewish influences in the church—some perhaps Christian Jews) were persuading Christians that they had to fulfill some of the old covenant requirements (mainly circumcision) in order to be actually justified before God. But their understanding of the role of the old covenant requirements had become perverted, since even Old Testament saints were not saved by works but by faith (Hebrews 11).

In a nutshell, being under law means being under the terms of a covenant which states, 'if you violate the law, you will die (or are eternally damned).' It was the covenant given to Adam. It is the covenant that all of mankind is under until they trust in Christ. Being 'under the law' does not mean you're doing your best to obey God unless you're doing your best in order to save your own soul. A child who is working very hard to win their parent's love is under law. A child who is working very hard because their parents love them is under grace.

III. Written on our Hearts

What about the law written on our hearts (Romans 2:15; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16)? First we must realize that the idea of having the law of God in one's heart is not merely a new covenant concept.

**“The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom,
and his tongue talks of justice. The law of his God is
in his heart; none of his steps shall slide” (Psalm
37:30, 31)**

Mind and Heart

The author of Hebrews writes,

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Hebrews 8:10).

Firstly, there is nothing to suggest here that God uses anything other than the preached or written word to put His law in our minds. But what about writing it on our hearts? What is the difference between God putting it in our minds and writing it on our hearts? It is as simple as this. We can preach the law all day long. We can put it on our doorposts and on our gates. But all our efforts will be of no avail unless God writes it on the hearts of men. I believe the heart is distinguished from the mind here in terms of affection and will.

It may very well be that God’s law is purely and accurately conveyed to the hearts of all men through what theologians call *general revelation* (what God reveals to everyone). But even if that is the case, we must also recognize that the human **“heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9)**. The man at the other end of the phone line may be speaking very true words. But if the phone is defective, my ability to properly understand is compromised.

One last thought. Even if we were to govern our lives by the law of God written on our hearts. We certainly couldn’t think that that law would be inconsistent with the law written in His word. If we truly wish to enjoy the law of liberty, we must trust the word of God, even over our own hearts.

IV. Freedom

James calls the law the law of liberty or freedom. Our nation was built on the promotion of freedom. Patrick Henry said, “Give me liberty or give me death.” President Woodrow Wilson, a Scotch Presbyterian, in his speech entitled ‘The New Freedom’ stated,

“I have long had an image in my mind of what constitutes liberty. Suppose that I were building a great piece of powerful machinery, and suppose that I should so awkwardly and unskillfully

assemble the parts of it that every time one part tried to move it would be interfered with by the others, and the whole thing would buckle up and be checked. Liberty for the several parts would consist in the best possible assembling and adjustment of them all, would it not? If you want the great piston of the engine to run with absolute freedom, give it absolutely perfect alignment and adjustment with the other parts of the machine, so that it is free, not because it is let alone or isolated, but because it has been associated most skillfully and carefully with the other parts of the great structure.

What is liberty? You say of the locomotive that it runs free. What do you mean? You mean that its parts are so assembled and adjusted that friction is reduced to a minimum, and that it has perfect adjustment. We say of a boat skimming the water with light foot, "How free she runs," when we meant, how perfectly she is adjusted to the force of the wind, how perfectly she obeys the great breath out of the heavens that fills her sails. Throw her head up into the wind and see how she will halt and stagger, how every sheet will shiver and her whole frame be shaken, how instantly she is "in irons," in the expressive phrase of the sea. She is free only when you have let her fall off again and have recovered once more her nice adjustment to the forces she must obey and cannot defy."¹²

Human liberty consists in nothing less than the skillful adjustment of humanity to the perfect law of God. The more we are perfectly aligned with the law of God the more our freedom. When we obey the breath out of heaven our sails are full. When we throw our heads back and stiffen our necks to the law of God, we too shall halt and stagger until we repent to the force that we must obey and cannot defy.

¹² Essie Chamberlain, *Essays, Old and New* (Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, Chicago, 1926), pp. 112,113.

Alive in Christ

And yet, on this side of heaven, we continually find ourselves at odds with the breath out of heaven. We simply fail to yield to the laws of perfect alignment, as if hell is attached to our feet and we run amuck at best. But in our knowing this, the law has achieved one of its goals. It has reminded our flesh that it (that is, the law) needs to be nailed to the cross. And we are alive, and only alive in Him, having forgiven all our trespasses and having defeated the enemy of our souls.

So if I teach this law in such a way as to think you can ignore it, I have become least in the kingdom of heaven. But even more treacherously, if I teach this law in such a way as to think you can keep it, I have consigned your soul to hopelessness.

Know the law, *embrace* the law and *seek to keep* the law with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. This, above all things will cast you into the outstretched arms of the only true law-keeper, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Discuss Dr. Bahnsen's response to the caller. Is it possible for there to be absolute standards apart from God? Why or why not?
2. Can you imagine any method of obtaining law or counsel on how to live from another source other than from God?
3. Romans 8:14 and Galatians 5:18 refer to being led by the Spirit. Can you see a connection between a misunderstood notion of being led by the Spirit and the method of the caller?
4. What are some difficulties with the idea of dismissing the law and replacing it with being led by the Spirit?
5. What does it mean to be led by the Spirit?
6. Discuss the two 'cautions' given regarding this subject.
7. What's a legalist? What does it mean to be anti-nomial?
8. Discuss Martyn Lloyd Jones' comment.
9. Is seeking to obey the law the same as being under the law? Discuss your answer.
10. Is the law written on our hearts strictly a new covenant concept?
11. What is the difference between the law put in our minds versus written on our hearts?
12. What are some difficulties with the idea of replacing the written law of God in the Bible with the law written on our hearts?

13. Discuss President Wilson's speech on freedom. How could this relate to the law of God?

14. When we fail at keeping the law, how has the law achieved one of its goals?

15. In what respect must the law be nailed to the cross?

16. Should we ignore the law? Why?

17. Should we think we have kept the law? Why?

Part 3: The First Commandment

Exodus 20:1-3

February 4, 2018

And God spoke all these words, saying: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:1-3).

Review

Many years ago, a friend of mine who was not a church-going man nor an openly professing Christian, told me about a date he’d had. He said, “Things were going pretty well, and she was really nice, but then she said she was an atheist. It freaked me out! How could anyone be an atheist?” In the mid eighteen-hundreds, the great systematic theologian Charles Hodge wrote:

It is the secret conviction of every man that his duty to God is his highest duty, as is evinced by the fact that the charge of atheism is one from which the human soul instinctively recoils.¹³

We live in a culture where the *new atheism* aggressively boasts of their dismissal of God. Atheism is worn like a mantle of intellect and integrity. Intellect in that they’re not simple enough to believe in God and integrity in that they will not be bullied into belief through religious guilt manipulators. With the recent atheistic best-sellers, people are becoming much more comfortable with the notion of atheism. It is still, nonetheless, a notion that makes even the natural mind cringe. And there are some very good reasons for this.

¹³ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 (Eerdmans, reprint 1989), p. 280.

One reason people recoil at atheism is because it is a sin. People react to professions of atheism the same way they might respond to professions of lying or stealing. Being a committed atheist is not morally different than being a committed thief. The first commandment forbids atheism either theoretically or practically. What I mean by that is that it is a sin to be or live as an atheist. Unbelief is not a morally neutral position.

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God (Hebrews 3:12).

How can something like unbelief be sinful? In the first chapter of Romans, Paul writes that **“what may be known of God is manifest in them (all men), for God has shown it to them” (Romans 1:19)**. Paul goes on to explain that man’s knowledge of God is **“clearly seen...so that they (all men) are without excuse” (Romans 1:20)**.

The knowledge that God exists is something that God has shown to all men and manifests in all men. The rejection of God (i.e. the violation of the first commandment) is sinful because, as stated above, men suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

The Apostle tells us that they are, therefore, without excuse. Men are as guilty in their rejection of God as they are in the violation of any other commandment (e.g. murder) because they inherently know that God exists and that He should be worshipped, but they suppress that truth in unrighteousness.

No Other Gods

Of course, the commandment reads, **“You shall have no other gods before me”** rather than you shall **“You shall not be an atheist”**. The reason for this, simply stated, is that it is impossible to avoid having a god. One might say they don’t believe in God as the identifiable deity who created the heavens and the earth. Or a person may very well grant that there is some type of god (even some form of the Christian God) but leave it so ambiguously identified that their god can and will be transformed at a moment’s notice to suit their preference in the occasion.

In the 32nd chapter of Exodus, when the Israelites who had been delivered from slavery grew impatient due to Moses' delay, they sought to redefine God. He would still be the God who brought them from Egypt (Exodus 32:4), but this god would be a gold bull-calf: A strong god but one who would do the bidding of his master, his master being the people who built him.

False gods, whether pagan or some dim replica of the true God or perversion of that which came from the true God, like the bronze serpent that was designed to heal but then became an object of worship (Numbers 21:9; 2 Kings 18:4), or some person or idea, are legion. A person's god is the reason they get up in the morning. A person's god will determine the next thing they say, do or think. And when a person feels bad, it is because they have disappointed their god. And human despair is a consequence of serving a god who is neither wise nor good nor gracious.

Heaven help us if we find that our god is not infinite, glorious, blessed, perfect, all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty, all-knowing, all-wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.

For if our god is anything less than God, he/it will make foolish and dark demands, capitalizing on our flesh and folly, lead us to destruction and offer no redemption or way out. It is not merely common that the natural man will bow before his false gods, it is inevitable. The Scriptures are replete with accounts of people who follow false gods, kings, money, power, etc.

In Genesis 31:19 it is almost casually conveyed that Rachel had stolen one of "**her father's household gods.**" John Calvin utilized this passage as one proof text for the nature of the sinful mind, when he wrote:

When he relates that Rachel stole her father's images, he speaks of the use of idols as a common vice. Hence we may infer, that the human mind is, so to speak, a perpetual forge of idols.¹⁴

¹⁴ Calvin, J. (1997). Institutes of the Christian religion. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

In the 16th century Calvin wrote words that apply no less today, saying:

The human mind, stuffed as it is with presumptuous rashness, dares to imagine a god suited to its own capacity; as it labours under dullness, nay, is sunk in the grossest ignorance, it substitutes vanity and an empty phantom in the place of God.¹⁵

It is an obvious violation of the first commandment when we place our trust, or deposit the primary seats of our affections, toward any entity, thought or ideology other than the true God. I won't spend too much time pointing out the obvious infractions of this commandment in an affluent, industrialized and materialistic culture. But let's beware of both the obvious, and not so obvious, ways we all might find ourselves stumbling when it comes to the first commandment.

There are some obvious false gods. It is easy to have the primary seat of our affections be drawn to blatantly sinful and unhealthy things, such as drugs, alcohol, illicit sex, gambling, violence, self-gratification, money, pride, etc. Many of these things are covered in the remaining commandments, so I won't go into detail here. Suffice it to say, as John writes,

For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world (1 John 2:16).

Not So Obvious False Gods

But there is another danger. In a very subtle way the primary seat of our convictions and affections can be drawn to good things, such as our families, our health, political agendas, industriousness, etc. These may be good things, but they are not designed to be God. If we try to make them our God we will likely ruin them and ourselves.

¹⁵ Calvin, J. (1997). Institutes of the Christian religion. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

When I do weddings, I tell the husband (and the wife) that there is nothing on this earth that God has given him that is to be more important than his wife. She is number one. But that is a far cry from allowing her to be God. It is precisely because he is answerable to God that he can love his wife properly. When God is acknowledged as God, God is the standard by which love is measured. If another person is God, the standard for love is measured by the other person. Inevitably, that will be a lower standard.

I saw a special on tigers on TV. The commentator lamented how they went from being revered as gods to almost being extinct. It was an interesting dilemma. If your god is a tiger, who kills whenever he is so inclined, you too (seeking to imitate you god) will kill whenever you're so inclined. But if you have a God who says you shouldn't kill whimsically, and that you ought to care for all creation, then the tigers have a chance.

In an exhortation to the Thessalonian church, Paul writes:

FINALLY then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you received from us *instruction* as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more” (1 Thessalonians 4:1 NASB).

Assuming we are not atheists, and assuming we are making every effort to avoid having material, temporal, or other created things, seize the role of God in our lives, what steps should we take, in order to excel in our obedience to the first commandment?

Knowing God

First, we must know *who* this God is to Whom we are to give preeminence. In order for us to love God and keep this commandment we must not assign to others that which is rightly assigned to Him. We must know His attributes. We must realize that He is the Triune, all-knowing, all-powerful and ever-present Creator.

To think that there are things out of the scope of God, that are beyond God's decrees and providence, is to grant that power to someone or something else and this therefore violates the commandment. We must know and acknowledge that He is the

Creator, Preserver and Governor of all things. The Westminster Confession presents it nicely:

God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: (Eph. 1:11, Rom. 11:33, Heb. 6:17, Rom. 9:15,18).¹⁶

To assign ultimate governing power to men or to Satan violates the commandment. Many believe that God's sovereignty is quelled by the will of man. Many believe that Satan is controlling the events of history and that this world belongs to him. When we think this way we unwittingly violate this commandment. Paul does call Satan the **"god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4)**. But the fact that people (even an entire age of people) serve a false god doesn't make him God. This thinking is harmful to Christians and opens the door to confusion and despair. God is sovereign. He has ordained whatsoever comes to pass. Our Father in heaven wants us to know that nothing is outside of His power.

Faith

Finally, we must have faith. It is not enough to merely know things about God (James 1:19); we are to, by faith, appropriate (make them ours) these things, or more accurately appropriate Him. That is, make Him *our* God. As Paul wrote:

For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10).

We are to call on His Name (Romans 10:13), walk in His ways (Psalm 128:1) and trust in His salvation—a salvation which comes by Christ alone.

¹⁶ The Westminster confession of faith. 3, 1 (1996). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation (Psalm 118:14).

It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law (Romans 3:26-28).

To know that there is protection from the rain is quite different from getting under the protection. The acting out of this faith is demonstrated by pledging our love, fear, reverence, gratitude, submission and devotion to God.

Obedience to this commandment requires that we do this, not merely on Sundays or when it suits us, but every minute of every day. We are to have a constant sense of His presence, His majesty, His goodness and His providence. We are not to stray to the left or right one iota, ever. We are to **“meditate”** upon Him and **“delight...in His law...day and night” (Psalm 1:2)**. We would do well to ask ourselves to take inventory of our investments of time, energy, finance, contemplation or thought-life.

Are we owned by the various screens ever before our eyes? Are we anxious about the opinions of others and how they perceive us? Do we drink more deeply of Christ, or of that libation at the end of a tiresome day? Do we **“taste and see that the LORD is good”** and rejoice that we are **”blessed”** when we **“take refuge in Him” (Psalm 34:8)?**

Who Then Can Be Saved (Mark 10:26)?

At this point we might be gaining an appreciation of how bad we are at keeping this commandment and how much we need deliverance from a covenant of works (being saved by how good we are).

This does not mean we should jettison the notion that we are to have a constant sense of our dependence, responsibility and obligation. The moment our path diverges, in mind word or deed, one scintilla from our pledging to God our complete devotion, commitment, obedience and trust, we have violated this

commandment. The moment we violate any other commandment, we have violated this commandment. *He is the Lord and there is no other.* We must realize the awesome demands of this commandment. There may be no commandment that reminds us of our need for a Savior as much as this one.

We must ask ourselves if God is our Father and Jesus our Savior. We must ask ourselves who our master is because Jesus teaches we can't serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). The fact that I'm not very good at serving my Master doesn't mean I don't know who my Master is. It is during the process of serving my Master that I am continually reminded that my Master is, and needs to be, my Savior. Let's make no mistake. If Jesus is not our Master, He is not our Savior.

That being said, friends, it was Jesus, and only Jesus, who always did the will of the Father. It was Jesus, and only Jesus, who always acknowledged the glory of the Father. Jesus *alone* never strayed one speck away from this commandment. And it is Jesus who grants His victory to all who call on His Name. I pray that our study and understanding of God's law would enrich us and incline our hearts closer to our Blessed Redeemer.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Is atheism a morally neutral position? Why or why not?
2. Why does the commandment read “no others gods” rather than “not be an atheist”?
3. Review and discuss Calvin’s quote on the human mind. What are ways we see this in our own culture or our own lives?
4. If we wish to excel in keeping this commandment, what are some things we must know?
5. What is the difference between knowing about God and knowing God?
6. Since we can’t keep this commandment perfectly, should we avoid trying to keep it at all? Explain your answer.
7. In light of our inability, who then can be saved?

Part Four: The Second Commandment, A

Exodus 20:4-6; Acts 17:29

February 11, 2018

You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments (Exodus 20:4-6).

Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man (Acts 17:29).

Not How But Who?

“It’s now how you worship but who you worship” was an expression I heard, believed and promoted for much of my life as a Christian. There is something very practical and sincere to it, similar to how it’s not the gift, but rather the thought that counts. It wasn’t until much, much later, in my study of the second commandment that I began to question whether or not that was a healthy attitude for worship.

In the first commandment God has instructed us to have no other gods before Him. In the next three commandments God instructs us on how we are to properly pursue our love and worship of the God whom we call *Father*. The first four commandments are God’s lessons on how we are to love Him. This morning we discuss the second commandment, which speaks of “**images**” *pesel* or “**likenesses**” *tmunah* of God.

The great systematic theologian, Charles Hodge, regarding the second commandment, stated:

Idolatry consists not only in the worship of false gods, but also in the worship of the true God by images.¹⁷

Many believe this is the commandment's primary emphasis. According to the Harper Bible Commentary:

The prohibition against graven images (Exodus 20:4-6, Deuteronomy 5:8-10) may in the first instance have been aimed at images of Israel's own God, Yahweh. God will not be localized in an object such as a golden calf (see Exodus 20:4-6; 1 Kings 12:28), because to permit this to happen would make God an object of manipulation."

Going into greater detail, J. I. Packer writes:

In its Christian application, this means that we are not to make use of visual or pictorial representations of the Triune God, or of any person of the Trinity, for the purposes of Christian worship. The commandment thus deals, not with the object of our worship, but with the manner of it; what it tells us is that statues and pictures of the one whom we worship are not to be used as an aid to worshipping Him.¹⁸

I remember transitioning from not even knowing that some held this view (that we should have no images or likeness of God) to thinking it was relatively insignificant to now thinking it is highly critical. I also found myself in the minority (at least in modern evangelicalism) by holding this position. In one of my seminary classes (a Protestant seminary) we were instructed to read a book that

¹⁷ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprint 1989), p. 291.

¹⁸ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 39.

promoted something I now view as a violation of the second commandment.

Pictures of Jesus?

Richard Foster, in his book *Celebration of Discipline*, recommends using pictures of Jesus for deep meditation¹⁹. Foster taught that images of God the Father or God the Son help us create a mental picture, making it all “more real”. How does one square such a recommendation with the words in Isaiah? Speaking of Christ, it is written:

For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him (Isaiah 53:2).

“**Form**” *toar* is referring to beauty of form: something physically impressive to look at. “**Comeliness**” *hadar* speaks of splendor or majesty. “**Beauty**” *mareh* simply put, refers to that which is desirable in appearance. In short, there was nothing about the physical appearance of Jesus that would draw us to Him.

I did make an effort those many years ago to follow Foster’s counsel. I discovered upon reflection and deeper examination that this was not a good thing. It didn’t make it “more real” but more of an imaginative concoction constrained by my own sinful and selfish desires.

We tend to be selective when coming up with an image, likeness or portrait. It should not be surprising that we pick ones we like. Suppose my wife hired someone to paint a picture of me. Suppose she advised the painter on artistic focus. I might be complimented. But suppose every time she thought of me, it was that picture that came to her mind? Suppose she had the artist paint a picture that revealed or hid qualities about me to her liking. I wonder if I might start resenting the picture. She might say, “But honey, it makes me love you even more!” To which I might respond, “Yeah, especially because it leaves out this trait or that aspect of my looks or

¹⁹ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (Harper and Row, 1978), p. 21.

personality.” The painting may, in fact, be a hindrance to our relationship rather than a help.

Many people, including myself at one time, read the first two commandments like this: “You shall have no other gods before me...if you choose to disregard this, at least don’t worship the false god with man-made idols.” I don’t think it should be read that way. It should be read, “You shall no others gods before me and *you shall not worship me utilizing man-made images.*” The sense of the commandment is *thou shalt not make any likeness of any thing* for use in worship, public or private. The Westminster Larger Catechism teaches (in part):

The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, (Numb. 15:39) counselling, (Deut. 13:6–8) commanding, (Hosea 5:11, Micah 6:16) using, (1 Kings 11:33, 1 Kings 12:33) and any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself; (Deut. 12:30–32) the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever; (Deut. 4:15–19, Acts 17:29, Rom. 1:21–23,25).

People might say they have a picture of Jesus, but they don’t use it for worship. It’s just decorative. Leaving aside how pictures of God for decoration may be a violation of the third commandment, we might ask ourselves how easy it is to shed man-made pictures of Jesus we see around us, when it comes time to pray or worship.

If I were asked to run around the building three times without thinking of a fox I don’t think I could do it. It would be nearly impossible. So how possible is it to have a picture of Jesus in my living room and begin to worship on Sunday morning without having that picture enter my head?

Images Are Not Truthful

I understand how what I am teaching here may be perceived as a tempest in a teapot. Does it really matter that much? In answer to

that I must convey that we recognize that images of God are simply not truthful. Though God is revealed everywhere we turn (Romans 1; Psalm 19), making an image of God puts limits on our perception of God. Images pervert God's glory and therefore dishonor Him. This affects us in ways we maybe don't realize. John Calvin stated:

A true image of God is not to be found in all the world; and hence...His glory is defiled.²⁰

Packer points out that the golden calf built by the Israelites was a bull-image of God and His great strength. That was the characteristic/attribute of God they wanted as they sought deliverance from the wilderness, a big strong animal who would do their bidding. The bull-calf, however came quite short of portraying the true image of God. It left out, for example, His moral character, His righteousness, goodness and patience. The true glory of God was therefore hidden.²¹

When my wife and I were recently visiting St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, we witnessed the most impressive display of religious art imaginable. The sheer power and opulence of what would be considered a priceless collection was almost overwhelming! But when it got right down to it what we witnessed was a massive warehouse of idolatry created by perhaps the most fear-mongering and guilt-manipulating religion the world has ever known.

Pointing this out was not well-received by some of my Roman Catholic friends. But I am not saying this to somehow unnecessarily beat down a religion or offend my friends. It is not because I don't want them to enjoy God through this art. It is because God is hidden when fallen humans take it upon themselves to determine how He is to be apprehended.

Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man (Acts 17:29).

Packer points out that a crucifix, portraying the crucified Christ on the cross, also obscures the glory of Christ, for it hides His deity,

²⁰ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 40.

²¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 40.

victory and present kingdom. It displays His human weakness, but conceals His divine strength; it depicts the reality of His pain, but keeps out of our sight the reality of His joy and His power. Images fall short.

Images are unworthy because of what they fail to display and the wrong things they do portray. Looking at pictures should not be used to move us to worship because they can never show us His glory.²² Artists may make an effort at showing His glory by painting a halo around His head, but the effort falls short.

Perverse Thoughts = Perverse Actions

The inadequacies of images pervert our thoughts about God. The bull-calf of Aaron led the Israelites to think of God as a Being who could be worshipped acceptably by frenzied debauchery (Exodus 32:5)²³. The crucifix promotes an opposing emotion of walking into a church and brooding over the bodily suffering of Christ.

An image of Christ on the throne promotes the pondering of His victory, which may cause us to be autocratic or domineering while neglecting a willingness to suffer in humility. An image of Christ doing a good deed so we could ponder His righteousness may cause us to forget salvation by grace. An image of Christ doing a miracle so we could ponder His deity may have us continually looking for signs.

We could never make enough images to give us an accurate representation of Christ. But even if we could, we could never accurately portray the look on His face or whatever gestures may have accompanied His works at the time of the event.

We wouldn't think to add 'screenplay-like' descriptions to the Bible. How obviously wrong it would be to write a new study Bible that gave how the author thought Jesus might have been stooping when He engaged the children, or what the look on His face might have been as He healed the leper. What if the author decided that Jesus looked scared? Would we be scared? What if the author decided Jesus looked angry or impatient? Would not that promote impatience in us? After all, He is our Lord. The inadequacies of images pervert our thoughts about God.

²² J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 41.

²³ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 41.

Images also promote a disposition in the worshipper. We visualize the image. When we fall to our knees to pray we will, no doubt, visualize the one we are praying to, informed by the image used to represent Him. To the extent that that image falls short or perverts the truth about God, we will fail to worship God in truth. This results in God's jealousy because at this point we begin worshipping a caricature of God rather than the true God.

When naming our children, we oftentimes accept or reject names based upon a person we knew who had a similar name. There was something about that person we either liked or disliked that is strong enough to influence our decision. When God is associated with certain physical features, we may find ourselves coming up short in our respect of Christ. What if the picture or image of Jesus conveyed to you is startlingly similar to someone who disgusts you, or you know to be very evil?

I find myself disappointed, time after time, when I see who Hollywood, or even Christian films, decide to cast as Jesus. Who would you cast as Jesus? What traits would you look for? What kind of voice? Arnold Swarzenegger? Woody Allen? Christopher Walken? Tom Selleck? You might think to yourself, "How silly. They would never cast Arnold Swarzenegger as Jesus." But that shows our hand.

We are quite confident (though we don't know for sure) that Jesus didn't look like Arnold Swarzenegger. That we wouldn't allow Him to look that way indicates that we *do* have a picture in our minds of just who we will allow Jesus to, or not to, look like.

I Like to Think of God as a...

What we have spoken of so far may help us understand the problem with mental images of God as well. This moves into the spirit of the commandment. You've heard people say, "I like to think of God as an artist, architect or father; not as a judge²⁴." The 'I like to think of God as...' comment usually precedes some denial of what the Bible tells us about God. It conflicts with the image of God we have created in our heads. Packer addresses this by stating:

At best, they can only think of God in the image

²⁴ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 42.

of a man - as an ideal man, perhaps, or a super-man. But God is not any sort of man. We were made in His image, but we must not think of Him as existing in ours.²⁵

The second commandment warns us against any worship or religious practice that leads us to dishonor God and falsify His truth. The second commandment should cause us to humble ourselves before God's incomprehensibility. It summons to us to recognize that God the Creator is transcendent, mysterious, and inscrutable. God is beyond the range of any imaging or philosophical guesswork of which we are capable. We should then humble ourselves, listen and learn of Him, and let Him teach us what He is like and how we should think of Him.

This is where the comment, "You can't put God in a box" may be appropriate. Unfortunately, that phrase is usually used by those who have just learned of an attribute of God that violates their image of Him. Both Isaiah and the Apostle Paul had personal glimpses of the heavenly throne. Yet even they recognized God's incomprehensibility.

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8).

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out (Romans 11:33).

The wisdom, values, aims and mode of God are so beyond us that we cannot possibly guess our way to them by intuition or any notion of ideal manhood. He tells us about Himself through apostles, prophets and His own Son. The second commandment requires that we get our thoughts toward God from His word and not from images.

²⁵ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 42.

We cannot put God in a box, but He has chosen to reveal Himself in a book.

In our next meeting, we will discuss God being jealous and why this commandment associates the violation of this commandment with hating God.

Conclusion

But let us finish for now by asking ourselves for now if we are we worshipping the one true God in truth? We may not have bull-calves in our churches or even crucifixes on our walls (though we may have pictures of Christ!!). How do I know if I am worshipping/loving the one true God in truth? I look to the person and work of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Scriptures, showing me the final truth about the nature and the grace of God.

Do I see all purposes of God centering upon Him? Do I find, as I search the Scriptures, that I continually have to carve myself and adjust my errant views of God, or do I adjust God to my images of Him? We content ourselves that we do serve and love the true God in truth. But upon any deep and honest examination, we would find that my flesh continually wars against me having accurate thoughts, worship and love of God. Does my weakness in this lead me to one solution - Calvary? Does the incomprehensibility and holiness of God bring me to my knees and make me ever aware of my sin and need for a Savior whom God graciously provides in His Son? Praise God that His fatherliness is not restricted to my puny, faulty and perverted views of what it means to be a father.

How impossible it is to avoid having an image of God that is less than what He is. How clearly we have violated this command in thought, word and deed, and how obvious it should be that we need to take refuge in the Son who fully knows His Father. If this brings us to our knees, then we know that we are worshipping the one true God in truth. And with that we enjoy life everlasting according to Christ's own definition—as He prays for us. “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John. 17:3).

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Discuss the adage, “It’s not *how* you worship, but *who* you worship”. What are the strengths or weaknesses of this?

2. What harm is there if pictures of Jesus help in your Christian life?

3. If you don’t use images of God for worship, is that okay?

4. Discuss if images are truthful, and why that matters.

5. Do our thoughts of God affect our actions? Explain.

6. What inevitably happens when we seek to make an image of God?

7. Who is the only One who ever kept this commandment and why is that important for me to know?

Part Five: The Second Commandment, B

Exodus 20:4-6; Acts 17:29

February 18, 2018

You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments (Exodus 20:4-6).

Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man (Acts 17:29).

Review

Last time we discussed how the phrase “It’s not how you worship but who you worship” sounds good but may not be the healthiest way to approach worship or loving God. The Scriptures reveal not merely who is to be worshiped but how He is to be worshiped.

The first four commandments are God’s lessons on how we are to love God. The second commandment speaks of images *pesel* or likenesses *tmunah* of God. The great systematic theologian, Charles Hodge, regarding the second commandment, stated:

Idolatry consists not only in the worship of false gods, but also in the worship of the true God by images.²⁶

²⁶ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprint 1989), p. 291.

Many people, including myself at one time, read the first two commandments like this: **“You shall have no other gods before me...if you choose to disregard this, at least don’t worship the false god with man-made idols.”** I don’t think it should be read that way. It should be read, **“You shall no others gods before me and you shall not worship me utilizing man-made images.”** The sense of the commandment is *thou shalt not make any likeness of any thing* for use in worship, public or private. The Westminster Larger Catechism teaches (in part):

The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, (Numb. 15:39) counselling, (Deut. 13:6–8) commanding, (Hosea 5:11, Micah 6:16) using, (1 Kings 11:33, 1 Kings 12:33) and any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself; (Deut. 12:30–32) the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever; (Deut. 4:15–19, Acts 17:29, Rom. 1:21–23,25).

The reason for this is because images simply aren’t truthful. They will always give us a skewed perception of God.

John Calvin stated:

A true image of God is not to be found in all the world; and hence...His glory is defiled.²⁷

Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man (Acts 17:29).

Images promote falsehood because of what they fail to display and the wrong things they do portray. The inadequacies of images pervert our thoughts about God, which leads to other perversions in life. The bull-calf of Aaron led the Israelites to think of God as a

²⁷ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 40.

Being who could be worshipped acceptably by frenzied debauchery (Exodus 32:5)²⁸.

The second commandment warns us against any worship or religious practice that leads us to dishonor God and falsify His truth. The second commandment should cause us to humble ourselves before God's incomprehensibility. It summons us to recognize that God the Creator is transcendent, mysterious, and inscrutable. God is beyond the range of any imaging or philosophical guesswork of which we are capable. We should then humble ourselves, listen and learn of Him, and let Him teach us through the Scriptures what He is like and how, what we should think of Him and how we are to love and worship Him.

Jealousy

This brings us to the notion of God being “**jealous**” *qana*. Have you ever been curious as to why it is proper for God to be jealous? It has been widely reported that Oprah Winfrey (perhaps the most influential woman in America) declared that her impatience with "rules, belief systems and doctrines" began when she, in her late 20s, heard a Baptist pastor say that God was jealous. How can it be right for God to be jealous or how can we say God is righteous if He has this character flaw?

It might be helpful to point out the difference between *jealousy* and *envy*. Envy is the feeling one has when they desire that which belongs to someone else. Jealousy is the experience of recognizing that that which belongs to you is somehow being taken by another. To desire another person's spouse is envy or covetous. The sorrow experienced when your spouse shows undue affection for another is jealousy. To be sure, a person can respond to their own jealous feelings in an inappropriate way. They can rant and become violent. But the *feeling of jealousy* is not itself wrong.

It shouldn't be too difficult for us to recognize that envy is impossible for God, for God owns the earth and all it contains. Since there is nothing that does not belong to God, the idea that He desires that which belongs to someone becomes a bit of an empty set. It cannot happen.

²⁸ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 41.

Why is the term *jealousy* used in the Second Commandment? Jealousy is used in conjunction with this commandment because of the fallacious representation that images portray of God. God's jealousy is His zeal to maintain His glory and protect His children. If we recognize that it is most glorious to God, and in our own best interests, to worship the true God, we should recognize His jealousy as a good thing. For when our view of God is distorted by an image, we are straying from the true God and from what is most glorious to Him and best for us.

If I see my children captivated by a man who is not their father, but is seeking to have a father's place in their lives, I am to be jealous. For whoever that man is, he does not love my children the way I do.

The God-Haters

God refers to those who neglect His word in this respect, not as image-worshippers, but as *haters of God*. Those who disregard His commandments as a whole are considered to be those who hate Him. The context of the statement 'God-hater' is within the framework of image-users who prefer the image of God over the true God. They made the image; naturally they prefer it.

Image-users inevitably get their theology from the God they imagine rather than the revealed will of God in the Scriptures. Most of Deuteronomy 4 reveals the contrast of the God who reveals Himself by speaking versus the temptation to make images.

Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that is in the water beneath the earth. And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to

worship them and serve them, which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage... Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God (Deuteronomy 4:15-19; 23, 24).

Moses teaches that God expressly forbids the use of images. The images made, even by those who are well meaning, will eventually war with the God of the Scriptures. You can't serve two masters, as Jesus taught. And the language Jesus uses in this instruction pits the two vying for that role in strong opposition.

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other (Matthew 6:24).

This is remarkable language! We might find it difficult for this to resonate with our experience. What I mean by this is that we don't generally find that when something or someone is vying to be a priority in our lives and gets second-place so to speak, that we hate it or despise it. If I choose tacos over hamburgers, it doesn't follow that I hate hamburgers. If I choose to place a higher priority on my health than on my academics, it doesn't follow that I hate academics. Even if I choose to make a certain person my best friend over someone else I genuinely like, it doesn't follow that I hate and despise the other person.

But a passage like this is not merely talking about preferences. It's really talking about the absolute controlling influence in our lives. It is that aspect of our personhood which governs all other decisions. It is our very heart and soul.

When we begin to construct God via images or likenesses (whether on canvas, stone or in our own minds), then that image commandeers our hearts and souls. And it will not tolerate a competitor. It is not a matter of merely preferring one thing, or even

person, over another. It is the recognition that something or someone is looking at you and saying, “**This is mine**”. And when someone or something else utters the same phrase, the fight is to the death. This may sound overly dramatic, but does not Paul use this kind of language?

...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin (Romans 6:6).

In light of this it is little wonder that the greatest foes of Christ were religious. And this hits so very close to home when we realize their religion was not so much a false religion but a perversion of the true religion. And the same danger lurks throughout history. The caricatures of the truth remain and, from time to time, prevail. Ross Douthat, in his book *Bad Religion, How We Became a Nation of Heretics*, makes a strong argument that we currently live in that theological climate.

Is this heresy due entirely to the breaking of the Second Commandment? Not likely. But it is due to our propensity to chip away at a Biblically based presentation of the Triune God and all of His attributes. The ease at which we construct images and likenesses of God is both disease and symptom. It is a symptom in that it is the consequence of a low view of God and the Scriptures by which He reveals Himself. It is a disease in its contribution to a god that is not the true God at all, but a (perhaps) superior version of ourselves; a truth expressed by the Psalmist when writing about man-made images:

Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them (Psalm 135:18).

Sanctions and Blessings

The sanctions, or punishments, that comes with this commandment are severe. The Lord states, “**For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me,**” These sanctions are frightening.

This commandment is no small thing and shouldn't be taken lightly. It affects us and will affect our children. It shouldn't be startling to us that we are the most powerful influence in our children's lives. The improper view of God we have will be passed on to our descendants for three and four generations. I see qualities in myself, both good and bad, that I saw in my mother or father. A skewed understanding of God may be the worst thing we can leave our children.

We are also told of the positive side of keeping the commandment. "...**but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.**" The adherence to this commandment promotes the glory of God and the spiritual well being of man. We see the mercy of God in how long obedience yields blessings (thousands of generations) versus how quickly the evil can be purged (three and four generations).

Conclusion

By now we may be drawing the conclusion that it is virtually impossible for the creature to have a truly accurate view of God. Not only is God far beyond our comprehension in terms of His eternal, infinite nature, even that which we can apprehend, and the things we do understand, inevitably fall short of perfection. This is not to say we have no grasp or understanding whatsoever. It should also be a lifelong quest to understand Him more fully. As Paul prayed:

...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him (Ephesians 1:17).

But we should never draw the conclusion that our understanding is pure enough to warrant God's approval. To put it in simple terms, we live in a constant state of disobedience to this commandment.

But praise be to God that our peace with Him is not a ladder we climb or a leap we make! The ascending of man only takes place by the descending of Christ. We don't reach Him, but He has reached us. And He turns our face toward Him and we bask in His glorious light (Psalm 118:27; 1 Peter 2:9).

No, we have not kept this commandment. Our knowledge of God is skewed in innumerable ways. But not so with Christ. He fully knows the Father. He always kept this and all commandments. And His great obedience belongs to those who have called upon His Name. We see this in His wonderful prayer for us:

O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them (John 17:25, 26).

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Discuss the adage, “It’s not *how* you worship, but *who* you worship.”
2. What do the first four commandments principally teach?
3. What are some of the sins forbidden in the Second Commandment?
4. How do images of God promote falsehood?
5. How is it possible for jealousy to be a good thing?
6. Discuss how a violation of the Second Commandment is a form of hating God.
7. What are the blessings and sanctions attached to the Second Commandment?
8. How does this commandment reveal to us our need for Christ?

Part Six: The Second Commandment, C

Exodus 20:4-6; Acts 17:29

February 25, 2018

You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments (Exodus 20:4-6).

Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man (Acts 17:29).

Review

In quick review, we discussed how the adage “It’s now how you worship but who you worship” is not a sound way of approach God. The second commandment speaks of “**images**” *pesel* or “**likenesses**” *tmunah* of God.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth (Exodus 20:4).

This is not a general prohibition against art but a prohibition against making images of a deity (anything god, whether true or false). The great systematic theologian, Charles Hodge, regarding the second commandment, stated,

Idolatry consists not only in the worship of false gods, but also in the worship of the true God by images.²⁹

Many people, including myself at one time, read the first two commandments like this: **“You shall have no other gods before me...if you choose to disregard this, at least don’t worship the false god with man-made idols.”** I don’t think it should be read that way. It should be read, **“You shall no have others gods before me and you shall not worship me utilizing man-made images.”** The sense of the commandment is thou shalt not make any likeness of any thing for use in worship, public or private.

Images Are Not Truthful

Does it really matter that much? In answer to that I must convey that we recognize that images of God are simply not truthful. Though God is revealed everywhere we turn (Romans 1; Psalm 19), making an image of God puts limits on our perception of God. Images pervert God’s glory and therefore dishonor Him. This affects us in ways we maybe don’t realize. John Calvin stated:

A true image of God is not to be found in all the world; and hence...His glory is defiled.³⁰

The inadequacies of images pervert our thoughts about God which will inevitably lead to perverse behavior, hence the second portion of the commandment contained in verse five.

...you shall not bow down to them nor serve them (Exodus 20:5a).

The God to whom we bow down will be the God whom we serve. The bull-calf of Aaron led the Israelites to think of God as a Being who could be worshipped acceptably by frenzied debauchery (Exodus 32:5)³¹.

²⁹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprint 1989), p. 291.

³⁰ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 40.

³¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 41.

We could never make enough images to give us an accurate representation of Christ. But even if we could, we could never accurately portray the look on His face or whatever gestures may have accompanied His works at the time of the event.

Images also promote a disposition in the worshipper. We visualize the image. When we fall to our knees to pray we will, no doubt, visualize the one we are praying to, and what is visualized will be informed by the image used to represent Him. To the extent that that image falls short or perverts of the truth about God, we will fail to worship God in truth. This results in God's jealousy because at this point we begin worshipping a caricature of God rather than the true God.

Jealousy

This brought us to the notion of God being “**jealous**” *qana* and the difference between jealousy and envy. Envy is the feeling one has when they desire that which belongs to someone else. Jealousy is the experience of recognizing that that which belongs to you is somehow being taken by another. Envy is impossible for God, for God owns the earth and all it contains.

Jealousy is used in conjunction with this commandment because of the fallacious representation that images portray of God. God's jealousy is His zeal to maintain His glory and protect His children. If we recognize that it is most glorious to God, and in our own best interests, to worship the true God, we should recognize His jealousy as a good thing. For when our view of God is distorted by an image, we are straying from the true God and from what is most glorious to Him and best for us.

If I see my children captivated by a man who is not their father, but is seeking to have a father's place in their lives, I am to be jealous. For whoever that man is, he does not love my children the way I do.

The God-Haters

The commandment refers to those who neglect His word in this respect, not as image-worshippers, but as haters of God. Those who disregard His commandments as a whole are considered to be those

who hate Him. The context of the statement, ‘God-hater’ is within the framework of image-users who prefer the image of God over the true God. They made the image, naturally they prefer it.

Image-users inevitably get their theology from the God they imagine rather than the revealed will of God in the Scriptures, so a conflict ensues. You can’t serve two masters, as Jesus taught. And the language Jesus uses in this instruction pits the two vying for that role in strong opposition.

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other (Matthew 6:24).

A passage like this is not merely talking about preferences. It’s really talking about the absolute controlling influence in our lives. It is that aspect of our personhood which governs all other decisions. It is our very heart and soul. It is the recognition that something or someone is looking at you and saying, “**This is mine**”. And when someone or something else utters the same phrase, the fight is to the death. As Paul taught:

...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin (Romans 6:6).

Our preference to the god of our own construction reveals our hatred for the true and living God. This brings us up to date.

Sanctions and Blessings

The sanctions, or punishments, that comes with this commandment are severe. The Lord states, “**For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me.**” These sanctions are frightening.

This commandment is no small thing and shouldn’t be taken lightly. It affects us and will affect our children. It shouldn’t be startling to us that we are the most powerful influence in our children’s lives. The improper view of God we have will be passed

on to our descendants for three and four generations. I see qualities in myself, both good and bad, that I saw in my mother or father. A skewed understanding of God may be the worst thing we can leave our children.

We are also told of the positive side of keeping the commandment. “...**but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.**” The adherence to this commandment promotes the glory of God and the spiritual well being of man. We see the mercy of God in how long obedience yields blessings (thousands of generations) versus how quickly the evil can be purged (three and four generations).

Conclusion

By now we may be drawing the conclusion that it is virtually impossible for the creature to have a truly accurate view of God. Not only is God far beyond our comprehension in terms of His eternal, infinite nature, even that which we can apprehend (the things we *do* understand) inevitably falls short of perfection. This is not to say we have no grasp or understanding whatsoever. It should also be a lifelong quest to understand Him more fully. As Paul prayed:

...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him (Ephesians 1:17).

But we should never draw the conclusion that our understanding is pure enough to warrant God’s approval. To put it in simple terms, we live in a constant state of disobedience to this commandment.

But praise be to God that our peace with Him is not a ladder we climb or a leap we make! The ascending of man only takes place by the descending of Christ. We don’t reach Him but He has reached us. And He turns our face toward Him, and we bask in His glorious light (Psalm 118:27; 1 Peter 2:9).

No, we have not kept this commandment. Our knowledge of God is skewed in innumerable ways. But not so with Christ. He fully knows the Father. He always kept this and all commandments. And His great obedience belongs to those who have called upon His Name. We see this in His wonderful prayer for us:

O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. 26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them (John 17:25, 26).

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Discuss the adage, “It’s not *how* you worship, but *who* you worship”.
2. What do the first four commandments principally teach?
3. What are some of the sins forbidden in the Second Commandment?
4. How do images of God promote falsehood?
5. How is it possible for jealousy to be a good thing?
6. Discuss how a violation of the Second Commandment is a form of hating God.
7. What are the blessings and sanctions attached to the Second Commandment?
8. How does this commandment reveal to us our need for Christ?

Part Seven: The Third Commandment, A

Exodus 20:7

March 4, 2018

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain (Exodus 20:7).

Preface

We're in the process of seeking to understand and obey what Jesus taught regarding loving God and loving others. The Greatest Commandment is a summary of the Ten Commandments. The first found commandments summarize how we are to love God, the next six how we are to love one another.

Loving God certainly, and primarily, includes having “**no other gods before**” (Exodus 20:3) Him. This is a supremely gracious command, for who is qualified to be God but God alone? Who has the wisdom, power, justice, love and grace for that particular office? It's like a loving father remind his children that he is their father.

Loving God also includes being careful not to exchange the true God, revealed in Scripture, with our tendencies to form “**images**” or “**likenesses**” (Exodus 20:4) of God either through art or even in our minds. Those endeavors can do nothing but detract from the full and accurate perception of God through the appropriate means He has determined, i.e. Scriptures, word and sacrament.

This tendency to adjust God according to our perceived needs, functionally makes God something other than He is, causing Him to be “**jealous**” (*qanna*) since God desires to have an exclusive relationship with His children, which of course, is of great advantage to us. God's jealousy should not be construed as envy or insecurity on His part but rather the recognition that we are betrothed to Him and He loves us, and it grieves Him when we follow and give our

primary affections to someone or something that does not have that true and loving concern for our souls.

We now approach the Third Commandment.

Assuming we are seeking to worship the one true God in truth, and assuming we understand, at least at some level, that we shouldn't seek to carve God into something we think is best at the expense of His character, the Third Commandment addresses how we handle the staggering responsibility of **“the name of the Lord”**.

The Name of the Lord

First, we need to be clear on what the **“name of the Lord”** even means. I ran into an old friend at The Home Depot and he told me of his new church where they were calling on the name of the Lord. I asked him what he meant. They were literally and verbally calling on the name of the Lord. If I were to attend that church (assuming I understood him correctly), I would hear the congregation all somehow calling out God's name. I don't think that's what it means. The name of God is more than just a name. Concerning the name of God, Charles Hodge states:

It often means a personal or individual designation, i.e., Jehovah. Frequently the “name of God” is equivalent to God himself. To call on the name of the Lord, and to call on God, are synonymous forms of expression. The name of God, therefore, includes everything by which He makes Himself known.³²

We are not merely talking about a ‘handle’. We might think of the famous line from *Romeo and Juliet* where Juliet utters, “What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet.” This might be true when it comes to roses, or even people as in the play. But these are physical entities that can be known by their physical substance.

God, on the other hand, is Spirit. We learned previously that God is not to be worshipped, or thought of, in that physical sense. Though God is revealed everywhere we look, including our own introspections (Romans 1:19, 20; Psalm 19), in a very special way

³² Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprint 1989), p. 306.

God reveals Himself through the use of words and those words include His Name.

God's names tell us about Him. For example, He refers to Himself as *El* or *Elohim* which may be a general term expressing His majesty and authority. *Adonai* expresses His lordship, *Jehovah* would be a personal name, *Abba* would be daddy, etc. As we grow as Christians the names of God should become more meaningful to us since they tell us of His attributes.

But the Name of the Lord applies to more than the names God uses for Himself. The name of God is **“to be taken generally and comprehensively for anything whereby God makes himself known.”**³³ For example, along with His names, He gives titles, such as ‘the God of Abraham’ or ‘the King of kings’. He also gives His attributes, such as ‘the Lord is Holy’. We are to acknowledge this, and reverently appreciate and use these names with an eye toward Him who has created, maintains and reveals these things to us.

Even further, **“the name of the Lord”** goes beyond the names or titles God uses to describe Himself. **“The name of the Lord”** refers to God Himself. Conversely, to use God's name in vain means to either disavow or disrespect Him and His rightful ownership of all things.

Does Not Forbid

Before we talk about what this command forbids, it might do us well to speak of what it doesn't forbid. It has been suggested that this commandment forbids all oaths (since oaths are generally made in the name of God). At first glance this appears to be the case when we consider the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. He says we should not swear *at all*. Of course Jesus went on to qualify His statement. Checking Scripture with Scripture, we realize that Jesus was speaking of spurious oaths that the Pharisees were in the habit of making (see Matthew 23:18-22).

There are many occasions where prominent biblical individuals swore and made vows: Paul swore by God.

³³ Thomas Vincent, *A Family Instructional Guide*, (Simpsonville, SC: Christian Classics Foundation) 1997.

For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you (Romans 1:9).

God swore by an oath. In Hebrews 6:13–18 the author of Hebrews declares that God, desiring...

...to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, He guaranteed it with an oath (Hebrews 6:17).

It is evident, therefore, that the words of our Savior (Matthew 5:34), **“Swear not at all,”** cannot be intended to forbid swearing upon proper occasions in the name of the true God, but must be designed to forbid the calling upon His name in ordinary conversation and on trifling occasions. Jesus made an oath Himself:

And the high priest arose and said to Him, “Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?” But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, “I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!” Jesus said to him, “It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:62-64).

Some common vows before God we see today are made in weddings, by witnesses in court, commitments as elders, deacons, church members, etc. These are all acceptable before God and should be considered very binding.

As truthful as we all ought to be, we must realize that a vow or an oath brings us to a deeper level of commitment. I was watching Star Trek in an episode where Riker (the second ranking officer on the Enterprise) was involved in an exchange program with the Klingons (very tough aliens). Riker was now serving as second in command on the Klingon vessel.

Naturally the Klingons questioned his honor. Riker said something to this effect, “I will serve you even if it costs me my life.” The Klingon officer said, “Will you make an oath to that?” To which

Riker responded, “I just did.” In other words, his word was his oath. That sounds very noble. And our word should be our oath. Yet we all realize that the depth of an oath extends beyond our normal every day words.

For example, saying ‘yes’ when asked to be married does not carry with it the same level of commitment as saying ‘yes’ in the wedding. Breaking off engagements is commonplace and acceptable based upon any number of circumstances. Breaking off a marriage is only acceptable based upon death, desertion or adultery. Even our daily commitments may meet fairly minor mitigating circumstances that would justify not doing what we said we would do. I may tell my wife that I’ll be home by 5:00 PM. But if on my way home I stop and help someone with a flat tire, I may not live up to that commitment. This is something my wife understands and accepts.

This Commandment Forbids

So, what does this commandment forbid? To misuse the name of God, or to use His name in “**vain**” *lassaw*, literally means to attach emptiness to it. Again, Hodge states:

All irreverence towards God...careless, unnecessary reference to Him or His attributes; all indecorous (lacking good taste or propriety) conduct in worship;...every indication of the want of that fear, reverence, and awe due to a Being infinite in all His perfections, on Whom we are absolutely dependent, and to Whom we are accountable for our character and conduct.³⁴

In books or movies we might see a group of warriors who have great respect for a departed king. When his name is mentioned they might all bow their heads in reverence. His very name demands respect. To use it lightly, casually, or in a manner not befitting the august nature of it is simply unacceptable.

Profanity

Perhaps the most common understanding we have of using God’s name in vain is *profanity*. That is, the association of the name of God

³⁴ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprint 1989), p. 306.

with anger, frustration or even excitement. It means to use God's name flippantly or falsely. We must be careful when the name of God is used as an interjection or exclamation. It may very well be the plan of the enemy to make the name of God mundane, to place it alongside, not only silly words, but also filthy words.

As Christians, the very name of Jesus should bring us to our knees. Paul writes:

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth (Philippians 2:9,10).

Casual/Disrespectful References

We ought to exalt the name of God. We should be careful to avoid associating God's name with that which is common or mundane. Christians will often develop their own sub-cultural vernacular. We tend to talk about God as if He were our imaginary friend or next-door neighbor. We might seize Christian jargon to appear spiritual.

I had a friend who would use terms like 'praise God' or 'glory' or 'hallelujah' to an extent that the words lost all meaning. We would be playing golf and if he made a good shot he would shout, "Glory to God!" This is very subjective of course, but I found his language void of the depth and reverence that God, the things of God, and the name of God, deserves.

I am not suggesting that there are not appropriate times to verbally give glory to God, praise His name or seek to bring God's blessings to others. But we ought to rethink how suitable our language is when His name starts rolling off our lips without much thought behind it.

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. ²Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter *any* thing before God: for God *is* in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few (Ecclesiastes 5:1, 2 KJV).

The Westminster Larger Catechism teaches that this commandment forbids **“vain janglings”**. This essentially means engaging in empty or inaccurate babbling about God and the things of God. The Apostle Paul wrote of this in his first epistle to Timothy.

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions (1 Timothy 1:5-7).

This particular violation of the commandment, it would be my observation, has hit an epidemic level in western evangelicalism. And the range of perpetrators is a vast one. From the neo-atheist giving their amazingly errant views of what the Bible teaches to the televangelist, confident assertions lacking understanding have run amuck.

In our following message, we will dig deeper into this and discuss other infractions of this commandment. I will also share with what I believe to be one of my most personal struggles in keeping this commandment.

But I would like to complete this portion of the sermon with, perhaps, the greatest use of God’s name that we can enjoy. And that is the glorious and gracious phrase we see commonly displayed upon the pages of Scripture which states that **“whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13).**

To call upon the name of the Lord is to trust in Christ as Savior, to confess Him as Lord, and ever repose in Him as the eternal preserver and comforter of our souls. This is where all our studies of God’s law most graciously lead us. It leads us to recognize our need. Do we recognize our need? Can we see what we lack? It has been written that:

...through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it - the

righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe (Romans 3:20-22a).

Our study of loving God and seeking to keep His law is reduced to the ministry of death (2 Corinthians 3:7) apart from faith in the only true Keeper of the law, Jesus Christ. When we call upon His name, the victory in its entirety becomes ours.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What do the Ten Commandments essentially teach?
2. Define what is meant by the 'name of God'.
3. How does God reveal His name?
4. What should our response be to His name?
5. Are all oaths sinful? How do you know?
6. What are some things the third commandment forbids?
7. Is profanity or cussing the only violation of this commandment? Explain.
8. What are some ways we see God's name being made common?
9. What does it mean to call upon the name of the Lord? Have you done this?

Part Eight: The Third Commandment, B

Exodus 20:7

March 11, 2018

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain (Exodus 20:7).

Preface

We're in the process of seeking to understand and obey what Jesus taught regarding loving God and loving others. The Greatest Commandment is a summary of the Ten Commandments. The first four commandments summarize how we are to love God, the next six how we are to love one another.

Loving God certainly, and primarily, includes having **“no other gods before” (Exodus 20:3)** Him. This is a supremely gracious command, for who is qualified to be God but God alone? Who has the wisdom, power, justice, love and grace for that particular office? It's like a loving father remind his children that he is their father.

Loving God also includes being careful not to exchange the true God, revealed in Scripture, with our tendencies to form **“images”** or **“likenesses”** (Exodus 20:4) of God either through art or even in our minds. Those endeavors can do nothing but detract from the full and accurate perception of God through the appropriate means He has determined, i.e. Scriptures, word and sacrament.

We are now discussing the third commandment.

Assuming we are seeking to worship the one true God in truth, and assuming we understand, at least at some level, that we shouldn't seek to carve God into something we think is best at the expense of His character, the third commandment addresses how we handle the staggering responsibility of **“the name of the Lord”**.

First, we need to be clear on what the “**name of the Lord**” even means. Concerning the name of God, Charles Hodge states:

Frequently the “name of God” is equivalent to God Himself. To call on the name of the Lord, and to call on God, are synonymous forms of expression.³⁵

We discussed last time that this commandment does not forbid oaths entirely. What it does forbid are spurious and thoughtless oaths and vows. The basic thought behind using God’s name in vain means to attach emptiness to it.

Perhaps the most common understanding we have of using God’s name in vain is profanity or even as an interjection of exclamation. We should be careful to avoid associating God’s name with that which is common or mundane. We also discussed talking about God without putting much thought behind our words. This included developing a sub-cultural vernacular (referencing God without a great deal of thought behind it) and “vain janglings”, where confident assertions are made about God or the things of God without the requisite fear or study that should accompany these words.

We continue.

One-Upping Others

I mentioned in our last meeting that I would share a conclusion I came to when it came to my own transgression of this commandment. And because of my own weakness and failure in this particular action, I have sought, not only to be aware of it in my own life, but to aid others as well.

As we grow in the faith, we begin to develop a more mature understanding of the word of God. With that, we find that error is easier to spot. Assuming for the sake of this discussion that we are correct in our assessment of error (we must always have the humility to recognize that it may be ‘me’ who needs correcting), addressing the error is its own art. I have a boatload of conversations I would love to have back.

It’s not as if I entered into these conversations about God and the things of God with the intentions of using God’s name in an empty

³⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprint 1989), p. 306.

way. But conversations take funny turns. It is easy to feel attacked, wounded, insecure and frustrated when someone is resisting or not grasping what you're seeking to explain. Suddenly we find ourselves trying to save face or to avoid humiliation. So, we attack back. We're like a reporter looking for that gotcha moment.

Or we vent. There is a selfish, unhealthy catharsis our flesh enjoys when we become infuriated and lash out. But if there is error (whether moral or theological), we are counseled by the Apostle Paul to...

...restore in a spirit of gentleness. Keep(ing) watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).

The basic feel of this exhortation carries the idea that it may very well be you or me who falls into error (perhaps tempted in the very conversation where we are seeking to restore the erring brother/sister) and how would we desire to be restored? There may come a time for a more forceful confrontation. Certain people may respond better or worse with various methods of confrontation. Paul writes:

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person (Colossians 4:6).

This is a lifelong skill to be pursued. But the point I would like to make is that to use one's faith, knowledge of God and the Scriptures to somehow lord over others is a violation of the third commandment. It is a common temptation to one-up others by using the name and ways of God. To use your knowledge of the Scriptures to win an argument rather than to bless, or even lovingly convict a brother or a sister, is a very common example of the violation of this commandment.

I made a commitment long ago (I'm not suggesting here that I always succeed) to be careful to see when a conversation had degenerated to the place where my words were no longer a blessing. There are few things that grieve me more than when I have found that I used whatever knowledge or gifts God has given me for this empty pursuit.

Guilt and Manipulation

Using the name of God for the expressed purpose of manipulation or making others feel guilty is another violation of this commandment. To guilt somebody into doing what you desire, and using the Scriptures as your personal instrument to accomplish this, is a sin. It might be a husband or a father misusing his God-given authority. It might be a wife disrespecting her husband because of some personal “call” she has decided God has on her life.

I knew a young woman who was very involved in a church where people believed they were still receiving direct, unmediated revelation from God. A young man had written her a ten-page letter of revelation he had, supposedly, received straight from the Lord. In her effort to convince me of the legitimacy of these types of revelations, she showed me the letter, the content of which was almost all biblical. In fact, it seemed he just copied some Psalms. A few months later the man told the young lady that God had told him they ought to go to Hawaii together. That may have been a violation of this commandment.

Dishonest Gain

Perhaps the most popular and egregious violation of this commandment in modern western evangelicalism is to be found with televangelism. Robert Tilton, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Jesse DuPlantis³⁶ and Benny Hinn, to name a few, are, in my opinion, high profile violators of the third commandment. What we see here is the using of the name of God to make money.

With these particular “evangelists” we see people who have abandoned and adulterated the word of God, breeding upon the weak and the sick for financial gain. In the many years I worked with the elderly, it was common for the widows to come to me with mailers they had received from these ungodly organizations asking for money and promising blessings in return.

³⁶ I am reminded of a recent conversation between Duplantis and Copeland where they explained to each other why they needed private jets. A commercial airline was too full of demons and would obstruct and otherwise interfere with their communication with God. Add to that, now that they were famous, it would be an inconvenience to be recognized and have people randomly asking for prayer.

This commandment states, “**for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.**” I fear that the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who use the gospel for personal gain. I don’t mean to be unduly harsh, but read the words of Peter regarding these people:

They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man’s voice restrained the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever (2 Peter 2:13-17).

Hallowed Be Thy Name

When Jesus was asked how we should pray, His opening comment was that the name of God be “**hallowed**” (holy, sacred or set apart). We must take great care with the name of God. As we grow and mature in Christ, His name should become more and more *precious* to us—more and more *holy* to us—more and more *sacred*. He is God and there is no other. His name is to occupy a hallowed place in our hearts and on our lips.

If I may seek to place my finger upon our own spiritual nerves when it comes to the primary institution God has chosen to reveal His name: the church. I have to believe that one of violations of this commandment occurs within the hearts of God’s own people as we come to church; this problem stems from another issue—one involving our understanding of church itself.

In the holy congregation, we comfortably walk in tardy. We allow ourselves to be distracted by what happened this morning or what might take place this afternoon. We wonder if the service will run smoothly and if we will like the songs that are chosen. Will the pastor be entertaining, and how will I be enriched by the whole event? Don’t misunderstand me; at a certain level there may be some

legitimacy to these expectations. All who are involved in leading should seek to be excellent.

Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts (Psalm 33:3).

David was said to be...

...prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the LORD is with him (1 Samuel 16:18).

Paul viewed himself in a ministerial sense as...

...a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it (1 Corinthians 3:10).

Apollos was said to be...

...an eloquent (*logios*-learned, cultured, skilled in knowledge) man, competent in the Scriptures...being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus (Acts 18:24, 25).

And to be sure, the apostle taught that in the church...

...all things should be done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Those who lead should be prayerful, thoughtful, deliberate, seeking to excel to the best of our God-given, Spirit-gifted ability. We should know Who it is we are serving, and our preparation and desire for a skillful presentation should govern our hearts.

The Upper Room

But this desire to know the august nature of the One who has called us to Himself in the gathering of His people is not restricted to those who lead. In a sense, we are all cast members in a production

where God is the singular audience. If we are willing to critique those who lead in singing, how well would do if critiqued in our own participation in singing? If we are willing to critique the prayers and the sermon, how well would we do if we were critiqued on how we listened and prayed along?

And just in case this notion causes us to view God as some sort of prima donna or worldly critic or fickle despot commandeering a theatre and demanding to be entertained, let us consider the upper room.

I wonder how our hearts would be affected if we were invited into the upper room the day before the cross to hear the words of Christ as He instituted in the Lord's Supper in anticipation of His own crucifixion. Ponder for a moment how we might approach that room—what we might be thinking of as we sat in that room.

At what point would we begin to weep or fear? At what point would we begin to stop thinking about ourselves? At what point would we cease being critics? At what point would we begin to realize that no matter how hard we try, we simply cannot dispense with our selfishness in the face of such love and grace? Would our hands tremble as we held the cup, realizing our need for it, yet also our unworthiness of it?

I am not seeking to point fingers any further than at my own heart. When I consider that I have made an effort, even my best effort, at appreciating this holy event and how far short I truly come from recognizing what God is doing among His people when they gather, I can come to no other conclusion than the reality that I am a law-breaker. And my peace in this holy gathering is not found in my own excellence, nor even in worship, but it is found in the One who has called us into His presence.

For what vain and empty reasons have we entered into His holy sanctuary today? Has this law revealed the depth of our sin before a holy God? If I were in the upper room, what would the next day be like? Would I gaze upon the cross more resolute about my need for it? Would I plunge myself headlong into the sufficient work of Jesus Christ the righteous, who never had a profane, idle, or wandering thought concerning the name of His Father?

The bad news is, we have no idea how cavernous and empty we are when it comes to properly handling the Name of God. The good news is we have a Savior who kept this commandment without flaw.

When we place our trust in Him, His righteousness becomes our righteousness.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What is meant by ‘the name of God’?
2. How does God reveal His name?
3. What are some things the third commandment forbids?
4. Is it only wrong to use God’s name in profanity or cussing?
5. What are some ways we see God’s name being made common?
6. Discuss one-upmanship, guilt-trips and dishonest gain.
7. How can this commandment be violated on Sunday mornings?
8. How do we respond to our failure in keeping this commandment?

Part Nine: The Fourth Commandment, A

Exodus 20:8-11

March 25, 2018

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it (Exodus 20:8-11).

Personal Growth

Personal growth is the rage. In the same way the Beatles hired gurus, today people hire personal analysts, personal trainers, personal dietitians, personal psychics, etc., to aid in personal discipline and development. It's very important to us to improve our personal lives. Nestled within the boundaries of western Christendom lays this same emphasis. We call it *personal spiritual growth*. We seek to develop and augment our personal relationship with Jesus.

I will occasionally hear from Christians who are feeling distant from God or feel stale in their faith or some such description of the *feel* of their relationship with God. I empathize. I think Jesus empathizes. There are numerous methods we can employ to address this issue.

Quiet times can be very valuable for the growing Christian. Personal alone time with God and meditation (thoughtful examination of His word) is critical. Small-groups are also a valuable tool in personal spiritual growth. We need to have intimate relationships with those to whom we can confess our sins, friends who will hold our feet to the fire! As the Proverbs so indicate, **“Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend” (Proverbs 27:6).**

Weekly Bible studies, prayer meetings, acts of mercy toward widows and orphans, seminars, conferences, even pilgrimages (where we can examine the historical significance of the events of our faith), can all be useful in boosting us in spiritual maturity. I don't say this for any kind of self-promotion, but I have in the past, and still do, engage in many of these types of activities on a regular basis. I certainly hope you all do as well. But I know for me, I missed the obvious for much of my Christian life. There was something else; something very significant that God tells us is a gift from Him designed for us (Mark 2:27). Ezekiel writes of it this way:

Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I *am* the LORD who sanctifies them (Ezekiel 20:12).

As we conclude our study of the first table of the Ten Commandments (remembering that the first four are how we love God, the next six how we love men) let us consider the significance of the order.

The first commandment tells us that we are to have no other gods. The second commandment tells us we are not to alter, or have improper images of the true God. The third commandment mandates that we are to highly esteem the name of the true God. Now in the fourth commandment, we are instructed to dedicate ourselves to a practice designed to secure the purity of the first three.

The Ultimate Discipline

The keeping of the Sabbath is the ultimate discipline. Over and above all other disciplines, God has determined something richer and more valuable than our quiet times, conferences or seminars. He determined a *day*. On this day, we are to take our minds off of the mundane and the routine, and focus our thoughts and behaviors uniquely heavenward. It is in this respect that the Sabbath is to be kept holy or sacred (separate) from other days.

A fair question might be: 'Should not our thoughts continuously be heavenward?' Doesn't God own every day?

Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known *the difference* between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them (Ezekiel 22:26).

It would appear that we have lost the sense of what is holy or sacred or Sabbath. We assert that all our money belongs to God and therefore a tithe is no longer necessary. But there is a prayer of consecration for the tithe, i.e., a prayer that the tithe would be used for a sacred, separate use. The tithe actually belongs to God in such a way that He considers the withholding of it from Him as *stealing* (Malachi 3:8).

There is also a prayer of consecration for the elements of communion. They are sacred elements, which the Apostle Paul describes as a cup of blessing. Certainly, when we handle the communion elements we perceive them to be different than the hamburger we ordered at the drive-through.

God has determined that *certain things are sacred unto Himself*. I remember thinking that this concept only applied to the old covenant. But even in the old covenant (where God clearly marks things out as sacred) the earth was **“the Lord’s and all it contains” (Psalm 24:1)**. When we say there are things that are uniquely holy or are to be considered as belonging to God, we are not implying that all things don’t belong to Him. Dad may have bought, and therefore owns, everything in the house. But the letters he has saved from his wife are not to be touched! (They are, in one sense, set apart for him specifically.)

The Neglected Commandment

God associates Sabbath breaking with pure rebelliousness.

Thus says the LORD: ‘Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring *it* in by the gates of Jerusalem; nor carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, nor do any work, but hallow the Sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers. But they did not obey nor

incline their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear nor receive instruction' (Jeremiah 17:21-23).

Not granting for one second that there are no pragmatic benefits from keeping the Sabbath, neglecting or disregarding the Sabbath appears to be man's way of simply telling God we are not interested in being with Him unless He has something for us. Like the fruit in the Garden of Eden, the Sabbath appears morally neutral, so our neglect increases the rebellion all the more. Sinful man's answer to this commandment tends to be a simple and unqualified, 'No, I'm not interested; who can keep it anyway?'

Of the Ten Commandments, this may be the hardest to preach, and to accept, as a twenty-first century Christian and pastor. Speculating as to the reason, I can only say that as a people we have largely become Sabbath breakers. Furthermore, we have tailored our theology to accommodate Sabbath breaking.

For some reason today's church has concluded that there are only nine binding commandments (many churches resist the idea of commandments being obligatory at all!). When Ezra read from the books of the Law, the Israelites, who were in slavery, wept at its reading because they finally realized why they were in their present condition. They sought to repent. It is my prayer that we, as modern Christians will have the same heart. John Calvin states:

It is to be gathered without doubt from many passages, that the keeping of the Sabbath was a serious matter, since God inculcates no other commandment more frequently, nor more strictly requires obedience to any; and again, when He complains that He is despised, and that the Jews have fallen into extreme ungodliness, He simply says that His "Sabbaths are polluted," as if religion principally consisted in their observance.³⁷

In support of Calvin's statement we turn to Ezekiel.

Notwithstanding, the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, and were not careful to observe

³⁷ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. II, Harmony of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Baker Book House, reprinted 1993), p. 435.

My judgments, ‘which, if a man does, he shall live by them’; but they profaned My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them and fulfill My anger against them in the wilderness (Ezek. 20:21). ‘You have despised My holy things and profaned My Sabbaths’ (22:8).

It is worth noting that the fourth commandment is the longest and most detailed of all the commandments.

The idea behind the Sabbath is not merely kicking back one day in seven. There is an emphasis on both *cessation* of certain activities and *pursuit* of other activities. It is where we get the word sabbatical. When I was in high school, I had a world history teacher who used to take regular sabbaticals to Europe. She ceased from being a teacher and became a student for a period of months. As a result, we, as her students, received back a teacher superior to the one who left. This is what the Sabbath should accomplish in Christians.

Is There Still a Sabbath?

So, is there still a Sabbath? Was the Sabbath only for the age of law? Moses writes regarding the perpetuity of the Sabbath.

Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant (Exodus 31:16).

Before the Law

A brief explanation supporting the continuance of the Sabbath might be helpful. First, the idea that the Sabbath was only for the age of the law (the Mosaic covenant) is inconsistent with the fact that the Sabbath was observed prior to the law.

Before the Law was given we see in the record of Exodus the observance of the Sabbath. **“Now it came about on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one” (Exodus 16:22).** The instruction here was to gather twice as much on the sixth day so it wouldn’t be necessary to violate the Sabbath.

The law was given in Exodus 20 so we clearly see the observance of the Sabbath wasn’t merely in the Mosaic Law. The commandment

also enjoins us to *remember* the Sabbath. This assumes a prior knowledge--a knowledge which dates back to creation itself when *God rested*.

In, and After the Law

Obviously we see the Sabbath in the Law, in the commandment we just read. The question remains: *Is there still to be the observance of the Sabbath in the new covenant?*

Jesus said in Matthew 12:8, “**For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.**” So as Dr. Bahnsen asked, “Is Jesus Lord of something that is dead?” Although the Sabbath had both ceremonial and civil significance (that is, it is part of the Levitical foreshadowing of Christ and our eternal Sabbath rest as well as having civil punishments) its inclusion in the Ten Commandments demonstrates that it is also moral in nature and therefore should be perpetual in observance.

Some would argue that the following verse abrogates (eliminates) the Sabbath:

Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ (Colossians 2:16,17).

Paul asserts that regarding a day, or not regarding a certain day, is a matter of Christian liberty (similar to eating or not eating food that had been sacrificed to idols). The natural and fair interpretation is that he means only those days which were in debate, and no others. We must understand that there were other ‘sabbath days’ (Sabbath in the above passage *sabbaton* is plural). There were ‘sabbath days’ that were unique to the nation of Israel that were not in force prior to the Mosaic administration. They were sabbath days which foreshadowed the work of, and rest in, Christ. These types of sabbath days are no longer in force. These were Sabbaths which separated Israel from the surrounding nations—they were abrogated in the New and international Covenant. But we should not read this to think Paul is eliminating one of the Ten Commandments!

No Sabbath?

I think it is a mistake to interpret the apostle's words as to leave the New Testament church no Sabbath at all, in any shape. After the experience of all ages has shown that a Sabbath rest was the natural and necessary means essential to religious welfare, was the New Testament Church stripped more bare or left more poor than all preceding dispensations?

Paradise had enjoyed its Sabbath, though needing it less. The patriarchal saints enjoyed it. Abraham enjoyed it. Israel, under the more burdensome tutelage of the law, enjoyed it. But now that the last, the fullest, the most gracious and blessed dispensation of all has come, would it be that this blessed institution is now taken away? It seems unreasonable to accept such an exposition of the apostle's meaning. The Sabbath is not so much an *abrogated* commandment as it is a *neglected* commandment.

In the same way that neglecting prayer, alone time with God, Bible study and other means that God has supplied for His glory and our benefit would have negative consequences, neglecting the Lord's Day has had dire consequences at every level of humanity.

Assuming there is a Sabbath and that obeying the Sabbath yields great blessings, the questions remain: "How are we to *approach* Sabbath keeping? What *day* is the Sabbath? What are the *reasons* for the Sabbath? What is, and what is not, *allowed* on the Sabbath? What is our *focus* on the Sabbath? Where will *ignoring* the Sabbath lead? Where will *keeping* the Sabbath lead?"

We will address these questions in our next meeting.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What are some more popular methods of personal spiritual growth?
2. How is the Sabbath a method of growth for the Christian?
3. Discuss the concept of things being holy. Are there things that don't belong to God? Then why does He seem to indicate that certain things belong to Him?
4. Why do you suppose the Sabbath is such a neglected commandment?
5. Discuss Calvin's comment and how it relates to the passage from Ezekiel.
6. When did the Sabbath begin? Is there still a Sabbath? What are different aspects of the Sabbath?

Part Ten: The Fourth Commandment, B

Exodus 20:8-11

April 8, 2018

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it (Exodus 20:8-11).

Review

In review, we have discussed the following regarding the Sabbath:

- It is for God's own glory and for our benefit as His children.
- It is the ultimate discipline in our pursuit of piety.
- Losing a proper pursuit of the Sabbath will result in the diminishing of the first three commandments.
- Abandoning the Sabbath will incapacitate us from keeping the next six commandments.
- The first four commandments are God's transcription for how we ought to love Him.

The argument of the continuance of the Sabbath was made:

- By observing that it existed *before* the law (Moses).
- It existed *during* the law of Moses.
- That Jesus referred to Himself as the Lord of the Sabbath in the New Testament implies its continuation in the New Covenant.

The New Testament references that seemed to downplay the Sabbath were referring to sabbath days that were unique to Israel rather than *the* Sabbath which existed before Israel.

Sabbath Keeping

Assuming there is a Sabbath and that obeying the Sabbath is honoring to God and yields great blessings, how are we to approach Sabbath keeping? What day is the Sabbath? Should the Sabbath be pursued as an individual discipline? What are the reasons for the Sabbath? What is, and what is not, allowed on the Sabbath? What is our focus on the Sabbath? Where will ignoring the Sabbath lead? Where will keeping the Sabbath lead?

What Day is the Sabbath?

In the old covenant the Sabbath was the seventh day of the week, which was Saturday. **“Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb” (Matthew 28:1).** Saturday was the Sabbath and Sunday was considered the first day of the week. This is verified in Mark. **“Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen” (Mark 16:2).**

With this before us why does the church meet on Sunday rather than Saturday? One reason is because *the New Testament church gathered on Sunday*. **“And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread” (Acts 20:7a).** The early, new covenant, church met on the first day opposed to the seventh day,

which was the Old Testament Sabbath (on the seventh day, the Lord rested). Again we see in 1 Corinthians:

NOW concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come (1 Corinthians 16:1,2).

Add to this the events surrounding Thomas in the Gospel of John. Jesus appeared to the disciples directly after the resurrection on **“the first day of the week” (John 20:19)**, which was Sunday. Thomas was not with them (John 20:24). In the well-known portion of the Gospel, Thomas demands to see and touch Jesus to affirm their claims of His resurrection (John 20:25). This takes place **“eight days later” (John 20:26)**. Why is this significant?

In Scripture, any portion of a day counts as a day. Jesus first appeared to the disciples on Sunday. Eight days later would be the next Sunday. Had they continued the Old Covenant observation of a Saturday Sabbath, they would have met seven days later.

Sunday was the day our Lord rose from the dead. From that day forth, the church recognized the Sabbath to be the day of Christ’s resurrection – *the Lord’s Day*. To be sure, there are arguments made in favor of a Saturday Sabbath. Towards this, I believe there should be a charitable spirit. At the same time, there is a strong argument both historically and biblically for a Sunday Sabbath.

An Individual Discipline

Christians may embrace the principle, or spirit, of the Sabbath, but merely apply it personally and in a solitary fashion. But the commandment is to the *covenant people* of God, and is to be applied universally. The command involves you, your household, your servants (which could include anyone who might serve you, i.e. waiters at restaurants), your animals and even strangers. The problem with the Sabbath being on multiple days and pursued on an individual basis is one of corporate recognition within God’s covenant people of a day that is His.

One might say that Thursday works best for me but that falls short of the people of God recognizing one day that is holy unto the Lord. It's the Lord's Day, not the Lord's two hours; not to mention that we are to recognize the Sabbath as a body, not merely as individuals.

As our children grow older, we find it more and more difficult to get them all together for a meal. We have four children we look forward to seeing them. Although we enjoy them individually, there is an increased sense of joy when they all come together for special occasions. In like manner, it is a glory to God for the church universal to recognize this commandment in harmony.

Reasons for the Sabbath

What is the reason for the Sabbath? Jesus, speaking in Mark 2:27 states: "**The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.**" It is the ultimate discipline and is designed for our benefit. There are some 200 allusions to the Sabbath and what it is for. Among these reasons are:

- To commemorate the work of Creation (Exodus 20:11).
- To preserve the knowledge of the only living and true God. There was a time when Sunday was quite different than all other days of the week. As a child I remember Sunday being a day when all the stores were closed. Unfortunately, I was never told why. The reason was the effect the Sabbath had in preserving within our culture an understanding and respect for God. You probably have relatives you never visit. In failing to do so you are making an indelible mark upon your children that these relatives are not important to you. When we ignore the Sabbath, we give the same message regarding Christ.
- It is a day when we turn our thoughts toward that which is unseen and spiritual (Luke 4:16).
- It is a day that is set aside for instruction and worship of God (Luke 4:16).

- It is a day of rest and cessation from normal daily activity (Nehemiah 13:15-19).

Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed (Exodus 23:12).

- It foreshadows our ultimate rest in God (Hebrews 4:9).

All of these things are in the best interests of man and the glory of God. God's design in instituting the Sabbath was purely a humane one. God intends it, not as a burdensome ceremony to gall the necks of men to no benevolent purpose, but as a means of promoting the true welfare of the human race.

From a purely practical and pragmatic standpoint the question must be asked: 'Would the human race, would the church, be richer or poorer by observing one day in seven to the Lord?' It would be difficult to answer 'no' to this question.

Allowed on the Sabbath

Now we spend a moment on the very practical question of how the Sabbath is to be observed. What is allowed and not allowed? There is perhaps no commandment where the church is more tempted to be anti-nominal (anti law) or Pharisaical (imposing laws where there are no laws)

Numerous times Jesus and His followers are accused of being Sabbath breakers. This happened when they picked the heads of grain to eat (Matthew 12:1,2). It happened when Jesus healed a man with a withered hand (Matthew 12:9-14).

The way Jesus responded to these accusations, it must be noted, was not to argue that the Sabbath no longer existed in the New Covenant. Rather, He taught that the religious community had perverted what it meant to keep the Sabbath. The drift of Jesus' response to the accusations was to show that the *keeping of the Sabbath allows for acts of necessity and mercy.*

Jesus healed on the Sabbath. He indicated that it is proper to retrieve your sheep from a pit on the Sabbath. Firemen, policemen, the man who keeps the electricity and gas flowing to your homes and to hospitals, etc. are all in compliance with the Sabbath.

Not Allowed on the Sabbath

The keeping of the Sabbath means cessation from our normal workaday week. Our behavior should be markedly different than the rest of the week. Question 117 of the Westminster Larger Catechism states that *Christians are to rest from worldly employments and recreations* (Exodus 16:25-28; Nehemiah 13:15-22).

Whether this forbids a walk in the park or tossing a ball back and forth to your three-year-old I can't say. The context of "recreations" (a part of the secondary standard that many pastors take exception to in many denominations who hold to the WCF) was likely a response to the king who had set up certain games that had keeping people from church as their expressed design. Whether or not our "recreations" today fall into the same historical category, it certainly means avoiding all unnecessary commerce and missing church on a regular basis because of sports or other activities.

The Sabbath Focus

What is the Sabbath focus? What are we actually seeking to achieve? The Sabbath is a day we are to set aside for the corporate worship of God. The Gospel of Luke records that Jesus, "**as His custom was,...went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day...**" (Luke 4:16). The keeping of the Sabbath means that as a covenant people, and as individuals, we have one full day, which is set apart from all other days, to fix our thoughts uniquely upon Christ. Fulfilling this call on our lives would be impossible if we were engaged in our normal duties.

Natural questions arise like: *What does this look like? Do we read the Bible all day? Pray all day? Talk theology all day?* Not necessarily. The focus of the Sabbath can be achieved by both *what we do* and *what we don't do*. In the same way fasting (something we don't do, i.e. eat) reminds us of a focus on prayer and piety, when we

decide not to do something on the Sabbath (like go shopping) the decision not to go shopping reminds us of what day it is.

Where Will Ignoring the Sabbath Lead?

What are the consequences for neglecting the Sabbath? To a society that neglects the Sabbath (though these were “sabbaths” they still have a similar design and obligation in the Old Covenant) it is written:

Notwithstanding, the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, and were not careful to observe My judgments, ‘which, if a man does, he shall live by them’; but they profaned My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them and fulfill My anger against them in the wilderness (Ezekiel 20:21).

Basic observations show us:

- The family will suffer for lack of unity and worship together.
- Work will increase because the standard will require working an extra day. In order to ‘keep up’, working on the Sabbath will become a necessity.
- Time for solace and reflection will decrease and people will quit thinking about why they’re doing what they’re doing altogether. I was a youth pastor for many years. During this time I used to run week-long camps, let’s call them ‘Sabbath camps’ for this purpose. These weeks were a great time of soul-searching by both the teenagers and the counselors. We were plucked out of our routine, and were required to think about life and God and deeper things. Honoring the Sabbath would make this a regular thing in the life of the Christian.
- As a society (like a family member we used to visit on a regular basis but now seldom visit), we will cease

acknowledging God altogether and find that we have mushroomed a generation that has little regard for God. This will inevitably lead to evil thoughts, deeds and, little doubt, some form of judgment.

Some of the greatest enemies of the Sabbath are things that seem so innocent in nature – soccer leagues, little league, professional sports, etc. If the Sabbath is repeatedly violated in order to cater to events scheduled on Sundays, an indelible message will be sent to the next generation: A message indicating what we think is genuinely important.

Where Will Keeping The Sabbath Lead?

If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob. The mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 58:13, 14).

Isn't this an interesting commandment? God is commanding us to *rest!* Seems like it should be so easy. All that stuff we're so busy with all week—don't be busy with it today! Go to church, have a time of prayer, reflection, fellowship and enjoyment of your faith.

We oftentimes speak of surrendering to Jesus, as if it's an easy thing to do. But it's much easier to be the victor than the one who surrenders. Surrendering to Jesus (which is ultimately obeying His commands and resting in the results) may be the most difficult thing in the world to do. Keeping the Sabbath may fall into the same category.

Resting in the Sabbath Keeper

As one who sees the value of the Sabbath and does seek to keep it, I must confess (as I would hope every one of you would) that I fail miserably. I am not confessing this to justify my continued Sabbath

breaking, as if God can be mocked; but the Sabbath, like any other commandment, is utilized by God to reveal to us just how sinful we are. At times I'll hear people mock the Sabbath by saying things like, "Who can possibly keep this?"

All this as if our failure to keep the Sabbath is an indictment against the Sabbath instead of against *us*! "It's impossible, who can do it?" may be a true lament. But the Sabbath, like any other commandment, should push us in humility, in a certain direction—resting in the Sabbath, in an ultimate sense, means resting in the One Sabbath Keeper.

Jesus kept the Sabbath perfectly. He gives the free gift of His perfect Sabbath keeping—His perfect law keeping—to all who in sincerity call upon His name. He has fulfilled all righteousness. When we trust in Him we become, in the eyes of the Father, the righteousness of God. It is in this, what the Scriptures call the Gospel, that we take rest and rejoice.

If we are a people who desire to ride on the heights of the land and feast on the inheritance of God's provision, we must find the purity of our Sabbath keeping in something or Someone wholly detached from our own efforts. This is found by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ the righteous.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. When did the Sabbath begin? Is there still a Sabbath? What are different aspects of the Sabbath?
2. What day is the Sabbath?
3. What is wrong with the idea of multiple Sabbaths?
4. Discuss the reasons for the Sabbath.
5. What things are allowed, or not allowed, on the Sabbath? What is the focus?
6. Where will ignoring the Sabbath lead? Have you seen any of this in your lifetime?
7. Where will keeping the Sabbath lead? Why do you suppose?
8. What does it mean to rest in the Sabbath Keeper?

Part Eleven:

The Fifth Commandment, A

Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16

April 15, 2018

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you (Exodus 20:12).

Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you (Deuteronomy 5:16).

Preface

Being raised during the turbulent times of the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement, a theme surfaced. Billboards, bumper-stickers and buttons displayed the words: *Question Authority*. Later, a friend of mine who had fought in the Vietnam War and later become a police officer in one of the more troubled portions of Los Angeles put forth a response. He donned a t-shirt with a picture of a police car. The car was facing the viewer with both doors open. Behind each door stood policemen with shotguns aimed right at you. The words on the shirt read: *Never Question Authority*. Somewhere between these two dispositions lies biblical truth.

Holiness and Direction

Once again, as with the Sabbath command, we see a neglected, yet highly valuable or profitable commandment in the Fifth Commandment. In disregarding this commandment we miss one of the primary methods by which we obtain both holiness and direction.

THEN the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall

be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father, and you shall keep My sabbaths; I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 19:1-3).

The general principle of duty enjoined in this commandment is that we should feel and act in a becoming manner toward not only our parents (although they are the first authority God has created) but to all who God puts in positions of authority in our lives.³⁸ We see the terms ‘father’, ‘lord’, ‘master’, etc. given to people who have seats of leadership over us (Isaiah 49:23; Genesis 4:20-22; 45:8).

First and foremost, we are to regard this commandment as applying to our parents. But it applies to different spheres as well. It applies to the various authority figures in our lives, e.g., husbands, employers, policemen, civic leaders, elders, etc.

Acknowledging and honoring authority is beneficial on numerous levels: 1) We can more accurately assess the course of direction God desires for us in our lives since God uses people in authority to guide us. 2) We move in the direction of personal holiness (as well as long life and well-being) which is a promise attached to the command. 3) We give honor and glory to God, for He is the one who has established all authority (Romans 13:1). And similar to all other commandments, the blessings of obedience go beyond our comprehension.

Weightiness

Let’s first look at the spirit of the command. The Hebrew word for ‘honor’ is *kabad*’ or *kabed*’. The word literally means to be weighty, or to be heavy. It conveys the concept of a ‘weighty’ person in society, someone who is honorable, impressive, worthy of respect.³⁹

In the sixties we might have said in regard to a certain person, “That guy is really heavy!” This meant that he/she was a person of great wisdom, whose opinion should be highly regarded. This is how we are to think of our parents and other authorities in our lives. It is not merely an outward submission, but we are to pursue this

³⁸ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprint 1989), p. 348.

³⁹ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Moody Press, 1980), p. 426.

disposition in a very genuine and heartfelt way. There should be a certain sense of awe in our attitudes.

There is one major component attached to this commandment which should aid in our desire to keep it—God picks the leaders in our lives.

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves (Romans 13:1, 2).

We certainly shouldn't read a passage like this as if those in authority are automatically right in whatever decision they make. That being said, it may be sobering to consider that we have, or had, the parents, president, pastor, employer, etc., God ordained specifically for us from eternity past.

And the Scriptures indicate that there is a great blessing in honoring authority, which we should not neglect.

Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old. Buy truth, and do not sell it, get wisdom and instruction and understanding (Proverbs 23:22).

My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck (Proverbs 1:8, 9).

How does honoring work itself out in a material or applicable manner? What does honoring someone entail?

Beware of Our Instincts

A good place to start in all of this is to be aware, and wary, of our instincts. I can almost hear many saying, "You don't know my parents! They're thorny, meddlesome, unreasonable and argumentative." Naturally, those in authority should labor to make this role easy for those under them. Paul challenges parents not to

“provoke” their children (Ephesians 6:4). Those who have authority will give an account to God for the way they used or abused their God-given authority (Hebrews 13:17).

At the same time, we don't see conditions attached to this commandment (to be sure, a command to do something sinful would require submission to the higher authority of God's word). The commandment does not say, “Honor your father and mother if...they are wise, good, kind, responsible, and caring.” Think of the biblical examples: When Peter said, **“honor the king” (1 Peter 2:17)**, Nero was likely king. And as bad as people think our present leaders are, Nero was worse.

When Samuel became old and made his sons judges over Israel, the elders of Israel seemed to have a justifiable complaint, leading them to ask for a king. After all, Samuel's sons sought dishonest gain, took bribes and perverted justice (1 Samuel 8:3).

In one way or another, God would have judged the sons of Samuel. But the lack of willingness of the elders to acknowledge even sinful judges caused God to say, **“...they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them (1 Sam. 8:7)**. We must acknowledge that God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick.

Pray

Another way we can honor those in authority is by praying for them.

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence (1 Tim 2:1,2).

It makes all the sense in the world to pray for those in authority over you. In order to live a quiet and peaceable life, we should pray God would sanctify those who make decisions that affect us. It is also an opportunity to play a godly role in the life of a person. We often view our authorities as only that. We forget they are people with wives and children and feelings and weaknesses. (I remember

how odd it was for me to see my high school science teacher at the grocery store. I wondered what he was doing there!)

Not Anxious to Dishonor

We should not be anxious to expose the weaknesses of those in authority. Even though Noah was, generally speaking, a righteous man, the Scriptures record a serious indiscretion with him in Genesis 9:20-23. He became drunk and naked. Ham, the father of what became an ungodly nation, went out to spread the news of his father's unseemly behavior. His other two sons Shem (the line of the promise) and Japheth sought to cover their father's shameful act. Shem and Japheth didn't say, "See, I knew the old man wasn't as righteous as he pretended to be!" Theirs was an act of respect.

Many years ago I was leading a Bible study and someone asked me how many people there were in church on the previous Sunday. I didn't know exactly but I gave a rough estimate. A lady, who was a member of our church at the time, took the opportunity to compare me to David when Satan inspired him to count his troops (1 Chronicles 21:1). I thought that was a bit rough.

It is probably not a healthy disposition to be looking for opportunities to ridicule and expose those in authority. There is a proper method for dealing with the sin in another person's life, whether an authority figure, equal or underling. But we must be careful to avoid a critical attitude toward those whom our Master Shepherd has placed as under-shepherds in our lives.

Proper Respect

And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death (Exodus 21:15).

For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death' (Matthew 15:4).

How important is it for us to properly respect those God has positioned to superintend our lives? To physically assault, or even verbally assault them was to be punished by death. Seems harsh!

Until we consider that the breakdown of godly hierarchy, especially starting with mother and father, is generally the beginning of massive cultural decay.

It must be added that passages like this don't condone vigilantism. It is not up to individuals to take the law into their own hands and start killing people who violate God's laws. Until a society becomes so sanctified as to enact laws consistent with the Scriptures, we should seek to move in that direction in an incremental way, recognizing that God is patient. Nonetheless, passages like the ones above should reveal how important this commandment is to the well-being of society.

Obedience

There is no separating the idea of honoring the God-ordained position that your parents have in your life with the willingness to obey them.

CHILDREN, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH (Ephesians 6:1-3).

Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord (Colossians 3:20).

We see in these passages that Paul equates obedience with honor. We also see the example of Jesus Himself in Luke 2:51 where He was "subject" to His parents.

The Obedient Son

Next time we will consider more aspects of this commandment. But before concluding this morning, we all must admit failure. There is only one Son who has always done His Father's bidding; He is the Son of God. He may have been considered a rebel and a revolutionary, as were His followers, but this was only because the world was in rebellion against His Father. His

Father loved the world, nonetheless, and therefore prepared a body for Him. Consider the words in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the submission of the Son to the Father and the subsequent blessing to those who respond by grace through faith:

Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come— In the volume of the book it is written of Me—To do Your will, O God.’ Previously saying, ‘Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and *offerings* for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure *in them*’ (which are offered according to the law), then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all* (Hebrews 10:5-10).

Our hope lies not so much in our own submission but in the one who submitted Himself on our behalf, Jesus Christ the righteous. Salvation is found in Him. Praise His name.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Discuss the idea of trusting an infallible God working through a fallible person.

2. How is honoring your father and mother connected to the pursuit of holiness?

3. Does the fifth commandment only apply to parents? Why would we also apply it to other authority figures?

4. What are three things acknowledging these authority figures will accomplish in our lives?

5. Discuss the word 'honor'.

6. Why does it seem difficult to pray for those in authority over us?

7. Discuss exposing the iniquity of leaders. Why do we desire to expose rather than cover?

8. Why was there a death penalty for striking or cursing a parent? Does that seem harsh to you?

9. Is obedience to parents necessary?

10. Can you think of other ways to honor?

11. Discuss some of the responsibilities of leaders.

Part Twelve:

The Fifth Commandment, B

Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16

April 29, 2018

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you (Exodus 20:12).

Review

In review, we discussed that the Fifth Commandment is a much-neglected commandment wherein we forfeit holiness and direction. It is a summary command regarding all those in positions of authority, not merely fathers and mothers. The means by which we honor those in authority include: acknowledging their God-given position; praying for them; not being anxious to expose their iniquities; showing proper respect and obedience.

Dishonor and Destruction

As I spoke about this in my Tuesday morning Bible study (a Bible study at a retirement home consisting, mostly, of women over 70) all the women had quite a strong reaction to the violation of this commandment. They're viewed as antiquated and valueless regarding their opinions and neglected, in terms of care.

A question did come up in the question and answer time at our church regarding whether or not honoring our parents includes caring for them as they grow older. The answer to this question is an unequivocal 'yes'.

Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God (1 Timothy 5:3, 4).

Though Paul highlight widows, there is a responsibility children have to **“repay their parents”** *amoibas*. The simple idea conveyed here is that when the children could not take care of themselves, the parents did. When the parents can no longer take care of themselves, the children provide the necessary aid and comfort. This is not to suggest that children cannot make use of nursing homes or other resources to facilitate this care.

Depending upon the level of need, it can be almost impossible for an adult child to simultaneously hold a job and watch after a parent who may be suffering from an illness that causes them to stray or treat an illness which needs some higher level of expertise. At the same time, the use of outside resources should not be an excuse to abandon the elderly.

Blessings and Afflictions

The Apostle Paul notes that the Fifth Commandment is the **“first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”** (Ephesians 6:2,3). With this verse in mind, it would do us well to take a brief look at the Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 19 to examine how our obedience to the law of God, in terms of blessings and afflictions, is best understood.

6. Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly; discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts, and lives; so as, examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin, together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of his obedience. It is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin: and the threatenings of it serve to show what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law. The promises of it, in like manner, show them God's

approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof: although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works. So as, a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law; and, not under grace.

7. Neither are the forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the gospel, but do sweetly comply with it; the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done.

There is more here than what we can thoroughly examine now. Suffice it to say that the great blessing of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone should never be understood as if there are no consequences for sin “in this life”. The curses that come upon a society that dishonors their fathers and mothers are numerous.

The eye that mocks a father, and scorns a mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it” (Proverbs 30:17).

Degrading Parents

The modern psychological method of blaming and degrading parents is one of the great curses on our land. It is no mystery that many of the problems people have are due to the sins of the parents. This is a biblical fact. But the solution (or the healing) does not lie in dishonoring our parents no matter how guilty they may be.

If our parents did us wrong, it was because they followed their own desires and were under the influence of ungodly wisdom and their own ungodly natures. When we dishonor them, we are following their example of doing what we want to do rather than what God has called us to do.

Not only this, but when our children see us dishonor our parents, they are very likely going to imitate us. In this respect we are pronouncing a curse upon our own heads. In short, if we dishonor our

parents, we are tilling the ground in the hearts of our children, which may lead to them in turn dishonoring us.

Destruction of Households

The rebellious neglect of this commandment destroys households, the very fabric of any culture. Ultimately this behavior plunges a society into violence, disease, disorder, misery, and premature death. Paul writes of the promise (with the New Testament alteration from land to earth).

Perhaps you are part of a long line of children who have been abused, mistreated or just not brought up well. If you, as a good and godly person, are willing to break the cycle and honor your parents, the promise is a good and long life. The breaking of this curse requires just one Spirit-filled (Ephesians 5:18) Christian to overcome his selfish and ungodly tendencies. Descendants who you will never meet will benefit as a result of their godly ancestor⁴⁰.

It has been said that the kinship of children to parents is a critical one. It is the relationship determined by God's providence where the faithful and general performance of the duties of children to parents, ensures (as far as any earthly means can) general health, peace, prosperity and welfare in the life of God's people. If we are seeking to be godly and holy, we must seek to honor our fathers and mothers, even if we don't think they're as worthy of our respect as they ought to be.

Absalom's Rebellion

2 Samuel 15 records the story of David's son Absalom. Absalom was guilty of rebelling against his king and father David. Absalom would get up early and place himself by the gate of the city. When people with issues (specifically lawsuits) would come in, Absalom would endear himself to them. He would tell them they have a good case but the king has no deputy to hear them. In other words, the king's administration is inept. In verse six we learn that by doing this, Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

⁴⁰ This promise isn't always individual or immediate. But there are general blessings that come upon a people who obey the commands of God.

Eventually there came a great conspiracy and Absalom sought to seize the king's throne. Many of the Psalms that are written by David were written during this heart-wrenching encounter with his rebellious son. The kingdom suffered greatly, and Absalom ended up dead.

We should avoid seeking to obtain authority that is not properly ours. Furthermore we must all be cautious of people who seek to steal our hearts by bad-mouthing those in authority over us.

The Limits

Understanding the limits of man's authority is one of the reasons we are studying the Ten Commandments. Peter and the other apostles give us an example of when it is not only okay but necessary to defy human authority. Religious authorities had given Peter an order:

Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:28,29).

In order to imitate Peter's conviction it is necessary to first know the law of God. To accurately obey God over man requires specifically knowing what God requires of us in the way of obedience. Knowing God's law is the only way we can ascertain whether or not there is a conflict between man's ways and God's ways. There is only one absolute authority: God. Any lesser authority (in this case we are discussing parents) who would have you violate God's law must be disobeyed.

Conflicting (God-ordained) authorities, i.e., husbands, civil authorities, pastors, etc. can also take precedent over each other depending on jurisdictions. If a policeman pulls you over and tells you to get out of the car and your mom says not to, you must listen to the policemen.

The Authority of Christ

Since we've been speaking of authority, I would like to conclude with the most authoritative statement ever made. And it was made by Jesus Christ:

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18).

At first glance the Bible appears to be contradictory in terms of who we should view as the god of this earth or age. Some passages seem to indicate Satan as the **“god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4)** and that **“the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19)**. Yet here Jesus claims **“all authority”** and John conveys that Jesus is **“ruler over the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1:6)** and **“King of kings” (1 Timothy 6:16; Revelation 19:16)**.

The answer to this apparent dilemma is actually fairly simple. When a person speaks of their higher power, is it fair to say their higher power is their god? But would it not necessarily be accurate to conclude that their higher power is, in fact, God? That the whole world is under the influence of a false god merely means that the world is engaging in mass idolatry and in no way detracts from who the true God is and what His rightful place happens to be in His creation.

So in this sense it is only accurate to refer to Satan as a god because of his influence over a sinful world. It would be a fatal error, however, to assign actual deity to Satan. He is a created being. He is not God. And even his power to hold the world under His influence was dealt a crushing blow at the cross, or to put it the Apostle Paul's way, He **“disarmed principalities and power, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it (the cross)”** (Colossians 2:15—parenthesis mine)

And since Jesus does have this authority, those who trust in Him can be assured with all confidence that wherever we are led by Christ in obedience to Him and whatever we face in life and our inevitable death, all enemies are defeated. *Jesus has all authority.*

We must herald this glorious news! We are not left at the mercy of subordinate powers and authorities. The glorious news is that there

is a God who reigns, who is all good, all powerful and ever gracious to those who call upon His Name. His arm is not too short to deliver from any calamity. His kingdom is a kingdom that shall not be destroyed.

Heaven and earth belong to Christ. Before He issues His call in our lives, He proclaims His power and authority over all things. What a blessing to know that unlike all earthly power, Jesus uses His power and authority to bring us safely into His own glorious and eternal kingdom!

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What are some of the blessings and afflictions accompanying this commandment?
2. Is it proper to degrade your parents if you think it will help you psychologically?
3. How will the neglect of this commandment affect households?
4. Should we honor leaders who don't seem worthy of honor?
5. Concerning rebellion, can you think of some examples of a modern day Absalom?
6. What are the limits of the authority, even godly leaders, have in your life?
7. Why is the authority of Christ such a blessing to us?

Part Thirteen: The Sixth Commandment, A

Exodus 20:13
May 6, 2018

You shall not murder (Exodus 20:13).

At Least I'm Not a Murderer

Of all the commandments, it seems that the sixth (You shall not murder) is the one most often used by people to exonerate themselves. How frequently people take comfort in the fact that they haven't actually murdered anyone in cold blood! As if this great act of virtue clears them from all wrong-doing before the eyes of God.

Jesus sheds a little extra light on the commandment in the Sermon on the Mount:

“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty *enough to go into the fiery hell*” (Matthew 5:21, 22).

Malice...Murder from the Heart

Jesus is teaching how the sixth commandment applies to the heart. In the eyes of God, our very thoughts of anger toward our brother make us guilty of murder and in danger of hell fire. It is this *murder* which comes *from the heart* that makes all men guilty. We

may be innocent before men,⁴¹ but we are all assuredly guilty before God.

This commandment forbids malice in all its degrees, in thought, word or deed. This becomes especially difficult regarding evil people with whom we come in contact or hear about. Similar to the distinctions we need to make regarding honoring parents who have done evil, we need to avoid a malicious disposition toward people in general who have done evil. We are speaking of people who may deserve excommunication or the death penalty—horrible people! Look at the person Jesus calls us to love:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘*You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.*’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-48).

His point is that there is nothing special or godly about loving lovable people. The willingness to pursue loving the unlovable (people who “curse, hate, spitefully use and persecute you”) tests and reveals the sincerity of our faith.

When Jesus says “**that you may be sons of your Father**” (Matthew 5:45), He is not suggesting we somehow earn or merit sonship by virtue of our level of success. He is saying that the way we seek to live will reveal who our Father is. We tend to imitate those who we admire most. The Father provides a sunrise and sends rain on the just and the unjust. In this respect, God does not discriminate. The ones who hate Him most are still given those things necessary to lead a good life. Our love for others should reflect this.

Read the penetrating words of John:

⁴¹ Innocent of the civil offense of murder.

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also (1 John 4:20, 21).

It has been said that it is easier to fake the first four commandments, because our false love of God will not be revealed until we have an audience with Him on the day of judgment. But the next six commandments (our love for our neighbor) contain things we get called out on when they’re lacking. But John’s sentiment in the above passage is that our love of our neighbor illuminates *whether or not we are truly loving God*.

But let us be clear. Love is not always passive. Loving our neighbor does not mean approving or endorsing the actions or behaviors of others. On the contrary, a failure to confront the ungodly behavior of others can be an act of gross negligence. But our confrontations should never be malicious.

There are times when anger is justified; malice is never acceptable. Malice is the desire to inflict evil to gratify wicked passion. Charles Hodge explains:

Our Lord is said to have been angry; but in Him there was no malice or resentment. He was the Lamb of God; when He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; He prayed for his enemies even on the cross.⁴²

Love But Not Like?

If I might, I will now address the bedraggled “I love him, but I don’t have to like him” comment at this point. I think there are numerous inconsistencies with that statement. Generally, what people seem to mean by using this phrase is to say they love someone, and seek to act lovingly toward them, even though they find the person’s character or personality immoral or irritating.

But this seems to war against a biblical definition of love, which **“does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, bears, and endures all things” (1**

⁴² Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprinted 1989), p. 362.

Corinthians 13:5, 7). The *love-not-like* statement just seems to accommodate our own selfish and carnal desires. We all recognize that there are things about us, and others, that rub people the wrong way, but we're called to rise above that. The real issue isn't, 'Am I offended by someone's behavior?' but is 'our Father in heaven offended?' One is hard-pressed to find an example in Scripture of Jesus saying, "I love you but I don't like you."

Quick Reconciliations

Jesus gives a "**therefore**" following his initial instructions and warnings on the sixth commandment. He then teaches of quick reconciliations.

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny (Matthew 5:23-26).

We have to be careful in reading a passage like this. To read it in a wooden way would be paralyzing. If I am worshiping in church or going to the Lord's Table or giving an offering (or some form of bringing my gift to the altar) and think hard enough, I can always find someone who might have something against me. If it is necessary for us to perfectly restore every last single relationship prior to worship, worship will never happen.

What Jesus is teaching is that grievances between brothers and sisters in Christ are not to be left unsettled. We should not think that it is acceptable to be at odds with our brothers and sisters in Christ while we are worshipping God. We often compare our love relationship with God to a love relationship we have with people. This comparison can be quite misleading. It is hypothetically possible for me to love my wife and hate my neighbor, and do both with a certain level of consistency.

However, I cannot love God and hate my neighbor for the simple reason that my neighbor is the possession of my God. My neighbor is made in the image of God, and to show contempt for my neighbor (even my non-Christian neighbor) is to show contempt for God.

Resist Beginnings

Among other things, Jesus is teaching to resist beginnings. Most great works of evil begin as small works of evil. Paul exhorts the Ephesians not to give the devil a foothold (Ephesians 4:27). Once he has your foot, soon he will have your neck! Resist allowing yourself to entertain malicious thoughts toward others. Every malicious action began as a malicious thought.

Destroying the Image of God

It may be of interest to note that the primary violation contained in this commandment is not (so much) robbing someone of their life. This arguably would be under the umbrella of the eighth commandment (You shall not steal). The heinous act of killing someone involves holding in contempt that which was made in the image of God. The sixth commandment is a sin because man is defiling the very image of God when he takes another man's life. Listen to the reasoning behind the Bible's first declaration of capital punishment:

Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man (Genesis 9:6).

Murder is a capital offense because it is destroying and defiling that which was made in the image of God. There is no creature on earth quite like man. God has communicated to (or bestowed upon) men (to a limited extent) His very own attributes—attributes such as wisdom, logic, creativity, commitment, love, etc. When a man kills another man, he is defiling the one object on earth which most resembles God. Perhaps this is why the unjustified killing of the innocent is so appalling. The more innocent the victim, the more similar he is to God.

It can also be shown that when God is dis-acknowledged, death of the innocent will be on the increase. If man is not made in the image of God (and, therefore, considered to not be unique and worthy of protection) a society can come up with numerous reasons why it is better for certain people (people who seemingly fail to contribute to society) not to live.

We'd be foolish to ignore the pervasiveness of this in the world and in the culture in which we live. We see it in political agendas, in academia and in the indoctrination of our children.

Politically, it is almost shocking how quickly we forget recent history with a widespread acceptance of Communism in the marketplace of viable political ideas. It has been said:

Communism, at its heart is dependent upon Marxist driven atheism. It was the surgical and intentional extraction of the acknowledgement of the Triune God from the affairs of men that left politically amoral monsters in charge of the 20th century. It is not what these atheists believed that made them the horrifying nightmares that they were; it was what they refused to believe.

In the academic world, Darwin holds court over, and extricates, all who would dare to challenge it. The late British theologian J. Sidlow Baxter made a projection back in the 1970s:

Those who believe we evolved from the primordial slime have plotted a destination for themselves, and those who follow, to re-evolve back into the slime from whence they believe they came.

And in the indoctrination of our children, consider the insight and prognostications contained in the words of J. Gresham Machen:

When one considers what the public schools of America in many places already are—their materialism, their discouragement of any sustained intellectual effort, their encouragement of the dangerous pseudo-scientific fads of experimental psychology—one can only be appalled by the

thought of a commonwealth in which there is no escape from such a soul-killing system.⁴³

But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; all those who hate me love death (Proverbs 8:36).

Next Time

We will discuss next time the various ways we can obey this brief, yet powerful commandment. Does this commandment forbid the taking of life in every conceivable way regardless of the circumstances? Are there ways that we are violating this commandment on a regular basis that we are perhaps unaware of? How does our neglect or respect for this commandment flavor our thoughts regarding the fact that Jesus was executed on our behalf?

⁴³ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans) p. 13.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. To what extent can we take comfort that we are not murderers?
2. What is Jesus' take on the sixth commandment?
3. Define *malice*. Why is malice never good?
4. Where is the difficulty when we say we love God but hate our neighbor?
5. Does it make sense to love someone without liking them? Explain.
6. Discuss *resisting beginnings*.
7. What is the *primary* violation contained in this commandment?

Part Fourteen: The Sixth Commandment, B

Exodus 20:13

May 13, 2018

“You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13).

Review

Last week we discussed the commentary Jesus had regarding this commandment (Matthew 5:21, 22). Though we may not have actually, physically murdered anyone, our very words and thoughts make us guilty of this commandment before God.

The commandment forbids malice in all its degrees. Malice is the desire to inflict others governed by wicked or sinful passions—the desire to just want to stick it to somebody. We are called to love even the most unlovely and unlovable people. As difficult as this is, we are to make every effort to love others over and against our fleshly inclinations. In the same way the sunrise does not discriminate, our love should seek to extend universally.

We also learned that the primary offense in the violation of this commandment is that it contains a defilement of the only aspect of creation that was made in the image of God (Genesis 9:6). When the recognition of the uniqueness of humanness is disregarded, man is reduced to that which is dispensable. Or as the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement might suggest, the only hope for our planet is the “voluntary extinction of one species: Homo sapiens... us.”

In their defense, they are not suggesting murder. But their platform/movement does suggest that humans, so far from being a blessing and God’s image-bearers, are amoral parasites which need to go away. This may be a far-leaning position, but it is not extreme to recognize that the routine violations of this commandment find their genesis in a purposeful and self-conscious extrication of God (and the things of God) from our corporate moral conscience. *Those who hate God love death* (Proverbs 8:36).

This commandment, similar to all the commandments, ought to drive us to Christ. The law teaches us that we're sinners and the cross of Christ is the only sufficient answer to our dilemma before God.

This morning we will continue pursuing a fuller understanding of this commandment. We'll do this under the categories of what can be called *blatant murder*; then next time we will address *subtle murder*, the *justifiable taking of life* and finally how all of this informs our understanding of the *cross of Christ*.

Blatant Murder

Let us here examine the outward and civil aspects of the command—things we would consider blatant murder.

Pre-Meditated Murder

The first and most obvious infraction that we see regarding the sixth commandment is *pre-meditated murder*. Our judicial system's notion of premeditation is derived from Scripture.

...if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die (Exodus 21:14).

There are justifiable circumstances to take a life, which we will not go into at this point. There are also other mitigating circumstances such as manslaughter, negligence or momentary anger that receive a lesser punishment. There are numerous examples we can cite. Everything from drinking and driving, leaving a dangerous animal free and unsupervised (Exodus 21:29), not properly marking or providing a safety feature for some dangerous portion of your property (Deuteronomy 22:8), etc.

All these things would still fall under the umbrella of violating this commandment. To a higher degree, it is explicitly clear, however, that there should never be plans made to unjustifiably kill another person. Since there is at least general agreement on this, I won't labor the issue. There are other matters which are a bit more

difficult to grapple with that are quite prevalent in our society. It is these I will be addressing.

Suicide

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people, resulting in about 4,400 deaths per year (about 45,000 total), according to the CDC and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Suicide would fall into the category of the premeditated taking of an innocent (by *innocent*, I don't mean sinless but instead being innocent of a capital crime) life.

Suicide is the killing of an innocent person who was made in the image of God and it is, therefore, murder. I don't want to be insensitive here. Many of us have been touched and hurt by this. Because it has become such a common act, I think it is worthy spending a moment here.

It is often asked if this is the unforgivable sin. I don't think it is. I believe it is possible, even for a true Christian, to reach a place of such darkness and instability that they may engage in this sinful act. But let us not lose sight of the fact that it is a sinful act. And it is a sinful act that has found appeal among many young people. Why is this so? How does this happen?

Just a few years ago 29-year-old Brittany Maynard became a hot topic of discussion in all forms of media. She was an attractive young woman, heralded as intelligent, energetic, adventuresome, and an all-around delightful person. Add to that, the excitement of being newly married. The devastating news revolving around Brittany Maynard was that shortly after her wedding she was diagnosed with a terminal, malignant brain tumor.

But her horrible diagnosis and prognosis is not what brought Brittany to the fore of the public's attention. It was her highly publicized intentions of engaging in the taking of her own life (what I will refer to, for the sake of the children listening, as the "ultimate self-destructive behavior"). It was this decision that initiated quite a fuss in the arena of public dialogue.

In light of all of this, I would like to dial more tightly into the spiritual/sociological/psychological mechanics behind this, from which none of us are immune. Our own spiritual/ethical vulnerabilities can be unnerving. It is not as if the person

immediately embraces the unthinkable—there is a path. And the impetus that opens the gate to the dark path can itself be very subtle—even attractive—like a pretty young lady describing how she intends to terminate herself as if the event were quaint or charming.

Malcolm Gladwell, as far as I know, is not a professing Christian writing Christian books. His best-selling books do make some interesting sociological observations nonetheless. In his book *Tipping Point* he describes how trends begin. He writes of fashion trends and entertainment trends. But he makes a startling observation when it comes to the behavior under our consideration.

He writes that in the South Pacific islands of Micronesia in the early 1960s the act of ultimate self-destruction (as we have been calling it) was virtually unknown. But by the end of the 1980s they had more per capita than anywhere else in the world. The phenomenon was studied. Sociologists wanted to know how the **“unthinkable has somehow been rendered thinkable.”** How does a culture begin to engage in what was called **“a contagious epidemic of self-destruction”**?

A number of the young people who had unsuccessfully attempted the action were interviewed and they said they were 8 to 10 years old when they first saw or heard about the action. They studied further and found that there was a high-profile young man that engaged in this action in 1966. The shift from non-existent to predominant was traced to that event.

They further found a strong correlation between the reporting of this action in newspapers and the action accelerating directly after the newspapers came out. To make a long story short, the sociological pioneer in this area, David Phillips from UC San Diego drew the conclusion that **“the decision by someone famous to (engage in the action)...gives other people, particularly those vulnerable to suggestion because of immaturity or mental illness, permission to engage in a deviant act as well.”** Gladwell concludes that **“people who die in highly publicized suicides (acts of self-destruction)...serve as a Tipping Point in suicide (self-destructive) epidemics.”**

Interesting how neither Phillips nor Gladwell entertained or sought to justify why they thought certain actions were deviant. I am also guessing that it never even entered their minds that they/we all might fall at some level into the category of immature or mentally ill.

The point I wish to make here is that we're all vulnerable. Cultural trends have much more force than we are willing to acknowledge. Lots daughters were raised in a Christian household but there is little doubt that the culture in which they were raised influenced their decision to engage in highly immoral actions (Genesis 19:32).

Abortion

Abortion is the pre-meditated taking of an innocent life. This action is the greatest travesty in the history of my life. Since I was in high school, we have aborted somewhere in the neighborhood of 60 million babies. I recall teaching a Bible study a number of years ago where someone was astonished that God had not judged us for such a travesty. We talked a while about what a judgment might look like. It dawned on us...what would be a worse judgment than the death of our children? It's as if the sin has created its own judgment and we're too blind to see it.

The Scriptures make no distinction between a born baby and an unborn baby. In the following passages, the parenthesis contains the Greek word for baby. In these two well-known sections of Scripture you can see that there is no distinction between the born baby and the unborn baby.

And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe (*brephos*) leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost (Luke 1:41).

And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe (*brephos*) wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger (Luke 2:12).

It has often been asserted that the issue of abortion is never directly addressed in Scripture. As we examine Exodus we see this statement is not entirely true.

If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on

him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (Exodus 21:22-25).

The natural reading of this passage seems to indicate that the life for life refers to the harm done to either the mother or the unborn child. Next time we will address *subtle murder*, the *justifiable taking of life* and finally how all of this informs our understanding of the *cross of Christ*.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What are some blatant acts of murder?
2. Why does premeditation make the act more offensive?
3. Is suicide the unforgivable sin? Explain.
4. Does the Bible make a distinction between a born and unborn baby? What can we deduce from this?

Part Fifteen: The Sixth Commandment, C

Exodus 20:13

May 27, 2018

“You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13).

Review

We previously discussed the commentary Jesus had regarding this commandment (Matthew 5:21, 22). Though we may not have actually, physically murdered anyone, our very words and thoughts make us guilty of this commandment before God.

The commandment forbids malice in all its degrees. Malice is the desire to inflict others governed by wicked or sinful passions—to just want to stick it to somebody. We are called to love even the most unlovely and unlovable people. As difficult as this is, we are to make every effort to love others over and against our fleshly inclinations. In the same way the sunrise does not discriminate, our love should seek to extend universally.

We also learned that the primary offense in the violation of this commandment is that it contains a defilement of the only aspect of creation that was made in the image of God (Genesis 9:6). When the recognition of the uniqueness of humanness is disregarded, man is reduced to that which is dispensable.

This commandment, similar to all the commandments, ought to drive us to Christ. The law teaches us that we’re sinners and the cross of Christ is the only sufficient answer to our dilemma before God.

Last time we discussed what I simply called *blatant murder*. This included the unwarranted and premeditated taking of an innocent life (Exodus 21:14). This would include the taking of one’s own life and taking the life of a yet unborn person.

We will finish this morning by addressing what I’ve called *subtle murder*, the *justifiable taking of life* and finally, how all of this informs our understanding of the *cross of Christ*.

Subtle Murder

The unjustified taking of a life doesn't necessarily have to be immediate or cataclysmic. Putting one drop of poison in your enemy's coffee over a period of years, resulting in his death, makes you as guilty as if you put a handful in on the first day. There are subtle forms of murder, which the Scriptures address. Not terribly subtle forms of murder would be things such as manslaughter and momentary anger, which receive a lesser punishment (Numbers 35:22).

Negligence

Negligence is another subtle form of murder. Turning your back on those who would die without your attention falls into the boundaries of this commandment. There is a culpability we have when we create an environment of harm for others. Some biblical examples would be leaving dangerous animals unsupervised (Exodus 21:29) or not providing a safety feature for some dangerous part of your property (Deuteronomy 22:8).

These biblical examples provide a model for other modern-day type issues. Getting drunk or using narcotics then driving or engaging in some other dangerous act is negligence or depraved indifference.

Jesus also taught that it is not merely creating a dangerous situation that constitutes sinfulness, but neglecting those who God has put in our paths. To neglect others, Jesus taught, was to neglect Him (Matthew 25:42, 43).

...for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; 43 I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me (Matthew 25:42, 43).

If someone is in danger of dying of starvation, exposure, thirst, etc., is it a sin to walk by. James taught that it was a sin to say, **“Go in peace, be warmed and be filled”** and then neglect giving that which was **“necessary for their body” (James 2:15, 16).**

This often brings us to the issue of panhandlers. I personally don't think it is generally a good idea to simply hand money to a

stranger in order to assuage our guilt or feel as if we've contributed. If you truly have a heart for the homeless, there are more efficient ways to help. One way is to get involved in a mission or homeless shelter. At the same time, if you come upon someone who is truly in danger, it is a violation of the Sixth Commandment to walk by.

An even more subtle form of murder has to do with neglect of one's own health or safety. To take foolish risks, or as Jesus put it, to **"put the Lord your God to the test"** (Matthew 4:7), is a violation of this commandment. There is a general responsibility we have, within reason, to make sure we and our families are clothed and cared for. Writing of a godly woman, the Proverbs commend her:

She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet" (Proverbs 31:21).

Many people are slowly killing themselves through their normal behaviors. Drunkenness, gluttony and the general disregard we have for our own physical welfare (Proverbs 23:21; 25:16) are subtle forms of violation. The Bible does condone medical care when necessary (1 Timothy 5:23). The Scriptures speak of getting enough sleep (Ecclesiastes 5:12). It also addresses having a general dismal disposition about life. With this behavior we are slowly killing ourselves and those around us.

For "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit" (1 Peter 3:10).

This list goes on. Suffice it to say that many people are engaged in a slow-drip method of killing themselves and others. When we begin to pursue the godly attributes of love, joy, compassion, duty, responsibility, and general thankfulness for the wonderful life God has given us, we are beginning to obey this commandment.

Justifiable and/or Necessary Killing

But does the Sixth Commandment forbid the taking of human life no matter what? Are there exceptions? The Sixth Commandment is

so often quoted by non-Christians out of context that they've somehow convinced many, even many in the church, that the command forbids the taking of any human life at any time and under any conditions. This is simply not the case. We will look at a few examples.

War

Israel was often called upon by God to take up arms against other nations. An appropriate time for war is a difficult topic, and more than we have time to go into right now (although most would agree that, at very least, when your country is invaded or significantly threatened, war is justified), but pacifism is definitely not a Christian virtue. God would often give instructions to Israel to engage in war. One of many examples is found in Deuteronomy:

When the LORD your God gives it into your hand, you shall strike all the men in it with the edge of the sword (Deuteronomy 20:13).

This is not to suggest that Christians should be warmongers. But as long as there are tyrants and despots in the world inflicting injustice and persecution upon the innocent, the godly may be called to take up arms against them.

You will see posters and billboards displaying something to this effect: *War Is Not The Answer*. And though I appreciate the spirit behind the pursuit of peace, one is forced to ask how we might respond to the evil actions of wicked military movements.

I had just completed the wedding of a friend and I was sitting with the wife of a friend and her friend. Somehow this topic came up and her friend offered the suggestion that war only begets war; one fist only creates an opposing fist (she demonstrated this with her own fists bumping against each other). My friend's wife was Jewish. I asked her friend if there should not have been military force brought against Hitler. (I didn't really intend to create an uncomfortable situation, but there you have it.) Her answer was that 'there is still violence in the world'. To which I answered 'but not at that level'.

It's true that there will always be violence, but it must be checked. The Proverbs teach:

Deliver *those who* are drawn toward death, and hold back *those* stumbling to the slaughter (Proverbs 24:11).

Unless those who are drawing others toward death freely and willingly allow others to deliver the victims, the obedience to this Proverb (and others like it) may require force of some sort.

Capital Punishment

Capital punishment is also a necessary and biblical requirement. This has been a matter of great controversy but it shouldn't be controversial among Bible-believing Christians. The message couldn't be much clearer as we read these passages:

Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man (Genesis 9:6).

He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death (Exodus 21:12).

This is not something abrogated in the New Covenant. In Romans, Paul writes:

For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil (Romans 13:3, 4).

The "sword" was an instrument designating capital punishment. There is a legitimate argument against our current process of capital punishment. It has been shown that the state has accidentally and inadvertently executed those later to be found innocent. Frankly, this is because we don't fully follow the Scriptures when it comes to the legal process.

God is so concerned with protecting the innocent that He does two things: 1) *He protects the innocent by punishing murders.* 2) *He protects those who are charged with murder, but might be innocent, by requiring two eye witnesses* (Deuteronomy 17:6). *And if the witnesses lie they receive the punishment they sought to inflict on the defendant* (Deuteronomy 19:18, 19). There should be no doubt of the person's guilt.

And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you (Deuteronomy 19:18, 19).

Some people might be concerned that more murderers might go free if two eye-witnesses are necessary. We have seen court cases where all the evidence points to the clear guilt of the defendant. True, in those cases the defendant may not receive the conviction. We must trust, however, that if we are faithful to the law God has given us, there will be more genuine convictions and executions of cold-blooded killers. We must also trust that this will result in overall fewer acts of murder in the land.

People ask the questions, "How can loving Christians be in favor of the death penalty?" Because 'loving' is not the only quality Christians are to possess—they are also called to be just. God has called us to deliver people who have committed murder immediately into His presence and His judgment seat. The knowledge of his execution may be one of the greatest factors in converting the murderer. It is also an act of love toward those who are next to be murdered.

If this is ignored, people will begin to take justice into their own hands, resulting in anarchy. Approximately 150 years ago Charles Hodge wrote:

Experience teaches that where human life is undervalued, it is insecure; that where the murderer escapes with impunity or is inadequately punished, homicides are fearfully

multiplied. The practical question, therefore, is, who is to die? The innocent man or the murderer?⁴⁴

Defense

Another exception regarding taking a human life is the defense of others (Psalm 24:11; 82:4) and in the defense of oneself (Exodus 22:2).

Capital Punishment and the Cross

The general modern disdain for capital punishment extends to the cross itself. For if men, in their sins, are not worthy of death, why did Jesus die? If we allow ourselves to be convinced that even cold-blooded murderers aren't worthy of death, how much less is the natural man worthy of death?

Death is no longer a judgment for our guilt, leading us to the realization that we need a Savior. It is now just the natural course of the human existence. This is not, however, the case. Death is a judgment for sin (Genesis 2:17). It is a just judgment. And it is the judgment lifted from sinful man when he places his faith in the Son of God: the Son of God who was publicly executed for our sins.

I trust that even though there may be none reading these pages who are worthy of death by man, we all realize we are worthy of eternal death. If by grace we realize this, we know there is a Savior who died that we might live.

⁴⁴ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprinted 1989), p. 364.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Discuss subtle forms of murder. Do you really consider these things murder? Why, or why not?
2. When is the taking of a life either justifiable or necessary?
3. How does one's view of capital punishment effect their view of the cross?

Part Sixteen: The Seventh Commandment, A

Exodus 20:14

June 3, 2018

You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14).

The Value of the Law

As we are turning the stretch in these Ten Commandments and start heading for home, a quick review of the nature of our association with the law of God might be appropriate. *What is the value of the law of God in the lives of men and women?*

First, the law is a source of *illumination*. But what does it illuminate? What does the flashlight of the law show us? It shows us the righteousness of God Himself, for the law flows from God's very nature. To meditate on the law of God is to meditate on God Himself. In doing so the flashlight also casts its beam on our own sinful natures. Augustine put it this way:

The law orders, that we, after attempting to do what is ordered, and so feeling our weakness under the law, may learn to implore the help of grace.

Or the way the Apostle Paul explained this use of the law in his own life: it was **“sin, that it might appear sin” (Romans 7:13)**. The design of all of this is to drive us to Christ.

The second use of the law is *the restraint of evil*. It is designed to curb **“the lawless and insubordinate” (1 Timothy 1:8-11)**. In this respect the law of God is of benefit to all humanity, especially in light of our propensity to call **“evil good and good evil” (Isaiah 5:20)**. The law, to a limited extent, protects the innocent from the oppressor.

John Calvin put it thus:

...by means of its fearful denunciations and the consequent dread of punishment, to curb those who, unless forced, have no regard for rectitude and justice.

Third, the law tells us what is pleasing to God. The Christian is to delight in the law of God. It is the ultimate and final authoritative declaration of what is good and ethical. And a people who seek to walk in it should expect that, in a general sense, things will go well “in this life”. As stated in the Westminster Confession regarding the law:

The promises of it (the law), in like manner, shew them God’s approbation (approval) of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof.⁴⁵

Patience and Peace of Mind

It is also critical for our patience and peace of mind to recognize that the natural man is blind to the law of God and the glory and benefits thereof.

Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be (Romans 8:7).

Let us recognize, contrary to popular belief, that “the law is spiritual” (Romans 7:14). And since it is of the Spirit, it will be folly to the natural mind.

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14).

I say this is important to understand for our patience and peace of mind because those who reject the law and gospel of Christ will inevitably transition from shame to boldness. As Paul wrote of those

⁴⁵ *The Westminster confession of faith.* (1996). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. (parenthesis mine.)

who reject God and the things of God: **“They profess to be wise” (Romans 1:22)**. They will do this by seeking to justify sinful behavior through an unwarranted transition in ethics.

And there is not a category where this has become more prevalent in our society than in the Seventh Commandment. One current example: If you embrace a biblical view of marriage in our current climate, you will be accused of being mean, ignorant, hateful and bigoted. One needn't look too far to see the aggressive repudiation of the laws of God when it comes to this commandment.

Just weeks ago the city of West Hollywood awarded the key to the city to a former adult film star. We're not talking about someone who has turned from that behavior in an effort to promote family fidelity; far from it. We are canonizing people who openly flaunt their disregard for the sanctity of marital integrity.

Even more recently a comment was made by Representative Diane Black out of Tennessee where she suggested that pornography (which would be a clear violation of this commandment) provides a root cause for school shootings. There has been a pretty universal critique of her suggestion as being laughably absurd.

Certainly, it is not all that simple. There are indeed other factors. And maybe she did not make the necessary connections: That pornography is a form of human objectification, which affects intimacy and is a form of infidelity, creating unhealthy households and some broken households. And it is in the household/family that the real 'me' is clearly seen and cultivated. As we launch into the Seventh Commandment, let's consider the words of Charles Hodge:

It is in the bosom of the family that there is a constant call for acts of kindness, of self-denial, of forbearance, and of love. The family, therefore, is the sphere the best adapted for the development of all the social virtues; and it may be safely said that there is far more of moral excellence and of true religion to be found in Christian households, than in the desolate homes of priests, or in the gloomy cells of monks and nuns. A man with his children or grandchildren on his knees, is an object of higher reverence than any emaciated anchorite in his cave.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprinted 1989), p. 371.

And since strong households are the primary building blocks of a healthy society, many of the wrongs taking place in any culture (including school shootings) can be traced to that which crumbles households (which includes pornography).

But what I found even more interesting in this collective denunciation of this woman is the repetitive appeal to the “experts”. The reproof offered by the journalists is propped by how *the experts don’t agree*. Not to dig too far into this, but there have been 23 school shootings so far this year. That is one per week. Maybe it is time to find some new “experts”.

All this to say, there is great wisdom in the law of God. It is a wisdom which will be rejected by the world until the grace of God circumcises stony hearts. The battle for the Christian is to lovingly, patiently, uncompromisingly walk in obedience. And the tone of our language should be markedly different than the tone of the pagan opposition. All too often it is here where we begin to sound like the fool to whom we are speaking. It is very often here where we violate the Proverb:

Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him (Proverbs 26:4).

In this somewhat parenthetical message, I would also like to address how we are to arm for battle.

Armed For Battle

Perhaps too often we find ourselves uttering the words of the Apostle Paul, “**For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do**” (Romans 7:15). Does God provide counsel to aid us in better law-keeping? How do we become better lovers of God and man? Volumes of Christian literature are dedicated to this, some good some bad. Toward the end of obedient faithfulness, I think the following is helpful:

First, we are to be *watchful of our hearts*.

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it *spring* the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23).

One of the best ways to be watchful of our hearts is to be aware of *initial desires* or early temptations when they surface.

But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:28).

Remove the cancer early, when it is just a thought. Another important pursuit for the Christian is to seek to *control our environment*.

Remove your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house (Proverbs 5:8).

If you have a hard time controlling your eating habits, Bullhog's All-You-Can-Eat House of Ribs & Nachos is probably not for you. Be careful of the movies we watch and music we listen to. Don't be so naïve as to think these things are not getting into our heart.

Temperance is also a necessary virtue.

Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, *when* it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things (Proverbs 23:31-33).

If you get mean or lustful when you drink, maybe you shouldn't drink at all. If you get angry when you debate, maybe you shouldn't debate.

Prayer and fasting are appropriate. Although I would not promote an intensive ascetic, monastic pietism, since its roots and essence are a bit Gnostic⁴⁷, we should remember that Jesus “**fasted**

⁴⁷ Gnosticism is built on the premise that material things are essentially evil. Avoiding all material things, including food, speech and other people, would then yield spirituality. Of course, it is not the material that is evil. It is man's nature. He won't be able to avoid that until Christ takes him home.

forty days and forty nights (Matthew 4:2). Prior to selecting the apostles, we read:

Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God (Luke 6:12).

There are too many references to Jesus praying for me to include in this sermon. Suffice it to say that if Jesus, the righteous, saw a need to pray and fast, how much more do we?

The *fear of God* and *consequences* is a legitimate motivation for obedience. Although it is not in vogue to speak this way, make no mistake about it, disobedience results in afflictions and consequences. Years ago I was seeking to minister to a man who had an infant and a toddler. His behavior toward his wife had caused his wife, and others, to get a restraining order. He couldn't control his temper. I wrote down the names of his children and his wife on a piece of paper, and told him to put it in his pocket. The next time he felt like giving into his anger, he was to pull the paper out and see the price.

The chastisements of our heavenly Father can be quite severe.

My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.” If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten (Hebrews 12:5-7)?

Finally, there are the various *means of grace* God has provided for His children. Regular attendance at church and His table of communion; study of, and meditation in, the Scriptures; fervent prayer; accountability; and so on, can all help in increasing our steadfastness and obedience.

A Sanctifying Cycle

In all of this we must recognize that our sanctification (our excellence in loving God and loving others) is more like a series of

slowly advancing loops than an escalator to the next floor. Every time we reach a top of a loop (or think we do) God will remind us how these loops will never reach the top. They will never get us to heaven. But heaven has reached us in the person, character, grace, glory, humiliation, sufferings, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. Let us set our hearts to meditation upon His victory this morning as we invited to His Table.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What are the various uses of God's law?
2. What does the law illuminate?
3. How is God's law of use to all humanity?
4. Why is it good to seek to walk in God's law?
5. What should Christians be savvy to when it comes to the world's hostility toward the law of God?
6. What are some ways we can "arm for battle" in obedience?
7. Discuss the "sanctifying cycle" of our growth in Christ.

Part Seventeen: The Seventh Commandment, B

Exodus 20:14

June 10, 2018

You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14).

Introduction

Years ago I had an odd epiphany. I found myself in the peculiar place of a spectator who simultaneously occupied the perimeters of *fantasy* and *reality*. I, as one who enjoyed prime-time television sit-coms, was amused by these light comedies, which regularly presented adultery, homosexuality and pre-marital intimacy as a mere, and sometimes comical, annoyance (if that), these being inevitably healed by the following episode. Sexual intimacy was, and is, regularly offered to the public as something with little or no consequence—that is the *fantasy*.

The *reality* hit me some when a woman who attended a Bible study I was leading had raised four children with a man who, after twenty-five years of marriage, began a relationship with another woman. This woman, who was in her fifties, grieved worse than anyone person I had known who had lost a spouse to death. She was sick with grief. I remember her explaining to me that if he had died, she would still have the good memories of a life spent together. But now she didn't have him or the fond memories of a household. It would have been easier for her if he had died!

We currently are witnessing a *#metoo* movement where people are vilified for coercing others via sexual intimacy for the opportunity (generally speaking) to get in front of a movie or television camera. But the same industry has no problem paying people to engage in similar acts of intimacy once in front of the camera. Perhaps the argument is that one is coercion and the other is

art. But are these not merely convenient terms with an end game of flimsy rationalization? We have so lost our way.

To say that a sexually indiscreet culture is playing with fire is a gross understatement. I am hard-pressed to think of a sin that is more pervasive and more destructive than the one addressed by this commandment.

Building Block of Society

The Seventh Commandment is directed toward protecting the sanctity of the home—the fundamental building block of society. Adultery refers to infidelity on the part of either the man or the woman. In general, husbands who love and are faithful to their wives, and wives who love and are faithful to their husbands, will yield a society of physically, emotionally and spiritually healthy children. Now, there certainly are exceptions. Maybe you are an exception. But in this instance it is the exception that proves the rule.

The tentacles of this sin reach way beyond what happens in the privacy of one's bedroom. Societies crumble when this commandment is forsaken. That this has widespread civil ramifications is accentuated when we read of this transgression as, not merely a sin, but a crime (**Leviticus 20:10**)!

Our natural shock of adultery being a crime has birthed numerous brands of theology designed to either mitigate or altogether eliminate reading the Bible in its most natural sense. But rather than being shocked at the Scriptures, we should be shocked in our own introspection. We should be shocked at our sin-darkness leading us to draw the conclusion that God's laws are ridiculous (as some are fond of saying). If we think God's laws are ridiculous, it stands to reason that God thinks *we're* ridiculous.

The Seventh Commandment concerns our own, and our neighbor's, chastity or purity. Thou shalt not commit adultery is put after the Sixth Commandment (thou shall not kill), it has been said, because our chastity should be as dear to us as our lives, and we should be as much afraid of that which defiles the body as of that which destroys it. We would fight, and perhaps kill, to protect the chastity of a loved one, but what effort do we make to protect our own?

Defiling a Mysterious Union

The world belittles this sin. It is treated so very lightly. But the Scriptures speak of intimacy in a glorious and mysterious way. Paul teaches that our intimate association with the body of Christ actually brings that body into this sin.

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! (1 Corinthians 6:15)

God created sex in such a way as to build a union between two people that makes them one. Multiple partners rob men and women from experiencing that union in the intimate, personal, unifying, lifelong way it was designed. Paul goes on to compare this physical union to our spiritual union with God.

Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him (1 Corinthians 6:16, 17).

The body of a Christian is considered *the temple of God*. Illicit sex desecrates that temple. The following passage is often applied to physical fitness, but its primary application is sexual immorality.

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

The destructiveness of this sin affects us individually, collectively as the body of Christ, and as a culture or nation. We are to “**flee sexual immorality**”. Like Joseph, who left his coat behind, the Christian should flee (even running away physically, if necessary) sexual immorality.

Duties Required/Sin Forbidden

What behaviors fall under the heading of “**You shall not commit adultery**”? What is required and what is forbidden? The Westminster Larger Catechism deals with this in some detail. There is more here than we can speak on in one message. But one gets the feel of the wise encouragements and warnings found in Scripture and upheld over time. Things we are to pursue include:

- Chastity in body, mind, affections (1 Thess. 4:4, Job 31:1, 1 Cor. 7:34) words, (Col. 4:6) and behavior (1 Pet. 3:2)
- The preservation of that chastity in ourselves and others (1 Cor. 7:2,35–36)
- Watchfulness over the eyes and all the senses (Job 31:1)
- Temperance (Acts 24:24–25)
- Keeping of chaste company (Prov. 2:16–20)
- Modesty in apparel (1 Tim. 2:9)
- Marriage by those that have not the gift of continency (1 Cor. 7:2,9)
- Conjugal love, (Prov. 5:19–20) and cohabitation (1 Pet. 3:7)
- Shunning all occasions of uncleanness, and resisting temptations thereunto (Prov. 5:8, Gen. 39:8–10)

Things we are to avoid (besides the neglect of the above) include:

- Adultery, fornication (Heb. 13:4, Gal. 5:19)
- Rape, incest (2 Sam. 13:14, 1 Cor. 5:1)

- Sodomy, and all unnatural lusts (Rom. 1:24,26–27, Lev. 20:15–16)
- All unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections (Matt. 5:28, Matt. 15:19, Col. 3:5)
- All corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto (Eph. 5:3–4, Prov. 7:5,21–22)
- Wanton looks (Isa. 3:16, 2 Pet. 2:14)
- Impudent or light behaviour, immodest apparel (Prov. 7:10,13)
- Prohibiting of lawful, (1 Tim. 4:3) and dispensing with unlawful marriages (Lev. 18:1–21, Mark 6:18, Mal. 2:11–12)
- Undue delay of marriage (1 Cor. 7:7–9, Gen. 38:26)
- Having more wives or husbands than one at the same time (Mal. 2:14–15, Matt. 19:5)
- Unjust divorce, (Mal. 2:16, Matt. 5:32) or desertion (1 Cor. 7:12–13)
- Unchaste company (Gen. 39:19, Prov. 5:8)
- Lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays (Eph. 5:4, Ezek. 23:14–16, Isa. 23:15–17, Isa. 3:16, Mark 6:22, Rom. 13:13, 1 Pet. 4:3)
- All other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others (2 Kings 9:30, Jer. 4:30, Ezek. 23:40)

In our next time together we will dive more deeply into the hotter and closer topics related to this commandment. Suffice it to say for now that God created marriage to be picture of Christ’s relationship with His bride. He is the faithful, sacrificial groom who lives and dies

for His bride, and the church is to be the trusting spouse who puts herself under His care.

In one of the Apostle Paul's longest treatments of marriage he inserts the statement:

This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:32).

Perhaps the greatest reason to pursue obedience to this commandment is to sanctify that image in our own hearts and to a watching world.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Why is fidelity so important?
2. Discuss the protection of chastity.
3. How does the violation of this commandment bring reproach upon Christ?
4. Discuss the topics covered under the Westminster Catechism on this commandment.
5. What has Christ done for His bride?

Part Eighteen: The Seventh Commandment, C

Exodus 20:14

June 24, 2018

You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14).

Review

As we finish discussing the Seventh Commandment we will focus now upon common misconceptions and objections prevalent in our own culture. There is nothing new about these misconceptions and objections. They resurface in every culture that finds itself governed by the inclinations of the human heart. “Follow your heart” sounds so appealing but has been the demise of relationships, marriages, families and the societies they form. This should be no surprise. Some six hundred years before Christ, Jeremiah records:

The heart is deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it (Jeremiah 17:9)?

And there may be no commandment where inclinations of our heart lead us more desperately into trouble than the Seventh Commandment.

We previously discussed:

- How our culture presents sexual sin as innocuous. This is seen in movies, books, television, advertising, etc. We can't seem to make up our minds if sexual sin is devastating (as seen in the *#metoo* movement), or light and without consequence as with the movies the victims and perpetrators of that movement produce.

- How the Seventh Commandment is directed toward protecting the sanctity of the home: the fundamental building block of any society. There certainly are other factors. But the heart of a strong society is the family. And the heart of a strong family is intimate fidelity between the husband and the wife.
- How this commandment protects the mysterious union that makes a man and a woman “**one flesh**” *heis soma* (**1 Corinthians 6:16**). How multiple partners rob us of that intimate, personal, unifying, lifelong and glorious mystery.

We also discussed the duties required and forbidden by this commandment (summed up in the Westminster Larger Catechism):

- Chastity in body, mind, affections (1 Thess. 4:4, Job 31:1, 1 Cor. 7:34) words, (Col. 4:6) and behavior; (1 Pet. 3:2)
- The preservation of that chastity in ourselves and in others (1 Cor. 7:2,35–36)
- Watchfulness over the eyes and all the senses (Job 31:1)
- Temperance (Acts 24:24–25)
- Keeping of chaste company (Prov. 2:16–20)
- Modesty in apparel (1 Tim. 2:9)
- Marriage by those that have not the gift of continency/ ‘singleness’ (1 Cor. 7:2,9)
- Conjugal love, (Prov. 5:19–20) and cohabitation (1 Pet. 3:7)
- Shunning all occasions of uncleanness, and resisting temptations thereunto (Prov. 5:8, Gen. 39:8–10)

Things we are to avoid (besides the neglect of the above) include:

- Adultery, fornication (Heb. 13:4, Gal. 5:19)
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- All other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others (2 Kings 9:30, Jer. 4:30, Ezek. 23:40)

We also discussed how God created marriage to be picture of Christ's relationship with His bride. He is the faithful, sacrificial groom Who lives and dies for His bride, and the church is to be the trusting spouse who puts herself under His care.

Our Vulnerabilities

I would be remiss in my duties if I were to avoid addressing some of the chinks in today's armor when it comes to this commandment. Where are we vulnerable? Where are we under attack? How have we been marinated in such a way as to be tender for the fork or darts of the enemy? We have become so relativistic when it comes to sexual sin. As a culture (a culture which has tremendous influence upon the church) we are being slow-baked into Sodom and Gomorrah.

This may sound overly dramatic. And, as Christians, this topic should be much clearer to us than it is. But I would like to approach this in such a way that any person can see the folly and hopelessness of approaching a system of ethics (here, in particular, sexual ethics) devoid of a God who has revealed right and wrong, good and evil, through His word.

What I intend to demonstrate, in the few minutes we have, is how some critical thinking will open our minds to the moral vacuum which will inevitably prevail when God (the God who has revealed Himself in knowable, understandable propositions found in Scripture) is extricated from our equations.

Maybe I can begin by asking this question: How many letters would you be comfortable adding to LBGQTQ (Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, Queer)? What do you think should be sanctioned and why?

At the risk of sounding self-deprecating, I confess that Christendom is extremely narrow in painting the boundaries of amorous: no premarital, no extramarital, no incestuous, no pedophilia, no gay, no lesbian, no bisexual, no polyamorous, no trans-sexual, no bigamy or polygamy, no necrophilia, no bestiality, no prostitution.

According to Christians, it's mom, dad, junior and sis. Departing from that is simply wrong and should not be sanctioned.

So, should the movement add more letters? Should there be an 'I' for incestuous? Should there be a 'B'? Should there be a 'P'? One of the arguments made in favor of expanding our notion of appropriate relationships is an appeal to monogamy. Why? What about the bigamists and polygamists? Should their letters not be added? Should they not consider themselves a persecuted people group because their letter is not on the list?

And to bring us all to a greater level of discomfort, what of adding a 'P'? There is a growing comfort with pedophilia in the land. Just recently Nathan Larson, a man running for congress in Virginia, has unapologetically announced this about himself. You may think I am drawing upon such a small minority to make this point that it carries no weight, as if it were as rare as a serial killer.

But NAMBLA (North American Men Boy Lovers Association) is an advocacy organization with *thousands* of members. Their stated goal is to remove 'age of consent' laws. They believe those laws constitute a form of ageism and is immoral. They have a very strong political machine, utilizing the same instrumentation of other groups.

They have adopted the "persecuted people group" language and accuse their detractors of being hateful, immoral (as stated) ageists. In response to the "consenting adults" objection they put forth the "consenting people" answer. They boast of heroes like the renowned Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde and Dutch clinical psychologist/sexologist Fritz Bernard as examples to be followed and learned from.

I will stop here. My simple point is that most of our population is not comfortable with adding the 'P'. But we are hard-pressed to give any solid answer as to why.

By the way, I am not suggesting for a second that we should be insensitive to the strong inclinations and drives that run shotgun over the hearts of man. People have gone so far as to say that people are "hard-wired" to have these desires. But the very important point to recognize is that being hard-wired a certain way is never a justification. *Genetics do not determine ethics*. There are people who are hard-wired in such a way as to do great violence to others. That hard-wiring needs to be addressed and quelled and put under control.

Lust

Perhaps you agree. Perhaps, by the grace of God and by His Spirit, you have a heart that sees the folly of our current direction, and seek to walk in the narrow way. There is a great temptation to be both proud and disgusted. We must keep in mind and take to heart the words of Luke prior to Jesus giving the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector:

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt (Luke 18:9).

Let us ever be humbled with the thought that when it comes to this commandment, the mere *thought* of this sin, according to Jesus, would cast us **“into hell” (Matthew 5:29)?**

As usual, Christ gets straight to the heart of the matter. 1 Samuel 16:7 states, **“For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”** What man can claim innocence before God when confronted with Christ’s teaching on this commandment? And how pure the heart of Christ appears to us when we realize that He never violated this commandment!

To look at a woman or man lustfully is a violation of this commandment. This is why Job made a covenant with his eyes. Job states, **“I HAVE made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?” (Job 31:1).** This clearly addresses the issue of pornography. Christians should make every effort to guard their eyes. Pornography is a billion-dollar business that preys on man’s lack of self-control.

The ability you, and your children, have to access unlimited information and images through your computers or iPads, etc., can be a source of good or of tremendous evil. We are unwise to leave ourselves or our loved ones at the mercy of our own will-power.

Resist Beginnings

Once again (similar to Christ’s admonitions regarding murder) we are encouraged to resist entertaining thoughts that grow into sinful

actions. James 1:15 states: **“Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”**⁴⁸ It has been said: “Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.”

Christians should also avoid so-called innocent flirting. Most affairs start from what would appear to be innocent flirting at the office, school or even church. One of the scenes I enjoyed most in the movie ‘City Slickers’ was when Billy Crystal rescued the attractive leading lady from two villains. She later went to thank him for what he had done. Flustered by her beauty, he simply responded by saying, “I’m married.” Don’t even entertain the thought.

The Supreme Groom

Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ **“loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might**

⁴⁸ Verse 15. *Then when lust hath conceived.* He first calls that *lust* which is not any kind of evil affection or desire, but that which is the fountain of all evil affections; by which, as he shews, are conceived vicious broods, which at length break forth into sins. It seems, however, improper, and not according to the usage of Scripture, to restrict the word *sin* to outward works, as though indeed lust itself were not a sin, and as though corrupt desires, remaining closed up within and suppressed, were not so many sins. But as the use of a word is various, there is nothing unreasonable if it be taken here, as in many other places, for actual sin.

And the Papists ignorantly lay hold on this passage, and seek to prove from it that vicious, yea, filthy, wicked, and the most abominable lusts are not sins, provided there is no assent; for James does not shew when sin begins to be born, so as to be sin, and so accounted by God, but when it breaks forth. For he proceeds gradually and shews that the consummation of sin is eternal death, and that sin arises from depraved desires, and that these depraved desires or affections have their root in lust. It hence follows that men gather fruit in eternal perdition, and fruit which they have procured for themselves.

By perfected sin, therefore, I understand, not any one act of sin perpetrated, but the completed course of sinning. For though death is merited by every sin whatever, yet it is said to be the reward of an ungodly and wicked life. Hence is the dotage of those confuted who conclude from these words, that sin is not mortal until it breaks forth, as they say, into an external act. Nor is this what James treats of; but his object was only this, to teach that there is in us the root of our own destruction.⁴⁸

present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27).

I can't think of anything more sanctifying or challenging than seeking to love another the way I am loved by Christ. How important is it then to know how we are loved by our Savior? How did the Savior give Himself for His bride? He gave His very life. In all our efforts to sanctify ourselves, who is it that truly sanctifies and cleanses us? *It is the Lamb of God.* And what is His goal, which He most assuredly achieves? *A glorious bride, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but one that is holy and without blemish.* Is this who *your* Savior is?

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Is “Follow your heart” good or bad advice? Why?
2. How does our culture present sexual sin as innocuous?
3. How does this commandment provide and protect the building blocks of society?
4. Discuss how this commandment protects the mysterious union between husband and wife.
5. Review and comment on what this commandment requires and forbids.
6. What letters would you be willing to add to LBGTQ and why?
7. How does one making a convincing argument against NAMBLA?
8. What is the danger in terms of our attitude when we see the beauty of God’s truth for marriage?
9. What is meant by *resisting beginnings* and why is it important?
10. What has Christ done for His bride?

Part Nineteen:

The Eighth Commandment, A

Exodus 20:15
July 1, 2018

You shall not steal (Exodus 20:15).

Introduction: The Earth is the Lord's

One of my children was wearing a borrowed article of clothing during playtime. As it became apparent that the piece of clothing might become torn or stained, my wife instructed the child to change clothes and put on something that we actually owned. Her explanation was simply something to the effect, “This clothing is not ours, so we don’t want to ruin it.”

Years ago I went on a short mission trip and loaned my car to a friend. While I was gone she got in an accident, putting a pretty major dent in my car. I was only gone for a week or two, but I would never have known that the car was in a collision because she had it entirely repaired before I got home. I am confident that the effort she made in restoring the car was done with greater care and haste than if the accident had happened to her own car—especially since it created a financial hardship for her.

For some reason we have a sense that things we borrow from our friends (since a loaner car from a faceless company may not yield the same concern) need to be taken care of with greater caution than things that we own.

I mentioned these things because I think in order to appreciate the full expression of this commandment we must understand that everything, in an ultimate sense, belongs to God.

The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein (Psalm 24:1).

For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine (Psalm 50:10, 11).

God Gives/Men Accomplish.

In order to have a proper disposition toward this commandment, we must understand that our accomplishments, and the things that we own through those accomplishments, are a result of God's grace. Isaiah 26:12 makes what, at first glance, appears to be a contradictory statement:

You establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us (Isaiah 26:12).

Did they accomplish it or did God do it for them? Or is it somehow both? The highly prosperous person could work just as hard and receive nothing, if it weren't for the grace and providence of God. The reason for the necessity of grasping this concept will become clearer as we examine the scope of the commandment. Suffice it to say that the implications of this commandment go much further than simply not taking things that don't belong to us.

Things to address:

- Since God owns everything, should we assume people own nothing, thus producing a mentality which supports a sort of Christian socialism?
- Since God owns everything, is it possible to rob ourselves of our own stuff? And if it is possible for us to rob ourselves, what difference does it make since we own it anyway?
- In what ways can we rob others?
- How do men rob God?
- Who is the master thief and what has he stolen?

Christian Socialism?

Since God owns everything, should we assume people own nothing, thus producing a mentality which supports a sort of Christian socialism?

What I would like to bring to our attention and address is a mistaken understanding within the ranks of some Christians which suggests that since God owns everything men own nothing. The Christian faith ought, therefore, to be socialistic. Acts 4:32 is used to argue this point:

And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them (Acts 4:32).

Is this a proof text for socialism? It is not. A more thorough examination of this passage reveals that this is not a command but rather the record of a unique historical event where people helped each other motivated not by civil law but by love. We need to be careful when we seek to establish civil laws to force benevolence. Briefly put, civil laws are designed to protect the innocent and punish the evil-doer. It is not up to the government but up to the individual or corporate (as with churches or other relief organizations) private citizens to extend love and benevolence.

A nation of individuals who don't love and care for their neighbors will never produce a government that does. The bottom line here is that in order for something to be stolen, it must be owned. Therefore, there is a right of ownership.

This commandment revolves around the proper handling of those things that God owns and has entrusted to people. It also implies the God-given right to private ownership. There is nothing in the above passage that even hints that it's the government's responsibility to distribute other people's property.

There is a governmental infringement upon this commandment when we consider certain types of ungodly taxes. Examples might be taxes that assume government ownership over private property. Property tax, inheritance tax, income tax, etc., are all, arguably, a

form of stealing by a collective force armed with weapons and the power to incarcerate. I am not suggesting (at least, not here) that we engage in civil disobedience or rebellion. I am simply seeking to put forth a more biblical understanding of ownership in order that we might work, as private citizens, in a more biblical direction.

We could also discuss whether it is fraudulent to print money for which you have no backing, and incur an un-payable debt. Some believe, and I would agree, that it was fraudulent to go off of the gold standard and just start printing money willy-nilly. But since that is an entire subject in itself, I won't deal with it here.

Suffice it to say that even though God owns everything, He has placed His goods in the hands of individuals who are to be considered the owners of those goods from a worldly perspective. Nonetheless, we should recognize that everything we own is on loan from God and that everything we accomplished, He has done for us.

Robbing Ourselves

Since God owns everything, is it possible to rob ourselves of our own stuff? And if it is possible for us to rob ourselves, what difference does it make since we own it anyway?

Is it possible to steal your own stuff? If we have the disposition that what we own, ultimately, belongs to God, the idea of stealing our own stuff might be an easier concept to grasp. Christians are to work for ownership and should oversee, with care, those things that they, by the grace of God, own.

Know well the condition of your flocks, and pay attention to your herds; for riches are not forever, nor does a crown endure to all generations. When the grass disappears, the new growth is seen, and the herbs of the mountains are gathered in, the lambs will be for your clothing, and the goats will bring the price of a field, and there will be goats' milk enough for your food, for the food of your household, and sustenance for your maidens (Proverbs 27:23-27).

In the same way we're motivated to give special attention to someone else's property that we have borrowed, we should be

motivated to care for things God has entrusted to us. Negligence and wastefulness, even when it comes to our own things, is a form of stealing. This brings us to the second part of the question.

Forfeiting Ownership

If it is possible for us to rob ourselves, what difference does it make since we own it anyway? If we do not work and care for what we own, it may be forfeited to those who will.

Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich (Proverbs 10:4).

Go to the ant, o sluggard, observe her ways and be wise, which, having no chief, officer or ruler, prepares her food in the summer, and gathers her provision in the harvest. How long will you lie down, o sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? “A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest”— and your poverty will come in like a vagabond, and your need like an armed man (Proverbs 6:6-11).

Laziness and a lack of willingness to work and provide and care for our own lives and the lives of people who depend upon us is a form of stealing.

Keep in mind that *with ownership comes stewardship*. Since, ultimately, God owns everything, we are responsible to Him for the things He has given us. This includes the entire world.

Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28).

God holds us responsible for what He gives us. In short, we are to look at the things we own as ultimately belonging to God and we should act accordingly.

So the most subtle infraction of this commandment involves how we handle what we actually own. Perhaps this is why the answer to question 141 in the Westminster Larger Catechism includes:

...a provident care and study to get, keep, use, and dispose these things which are necessary and convenient for the sustentation of our nature, and suitable to our condition,... and an endeavour, by all just and lawful means, to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own.

The list of infractions continues in question 142:

...as likewise idleness, prodigality (extravagant living), wasteful gaming; and all other ways whereby we do unduly prejudice our own outward estate, and defrauding ourselves of the due use and comfort of that estate which God hath given us.

(Mic. 6:8; Zech. 8:16–17; Zech. 7:4, 10; Rom. 13:7; Lev. 6:2–5; Luke 19:8; Luke 6:30, 38; Eph. 4:28; Gal. 6:10; 1 Tim. 6:6–9).

Protecting Stewardship

In this commandment, ownership is protected. To aid in God's call regarding proper stewardship we see in the eighth commandment the protection of ownership and the respect of other people's property. If the commission given to Adam (take dominion) is going to be fulfilled, it is going to be fulfilled by Christians working, owning, and exercising faithful stewardship to God over every aspect of creation.

The Ultimate Stewardship

As Christians we believe this is all to be done to the glory of God in Christ. We also realize this will never be accomplished apart from the work of God's grace in the hearts of men through the preaching of the gospel of Christ—that Jesus came to rescue those in the death and darkness of sin. To pursue obedience to these laws

apart from faith in Jesus would be like being an interior decorator on the Titanic.

We must first realize that we ourselves were stolen. Paul would ask “...do you not know that...you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, what are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). We were stolen by the enemy of our souls and our own willing, sinful hearts. But God bought us back—that is the gospel—we are, therefore, not our own. It is in the recognition of this ultimate form of stewardship that we are to conduct ourselves. It is in the light of the gospel that we are to seek to love God and love our neighbors, which is why we study these things.

Next week we will finish by asking and seeking to answer:

- In what ways can we rob others?
- How do men rob God?
- Who is the master thief and what has he stolen?

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Why is it important to understand that God owns the world, and everything in it, in order to properly understand this commandment?
2. Is private ownership a biblical concept? Explain.
3. How can a person violate this commandment when it comes to their own property?
4. What might happen if one violates this commandment regarding his own property?
5. Explain the idea of *taking dominion*.

Part Twenty: The Eighth Commandment, B

Exodus 20:15

July 15, 2018

You shall not steal (Exodus 20:15).

Review: The Earth is the Lord's

To review, we have discussed that in order to appreciate the full expression of this commandment we must understand that everything, in an ultimate sense, belongs to God (Psalm 24:1; 50:10, 11). All our accomplishments, and the things that we own or achieve through those accomplishments, are a result of God's providence (Isaiah 26:12).

But even though God owns everything, He has placed His goods in the hands of individuals who are to be considered the owners of those goods from a worldly perspective. Christian socialism is unbiblical. Nonetheless, we should recognize that everything we own is on loan from God and that everything we accomplish, He has done for us.

With this in mind, we discussed the idea of violating this commandment when it comes to our own possessions. God holds us responsible for what He gives us. We are to look at the things we own as ultimately belonging to God and we should act accordingly. So, the most subtle infraction of this commandment involves how we handle those things we actually own. And the warning in Scripture is that an improper governing of our own stuff can result in the loss of it (Proverbs 6:6-11; 10:4).

Today we will address:

- In what ways can we rob others?

- How do men rob God?

Robbing Others

The stealing of our own stuff may be subtle. The stealing of other people’s stuff is pretty obvious. Again, we look to question 141 of the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Standards, which asks: **“What are the duties required in the eighth commandment?”** Let’s cover a few of these:

Truth, faithfulness, and justice in contracts and commerce between man and man.

He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8)?

“Justly” *mispat* addresses a legal decision. What *should* have happened *does* happen. Zechariah 8:17 tells us we should “not love a false oath.” Christians are not to depend upon the ‘fine print’ of a contract. Representation should be open, honest and forthright.

The catechism continues:

Rendering to everyone his due.

If there is a debt, it is to be paid. Romans 13:7 brings this into the realm of the immaterial as well:

Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor (Romans 13:7).

Honor: taking credit for, or not giving credit to, someone else for their accomplishments is wrong. Many other things can be included here. Stealing can be in the realm of *time*. Making people wait because of your irresponsible planning.

Reputation: this will be addressed in more detail in the Ninth Commandment. But suffice it to say that it is a sin to disrespect

another person's property or title whether they are an employer, parent, politician, elder, etc.

The catechism continues:

Restitution of goods unlawfully detained from the right owners thereof.

...he shall restore what he has stolen, or the thing which he has extorted, or what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or the lost thing which he found, or all that about which he has sworn falsely. He shall restore its full value, add one-fifth more to it, *and* give it to whomever it belongs...(Leviticus 6:4, 5).

According to the Scriptures, a thief is to pay back what was stolen plus a fifth more (in some cases even more than that). There shouldn't have to be both civil and criminal cases for the same crime. The catechism continues:

Giving and lending freely, according to our abilities, and the necessities of others.

Usury is a sin. To lend money at interest isn't necessarily sinful, but to lend at a rate that would cause undue burden to the borrower is a violation of this commandment (Deuteronomy 23:19, 20). It is worth noting that we should cultivate a desire to see the property of others protected. The catechism continues:

Moderation of our judgments, wills, and affections concerning worldly goods.

The Apostle Paul addresses the type of disposition which might set our heart toward disobedience of this commandment in 1 Timothy 6:6-10. He begins by addressing a general disposition of contentment:

Now godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6).

The general sentiment that I/we should simply have more than we currently have (this could be in material goods, relationships, honor, reputation, etc.) is ground tilled for that discontentment which leads to sin.

In order to be stronger in faithfulness, we are to ever be mindful of the big picture.

For we brought nothing into *this* world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out (1 Timothy 6:7).

This is not an argument against industriousness. But it is a caution regarding letting this world, our goals, ambitions, aspirations run away with us. Paul finishes this section:

And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Timothy 6:8-10).

The catechism continues:

A provident care and study to get, keep, use, and dispose these things which are necessary and convenient for the sustentation of our nature, and suitable to our condition.

God has given to us, and we are to exercise proper stewardship of the things He has given us for the care of our lives and the lives of others.

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8).

When a father doesn't provide for his household, or when children do not care for their aged parents, they are robbing from them. God has determined that we are to do these things (i.e. provide

for our household, parents, etc.). We are therefore obliged to do these things, as if they were a debt (Romans 1:14) we owed. Therefore, not doing these things is essentially stealing.

The catechism continues:

...a lawful calling, and diligence in it.

We are here reminded of what our legitimate calling might be and how we are to operate within the boundaries of it.

Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called *while* a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use *it* (1 Corinthians 7:20, 21).

Everyone should seek to better their condition. And there may be extreme times or conditions where we are called to civil disobedience. What Paul is teaching here is the general sense in which we should properly pursue whatever our post may currently be with the anticipation that it may be improved in the future.

The catechism continues:

The avoidance of unnecessary law–suits, and endeavour, by all just and lawful means, to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own.

Watching daytime television and figuring out how to sue someone is inconsistent with this commandment. The general idea contained in the Eighth Commandment is having respect for things that belong to other people. We must respect the time, talents, abilities, investments and ownership of others. We should not be governed by envy or the success and possessions of others. People who work hard and succeed are to be emulated, not envied. We are also to teach our children likewise.

Robbing God

Perhaps the most destructive element of the Eighth Commandment is robbing God. How does a person rob God? God considers withholding tithes as robbing Him.

Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed Thee?’ In tithes and offerings. “You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows (Mal. 3:8-10).

Tithing may not be the best way, but it is perhaps the easiest way (since it is measurable) to measure the spiritual health of the church. Today’s church gives about two percent. What we learn in Malachi 3 is that the tithe (the word ‘tithe’ means *tenth*) belongs to God and He considers it stealing to withhold that from Him.

I might add that I do not think the blessing associated with faithful tithing is magic, as if the tithing person should expect to hit the lottery because of their faithfulness. I think it is a matter of recognizing that certain works (instruction from pulpits, caring for needy, etc.) are the responsibility of the church. Those works require funding. A biblical, responsible, well-funded church is equipped to bless people.

In our country, over the last century, a ten percent church has become a two percent church and in its place a six percent government has become a fifty percent government as it seeks to fulfill the responsibilities outside the realm of its jurisdiction. It’s almost as if God is saying, “You can give one tithe to the church or five tithes to the government.” We have chosen the latter and have suffered for it.

There is much argumentation and speculation about tithing. There are all sorts of arguments about why Christians shouldn’t tithe and I respectfully disagree. Here are a couple of reasons why:

Appealing to the Law

When the Apostle Paul instructs how new covenant ministers are to be subsidized he appeals to the law of God.

Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.” Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:8-14).

In The Same Manner

Paul mentions those who minister the holy things eat of the temple, and partake of the offerings of the altar. Paul was no Gnostic. He recognized the material needs of the ministry and minister. Here he is alluding to the Mosaic system of tithing⁴⁹. In verse 14 he makes the statement “**even so**”, which is literally translated “**in the same manner**”. Paul is giving instruction on how those who preach the gospel should be subsidized. In the same manner as what? What other answer can there be than the same manner as the old covenant tithe to which he just alluded?

Interestingly enough, when Paul writes in 2 Corinthians about churches giving gifts to other churches (not tithing), he specifically states that he doesn't appeal to the law (2 Corinthians 8:8). Thus we have *tithes* and *offerings*. A *tithe belongs to God*, and an *offering* is what we have “**purposed in our heart**” (2 Corinthians 9:7) to give.

⁴⁹ Tithing was even before Moses. Abraham tithed to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:20).

Tithing was never repealed in the new covenant. One of the major causes of the impotent state of today's church is its negligence in this commandment!

The tithe is for the specific ministry of your church. Supporting other ministries or relief organizations, etc. would fall under the category of an offering.

The Responsibility of Ownership

The handling of this earth, and everything in it, is a commission given to man by God. The responsibility of ownership is not something to be taken lightly—whether it's what we own, or respecting what someone else owns, whether it's material or immaterial. We are called by God to secure a people's right over whatever God has entrusted to them.

Next time, we will discuss the master thief, what he stole and how it is restored.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Discuss, or consider, ways we can rob others; i.e. contracts, time, honor, reputation, restitution, usury, provision, lawsuits, etc.

2. How can a person rob God?

3. Discuss the Apostle Paul's appealing to the law in 1 Corinthians versus not appealing to the law in 2 Corinthians. Why do you suppose he uses this method?

Part Twenty-One: The Eighth Commandment, C

Exodus 20:15

July 22, 2018

You shall not steal (Exodus 20:15).

The Master Thief

Unexpectedly coming upon some ancient ruins in Rome was a favorite moment for my wife and me in a recent visit to Italy. We shared a glass of wine as music began to play out of nowhere. It was magical. We sat and began to imagine what this place must have been like before they became ruins. There were columns, but they were holding nothing up. There were paths that led nowhere. Roofs were absent and many walls were just missing.

There was a beauty to it, but there was also something very wrong. It had become a place to view and perhaps learn, but not a place to live. I would not have wanted to spend the night there. Our little excursion would come to an end and we would retreat to the comfort of our hotel room and modern restaurants.

Ruins can happen for any number of reasons. Sometimes it's just a lack of maintenance. It could be natural disaster, war, depopulation because of a deficiency of natural resources. But ruins can also be a result of deliberate acts of destruction. Somebody, or some group, with the motives and resources can decide that they want no recollection of a particular culture to continue to exist. History can provide a long list of villains who pillage and plunder, to ruthlessly take whatever they can and destroy what they can't.

These types of ruins, the types that become ruins through deliberate acts of destruction, can appear just as beautiful as those ruins that came about through neglect or some less devious or devastating undertaking.

There is beauty in this world that we can and should enjoy. But there is also something wrong. And we all have a feel for it, more or less. It wasn't as if when my wife and I went back to our hotel room or restaurant, life was perfect. And if, even for a while, it seems perfect, that perfection will soon come to an end.

Something happened that resulted in the world--the creation--becoming a sort of ruins. We can see that there was once vitality, a beauty that has been defiled. We have this idea of flawlessness, but it is nowhere to be found. Life is like a museum that someone drove a tractor through. The artifacts are still there and still beautiful, but not quite right. They're damaged. We want things to be the way they should be. But that goal is elusive.

And what inevitably happens, what we inescapably do in our efforts to make things feel right, is make things worse. Relationships are ruined; careers are devastated; domestic, cultural and international conflict so easily boil over in our efforts to extract what the ruins are incapable of yielding. Great evil is embarked upon through this desire to make things feel right, to reach that elusive goal. We depend upon the ruins of life to deliver something they simply can't deliver.

We think the right person, the right job, the right house, the right weight, the right friends, the right bank account, will get us there. And when it doesn't, we blame them or blame ourselves. We might rage at others, we might pity ourselves, or we may just settle: Settle for the sad reality that this is as good as it gets and there is no point in looking any further.

Because this is the uniformed and inevitable reality of human history as well as our own personal history as individuals, we tend to accept this as natural, as the way things are supposed to be. But that would be a mistake. To get so used to the pain that we decide to ignore it can be fatal. Even the slightest recurring pain may be cancerous. We need to feel that pain and acknowledge its genesis. And its genesis involves a thief. A thief has entered human history. And we (and by 'we' I mean all of creation) have become ruins through a deliberate act of destruction.

There is a master thief, who has taken what is not his. He is a thief and a usurper. Jesus said of him and his minions:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy (John 10:10a).

His thievery and subsequent death came through, and continues to come through, deception; stealing and lying always goes together. This devil is called “the father of lies” (John 8:44). And his initial lie, through which his thievery began, was to set his own word as superior to the word of God. “Has God indeed said...(Genesis 3:1)?” opened the door to his plunder.

What Has He Stolen? What Does That Look Like?

The next two questions go together. What has this master thief stolen and what does that look like or how is it recognized? The answer to the first question is both vast and simple. *He has stolen everything*. The Apostle John put it this way:

...and the whole world lies *under the sway of the wicked one* (1 John 5:19).

Literally, John is telling us that the entire cosmos reclines in the evil one. As one of the Puritan prayers indicate, “The heavens are not clean in thy sight.”⁵⁰ When the master thief offered Jesus “all the kingdoms of the world and their glory” (Matthew 4:8), Jesus didn’t question his ownership. His contamination is universal. What has he stolen? Everything. But what does it look like? As we indicated earlier, there remains a beauty to the ruins of creation.

One can only imagine the initial horror when Eve ate and gave to her husband and he ate and their eyes were opened to the darkness they were complicit in creating (Genesis 3:6, 7). But it is not as if this thievery (what theologians call *the fall*) is clearly revealed as ruinous to the natural eye. Even when the curse is pronounced we see there will still be the beauty and joy of children. There will still be the companionship of marriage. There will still be the tastiness of food. But there would also be pain, sweat and death. These curses are things we now take for granted.

The devastation of the fall is not readily apparent to the natural eye. Though the enemy of our souls has stolen, and ruined the created order, he is quite good at establishing curb appeal upon the dilapidated structure. The engine sputters and the brakes are bad, but the car will be purchased because of a shiny new paint job. As the

⁵⁰ The Valley of Vision, p. 38.

Proverb indicates, it is no difficult task on the part of the interloper to capture us “with her eyelashes” (Proverbs 6:25).

The Apostle whom Jesus loved put it this way:

For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:16, 17).

The glitter is seductive. It is no wonder that the psalmist beseeched God in prayer, asking:

Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways (Psalm 119:37).

There remains an external beauty to the created order. A warm breeze, a beautiful sunset, a delicious meal, talent in the music, art, sports math and other academics can be appreciated, admired and utilized. But they are not to be trusted. By *not trusted*, I do not mean not trusted within the boundaries of their limitations. If the fallen medical world comes upon a cure for a disease, it is not an act of faithless disobedience to take the pill.

But this world will never provide the ultimate answers or hope. We can look and look but will never find it, no matter how large the telescope or powerful the microscope. Ultimate answers will never be found through empiricism or rationalism. This is not to say we should not engage in science or in thoughtful introspection. Our senses and our thoughts are valuable and useful. But their mere use will never get us there. Why?

Because what escapes our attention is that we ourselves are part of the plunder. We are a portion of what was stolen. We too are in the sack of the thief. It was not without reason that Jesus would so often speak to His audience with the words, **“He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 13:9)**. It’s as if the hearing (and by *hearing* we are talking about understanding and embracing) of His words require some special provision from outside of ourselves.

When it became apparent that Peter understood what Jesus was teaching, Jesus revealed the source of that understanding:

Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven (Matthew 16:17).

And it is precisely here (in the thinking process) that the romance of the ruins begins to feel more like the violation of a home invasion. Some of you have experienced a robbery in your home. There is an intrusion and defilement of a home that has been robbed. It’s not just the stuff. Somebody has been *in your room*.

What has been stolen⁵¹ is our innocence, a reliable sense of goodness, objective personal morality and cultural ethics, (however defined), our lives and, horrifyingly, our ability to even know what has happened. As a screenwriter once put it: “The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world that he didn’t exist.”

But this lack of ability does not silence us. While blinded and tossed to and fro from the sack of the thief, we continue to scream. Bob Dylan wrote:

**In a soldier's stance, I aimed my hand
At the mongrel dogs who teach
Fearing not that I'd become my enemy
In the instant that I preach.**

One great thing we love to preach is that it is wrong to preach. In our rejection of that which is good, right and true, the Apostle Paul writes that we continue “professing to be wise” and in so doing become “fools” (Romans 1:22).

What does this thievery look like? It looks like a world that has lost its way and has no genuine ability or desire to find it. They will believe anything but the truth. Or, as G.K. Chesterton is credited to have said:

⁵¹ I must emphasize that humanity were willing participants in this nasty enterprise. We are not merely victims but willing perpetrators. “*Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal*” (WCF, 6:6).

When a man stops believing in God he doesn't then believe in nothing, he believes anything.

How Is It Restored?

The news seems bad. It's getting even worse when we read that, according to the Apostle Paul, we are not merely captives of this thief, but children of the thief and thieves ourselves. We are called "sons of disobedience" and "by nature children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:1, 3).

So how does restoration take place? How are all things made new? Toward the end of Scripture we see the anticipation of a restored creation:

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful (Revelation 21:4, 5).

So how does this happen? It is critical for us to realize that this restoration is not merely a matter of our cleaning up a vandalized house or seeking to rebuild a ruined structure. Though, as Christians, we are called to walk in holiness and obedience; to seek to walk in holiness without addressing and somehow contending with the master thief is a fool's errand. Or to use the words of Jesus, it would be like building our house "on the sand" (Matthew 7:26).

The thief and his power and ownership must be defeated. And we are as powerless as the Israelites on the side of the mountain by the Valley of Elah. There is a Goliath in the valley who taunts us with the power of enslavement and death and we have no answer. But there is a champion. One anointed for such a task. One, who by His own death destroys...

...him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Hebrews 2:14b, 15).

It's been said that "Jesus suffering death overcame; Satan wielding death succumbed." And as David cut off the head of Goliath with the giant's own sword (the sword which, he had no doubt, had won so many victories) the enemy would be defeated by that which he himself inaugurated, that is *death*. Through the death Christ we find the death of death. Or, as in Isaiah:

He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces (Isaiah 25:8a).

Who is worthy to accomplish such a celestial and eternal task? It is the "**Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David**" (Revelation 5:5). But when we turn and look we see "**a Lamb...slain...(who) redeemed us to God by (His) blood**" (Revelation 5:6, 9). It is Christ alone who can take back that which was stolen!

We spoke of the violation of a home intrusion. Jesus uses a similar metaphor in describing His restoration of all things:

Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house (Matthew 12:29).

Jesus would bind the strong man (the devil) and take back that which was rightfully His. This should not be understood as some purely retaliatory or militant act on the part of Jesus. It would be by *a ransom paid* (Matthew 20:28). The great victory, the great restoration and redemption of a usurped creation, would be accomplished by way of Calvary.

As willing participants in the master thief's nefarious deeds, he is defeated and we are redeemed through Christ. His false ownership and all the darkness associated with it is "**nailed to the cross**" (Colossians 2:14). Or as Paul put it, it is in the cross that Jesus...

...disarmed principalities and powers, (and) made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it (Colossians 2:15).

Now it is to the cross that we turn as we prepare for the Lord's Table.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. How is creation similar to ruins? What examples can you think of?

2. In what ways can our desires to make things right affect relationships and other behaviors in our lives?

3. What did the master thief use in order to steal?

4. What did the thief steal?

5. Is the world entirely unattractive as a result of the fall? Explain.

6. To what extent can human disciplines be trusted?

7. What is required for the natural person to grasp his/her fallen condition and why is this so?

8. What is necessary for restoration to happen?

Part Twenty-Two: The Ninth Commandment, A

Exodus 20:16

July 29, 2018

**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor
(Exodus 20:16).**

Useless Religion

One of the most disquieting verses in the Bible reads:

**If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not
bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's
religion is useless (James 1:26).**

One is hard-pressed to think of anything more devastating than useless religion. Think of brakes that are useless to stop the car or landing gear that is useless to put the plane safely on the ground. It is one thing for something to be useless. But it is quite another thing if there is a life-and-death expectation put upon that which is useless. Someone might tell me a television is useless and that is a minor inconvenience. But if the pilot says our landing gear won't lower or the tires have come off, that can seriously ruin your day.

The specific behavior James highlights to expose a useless religion is the lack of willingness to bridle (or properly guide) our tongues. It is this unbridled tongue which James uses as an example of the person who is a *hearer* of the word but not a *doer* of the word (James 1:22).

James hammers this home in chapter three:

**Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey
us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships:**

although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh (James 3:3-12).

James' point seems to be that even though the tongue is small, it is very difficult to control and it can have a monstrous impact. We can become so excellent at hiding our sin, at tucking it down deep. Then, like a dormant volcano, our words erupt and that sleeping giant of sin turns our exhale into an indictment. In the words of Jesus:

For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks (Luke 6:45b).

Isaiah was racked in self-horror when his eyes saw the **“King, the Lord of hosts”**, because in seeing the King he saw himself with clearer eyes. And the mechanics behind this self-abhorrence (Job 42:6) had to do with his own **“unclean lips”** and his inclusion among **“a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5)**. Unlike many of us, Isaiah did not take comfort in the notion (true or not) that there were others beneath him in goodness and piety.

One glimpse of God, and the condemnation of all the creation becomes quite clear. And somehow our lips become the thermometer, making manifest the temperature of our heart. An uncircumcised heart (Acts 7:51) may be easily hid. But uncircumcised lips (Exodus 6:12) tell a story.

A Common, Acceptable Sin

Yet in all of this, the Ninth Commandment is perhaps the most common and egregious sin invading and disrupting the covenant community known as *the church*.

The inability to know, or lack of willingness to care about, when the conversation has moved into the realm of ungodliness is a very common transgression among Christians. It is a common and ‘acceptable’ sin.

There is an old (and often repeated) story about a man who had been telling rumors, rumors he thought to be true about a certain pastor. It finally came to his attention that what he was saying was false. Filled with remorse he found the pastor and apologized for the things he had said, and asked if there was anything he could do to make it up to him. The pastor asked him to meet at the top of the church tower the next afternoon.

The man met him and the pastor handed him a feather pillow, asked him to cut it open, and throw the feathers from the tower. The man complied. The pastor then asked the man to meet him there the following night. At this meeting the pastor asked the man to collect the feathers he had released the night before. Of course this was impossible. The man then realized how words cannot be retrieved. He realized how damaging it is to speak falsehoods.

But this commandment goes way behind merely speaking falsehoods. It is about *preserving truth*. The Westminster Larger Catechism spends more time on this commandment than any other. A detailed analysis of the catechism would bring us way beyond our allotted time, but it is worth a read with some comment⁵²:

The duties required in the ninth commandment are:

The preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our neighbor, as well as our own,

appearing and standing for the truth; and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things whatsoever;

⁵² There are biblical prooftexts for all these catechism assertions.

a charitable esteem of our neighbors; loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for and covering of their infirmities;⁵³

freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocency;

a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them;

discouraging talebearers, flatterers, and slanderers;

love and care of our own good name, and defending it when need requireth;

keeping of lawful promises;

studying and practicing of whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report.

The sins forbidden in the ninth commandment are:

All prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbors, as well as our own, especially in public judicature;

giving false evidence, suborning⁵⁴ false witnesses, wittingly appearing and pleading for an evil cause, outfacing and overbearing the truth (when somebody yells or intimidates another into a false submission);

passing unjust sentence, calling evil good, and good evil;

rewarding the wicked according to the work of the righteous, and the righteous according to the work of the wicked;

⁵³ This is not to suggest the avoidance of Godly inquiry and confrontation. It is the notion of the unnecessary exposing of another's weakness or failure.

⁵⁴ Inducing.

forgery, concealing the truth, undue silence in a just cause, and holding our peace when iniquity calleth for either a reproof from ourselves, or complaint to others;

speaking the truth unseasonably, or maliciously to a wrong end, or perverting it to a wrong meaning, or in doubtful or equivocal expressions, to the prejudice of the truth or justice;

speaking untruth, lying, slandering, backbiting, detracting, talebearing, whispering, scoffing, reviling, rash, harsh, and partial censuring;

misconstructing intentions, words, and actions;

flattering, vainglorious boasting, thinking or speaking too highly or too meanly of ourselves or others;

denying the gifts and graces of God;

aggravating smaller faults;

hiding, excusing, or extenuating of sins, when called to a free confession;

unnecessary discovering of infirmities;

raising false rumors, receiving and countenancing evil reports, and stopping our ears against just defense;

evil suspicion;

envying or grieving at the deserved credit of any endeavoring or desiring to impair it, rejoicing in their disgrace and infamy;

scornful contempt, fond admiration;⁵⁵

⁵⁵ The idea of fawning over people.

breach of lawful promises;

neglecting such things as are of good report, and practicing, or not avoiding ourselves, or not hindering what we can in others, such things as procure an ill name.

Preserving Truth

The duty involved in this commandment is the duty of *preserving truth*. Truth is an often used yet seldom defined word. It is said that truth loves a definition (perhaps you now feel that it has been overly defined). We will say the word *truth* as if we're praying, yet make every effort to allow it to remain vague.

Suffice it to say that Christ referred to Himself as truth (John 14:6). The word of God is truth (John 17:17). Truth accounts for much more than we can ever imagine. Charles Hodge states:

Truth is, so to speak, the very substratum of Deity...So it is the foundation of the physical and moral order of the universe.⁵⁶

The Necessity of Truth

If, as seen with Isaiah, there is a universal indictment against humanity due to our lying lips, how is that remedied? How do lying lips somehow circumcise its own lying heart? Isaiah remained paralyzed until his lips were touched by something/someone from outside of himself. How does a mere man overcome, as Jesus put it, **“the father of lies” (John 8:44)?** Who will touch our lips? How can we walk in truth? How can we speak the truth, when it is so against our nature?

Or to put it in stark, biblical terms:

**Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots?
Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil
(Jeremiah 13:23).**

⁵⁶ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprinted 1989), p. 437.

The implied answer to these rhetorical questions is *no, no* and *no*.

Men, by their natures, are constrained to bear false witness. And others are constrained to *believe* the false witness. But the truth of Christ has the undeniable witness of the Triune God. Jesus taught that if He bore witness of Himself, His witness is not true (John 5:31). That's not to say that Jesus was lying, but rather that God Himself confirms His truth by His threefold witness:

I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me (John 8:18).

And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth (1 John 5:6).

So we see the Father, Son and Spirit all bearing the most truthful of testimonies to the human heart. Whatever truth any of us have of right, wrong, life, death, heaven, hell, salvation, damnation, reprobation or redemption, we owe it all to the true testimony of God working in and circumcising our bitterly reluctant hearts.

John says it this way:

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may *continue to* believe in the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:9-13).

We are presented here with the notion of calling someone a liar. He who denies the testimony given by God in His word (1 John 4:6; John 17:17) has chosen to call God a liar (something we actually see men emboldened to do these days). And if we are going to know of

God's love for us, the truth must be protected, cherished and contended for. Next week we'll further examine what the Ninth Commandment protects; if lies are ever permissible; if the truth be slanderous; and what our lips continue to tell us about ourselves.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Have you found that improper talking is common in the church? Why do you suppose this is?
2. Discuss the damaging effects of gossip.
3. Why is truth so important?
4. What is the 'witness of God'?

Part Twenty-Three: The Ninth Commandment, B

Exodus 20:16

August 12, 2018

**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor
(Exodus 20:16).**

Introduction

Shortly after *Roe v. Wade* was passed in 1973, I was invited to a meeting. The speaker at this meeting discussed how we as Christians were going to have to respond to this decision by the Supreme Court. It was at this meeting that I first heard two terms: *seizing the language* and *pro-choice*.

The speaker explained that those who supported this piece of legislation would not want their movement to be associated with the word, ‘abortion’. They, therefore, had to seize the language. They needed language that would help them sound noble. Their rally cry would not sound as if it was supportive of *abortion* but supportive of *choice*. The methodology, as we can see, has proven to be quite successful.

A quote, generally attributed to Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s Propaganda Minister, reads:

If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of

the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.⁵⁷

Shortly after that meeting I was assigned a book to read in one of my undergraduate classes entitled *How To Lie With Statistics* by Darrell Huff. The book probed the methods of establishing data in such a way as to favor your desired result. Things like how to tabulate results, what types of questions to ask in a poll and many other nefarious methods to make things look like hard facts when they truly are not.

So often, people will seek to buttress whatever their position might be with the phrase, "these are the facts". Years ago a heavily funded pro-choice (pro-abortion) organization (which generally presents itself as a family planning organization) was boasting that in the areas where they were more prominent there were fewer teens giving birth. Further investigation revealed that while that might have been true, pregnancy terminations in those same areas went up demonstrably.

All this to say, figuring what the truth is can be a difficult task. People are willing to lie (whether intentionally or not) and there is a skill involved in unearthing truth. And when one lives in a culture which self-consciously seeks to remove God from the equation of our thinking, that skill becomes rare. For, seeking to know truth apart from knowing *the Truth* (and by the Truth, I mean Christ, as He is self-described) becomes an exercise in futility.

Review

Last week we began with a discussion of how James used our lack of ability to bridle our tongues as an outward manifestation of useless religion (James 1:26). We then spoke of the duty involved in this commandment, which is the preserving of truth. Truth is a non-negotiable for the faith. Jesus is the truth (John 14:6); the word of God is truth (John 17:17); truth liberates (John 8:32).

⁵⁷ Some believe this is a variation of the Big Lie, an expression that was coined by Hitler when he dictated his 1925 book *Mein Kampf*, about the use of a lie so "colossal" that no one would believe that someone "could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously".

To give up the truth is to give up God Himself and the freedom He provides through the truth of the gospel. Conversely, to give up God (as if such a thing can even happen) is step one in shoveling the truth to the curb. Suffice it to say the fall of man resulted from the father of lies—the devil (John 8:44)—getting Eve to question the truth of God and His word.

We also spoke briefly how the Triune God bears witness to the truth of Christ (John 8:18; 1 John 5:6). The greatest and most undeniable testimony ever given by God Himself is of the truth of His own Son. The certainty of this testimony is so strong that John indicates those denying it to be in the act of calling God a liar (1 John 5:10). In yet another one of His most audacious statements, Jesus conveyed that the incontrovertible certainty of His words are sufficient for judgment (John 12:48).

As much as people don't like it (in our very romantic notions of God and religion), there is structure to truth. Throughout history there have been those who have entered the church seeking to present God as some amorphous personality—as if God is beyond logic and reason—as if the unsearchableness of God is synonymous with the unknowable-ness of God. But when God defines Himself as One who does not lie or change His mind (Numbers 22:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; James 1:17), He is informing us of a structure in His character—a structure revealed to give us peace, hope and assurance, or warning.

And it is not as if God is constrained by outward laws of logic, ethics or reason—as we might initially think. True logic, ethics and reason are themselves defined by the character and nature of God. If we are going to know of God's love for us, the truth must be protected, cherished and contended for.

Protecting Reputations

The Eighth Commandment addressed the protection of property. The Ninth protects reputations, which are, arguably, more precious. We are required, in this commandment, to maintain and promote the truth between man and man. We are also required to preserve our own, and our neighbor's, good name.

In its most direct sense a false witness is one who goes before a civil tribunal and perjures himself against another person. In today's court system perjury has become a bit of a minor infraction. The

maximum penalty today, even for the most severe felony of perjury, is only about four years. We might find it surprising how concerned God is with honesty, especially as it pertains to the protection of the innocent. In the 19th chapter of Deuteronomy we are informed that a person who offers a false witness will have done to them what they intended to have done to the other via that false witness:

And the judges shall investigate thoroughly; and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. (Deuteronomy 19:18-19a).

Of all the commandments, this one may be the most destructive in terms of personal relationships.⁵⁸ If you're found to be a liar, trust is compromised. A husband, wife, parent, sibling, friend can work through almost any problem or sin in their relationship, but as soon as one is shown to be a liar, it is no longer 'us' who is working through the problem. This sin removes a person from the unity of the battle. Trust must then be won back which usually requires a great deal of time and effort.

Justifiable, Obligatory Deception?

Is it ever justifiable to deceive? There is disagreement, even among the great theologians, as to when it is justifiable or even an obligation to deceive. Years ago at a church picnic I was playing volleyball. I pretended I was going to hit the ball in one direction, then hit it another way. A lady on the other team called me a deceiver! Is it a sin to fake left then go right in a sporting contest? Is it wrong to deceive a mad dog in order to destroy him, or a murderous villain in order to prevent the death of an innocent, or deception in a military battle, etc.?

Jesus clearly uses fiction when He tells a parable. Of course all knew it was fiction. But He also uses deception to give a lesson:

And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted (*prosepoiesato*) as though He would go farther (Luke 24:28).

⁵⁸ Except for murder of course.

Prosepoiesato means to pretend. He was giving the impression that He was going to do something that He had no intention of doing. These are pretty mild examples.

But what of the lie of Rahab in Joshua 2? Through a lie she protected the men of God. There is also the example of the lies of the Hebrew midwives in Exodus 1. Through their lies they protected the babies of the Hebrew nation when Pharaoh would have killed them. Both of these events found the praise and reward of God, even though they included deception.

It is argued that their praise from God never directly includes a reference to their lies, and that may be true. Yet their deception was at the heart of the overall event for which they were praised. Calvin said of Rahab:

And still the act of Rahab is not devoid of the praise of virtue, although it was not spotlessly pure. For it often happens that while the saints study to hold the right path, they deviate into circuitous courses.

Perhaps there was a more sinless route Rahab or the Hebrew midwives could have taken to make their virtue spotlessly pure. But it seems in this life that we are often confronted with decisions where we must prioritize. Breaking the speed limit while seeking to get a sick child to the hospital or violating a city ordinance of staying off the grass when you can administer CPR to a dying person who happened to fall on that grass would be obvious examples of obligatory disobedience of one command in obedience to a greater.

These things can be difficult calls. Obedience requires wisdom. We should not seek to justify ourselves or look for loopholes in the law of God.

No Partiality

The violation of the Ninth Commandment moves beyond the courtroom and into any social interaction.

You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge

your neighbor fairly. ‘You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD (Leviticus 19:15, 16).

We tend to give certain people the benefit of the doubt depending upon the nature of our association with them. This passage tells us this shouldn’t be. If we know a person intimately, it is easier to have a predisposition to either excuse or accuse them.

We must seek to evaluate each situation from a common starting point. If we don’t make a determined effort to achieve this, we will find ourselves more open to gossip and slander when it is addressed to certain people. This isn’t to say we shouldn’t have greater suspicion of a pathological liar, but that we should seek fairness.

We also learn the principle here that there should be no favoritism, or discrimination, based upon income or social status.

We should thoughtfully examine what we’re about to say. Are we speaking to edify, encourage, lift up and rejoice or to vent and find an advocate for our grievance? Let us examine the words and wisdom of Solomon:

The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body. Like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross are burning lips and a wicked heart. He who hates disguises it with his lips, but he lays up deceit in his heart. When he speaks graciously, do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart. Though his hatred covers itself with guile, His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly. He who digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him. A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth works ruin (Proverbs 26:22-28).

He who speaks truth tells what is right, but a false witness, deceit. There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment. Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but counselors of peace have joy. No harm befalls the righteous, but the wicked are filled with trouble. Lying lips are an

abomination to the LORD, but those who deal faithfully are His delight (Proverbs 12:17-22).

Purging Unclean Lips

What flows from our lips may be most tell-tale in terms of human depravity. Jesus teaches us that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). It is no wonder that we find it so difficult to pray aloud what we seem to be so comfortable uttering privately. Our lips alone would be enough to condemn us on the great and terrible day of the Lord. One thinks of the inauguration of Isaiah:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!’

And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: ‘Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts.’ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal *which* he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth *with it*, and said: ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged’” (Isaiah 6:1-7).

Beholding the holiness of God caused Isaiah to come undone. He didn’t resolve (at least here) to try harder or be a better person. He didn’t take comfort in the fact that others were greater liars than himself, but rather he viewed the lies of his fellow humans as a greater indictment against him. The wheels had come off his cart, and all he could do was lament.

I am reminded of when my children were little and had a bad dream. Their fear might overwhelm them. There were times when

they couldn't even make it out of their room. All they could do is sit in bed and cry and wait for mommy or daddy to come and rescue them. Such is the case for all, who by the grace of God, have eyes to see (even in a veiled sense) the holiness of God.

The coal is too holy even for the angel to touch. It carries it with tongs and touches the lips of sinful man and behold his iniquity is taken away and his sin is purged. And the coal is Christ. Reminiscent, this is, of the angels who heralded the birth of the Savior who takes away iniquity and purges sin. The Savior, **“Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth” (1 Peter 2:22)**. Isaiah took no comfort in his brothers of unclean lips, but found peace with God through One who would call him brother (Hebrews 2:12), whose lips knew no deceit. Our faith must be in the righteousness of a holy God who has the power to save, through Christ alone. Amen.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. The Eight Commandment protects property. What is protected by the Ninth Commandment?
2. Discuss God's disposition toward a false witness.
3. Why is lying so detrimental in relationships?
4. Discuss "justifiable deception".
5. When should we give certain people the benefit of the doubt over others?
6. Discuss the inauguration of Isaiah. What was his role? What was his disposition? What happened to him?

Part Twenty-Four: The Tenth Commandment, A

Exodus 20:17

August 19, 2018

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's (Exodus 20:17).

The Demon Possessed Law-Keeper

When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation (Matthew 12:42-45).

Law-Keepers?

Jesus was surrounded by people who, for some reason, thought they were very good at keeping the law of God. He tells this story in the midst of these self-proclaimed law-keepers. Although I believe the lesson Christ gives here primarily applies to Israel as a nation, it still has application to the individuals who make up that nation. I also believe the principle taught here can apply to any nation or individual in history. Before we pursue our study of the Tenth Commandment, let's examine this particular passage of Scripture.

First, let's look at the nature of the evil spirit. The evil spirit finds itself driven out of a man and wandering through the dry places.

The evil spirit is not content unless it torments, so it seeks refuge by re-entering its prior victim.

Secondly, let us examine the victim. The victim has cleaned up his house. It is swept and put in order. But one other thing is said about the house—it's empty. Being empty, the demon finds seven other demons worse than him to occupy the empty man. The victim is now in more troubled than before. There's an old saying, "There's nothing worse than a reformed drunk." This statement may be truer than we think.

One of the dangers of studying the law comes when there is a limited amount of success in keeping it. We might feel that we are now demon free. But, as William Hendriksen wrote, **"...harmlessness is not the same as holiness. Desisting from wrong differs by a whole heaven from being a blessing."**⁵⁹ We must not allow our house to remain empty; otherwise we'll be demon-free but open for business. We must be indwelt by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:11), which is evidenced by faith in Christ for the forgiveness of our lawlessness.

A History of Coveting

According to Vines, covet or *epithumeo* means to fix the desire upon (*epi*, upon, used intensively; *thumos*, passion).⁶⁰ It means to long for or lust after. Usually the word 'covet' is used with the meaning to covet in an evil sense. In Hebrew, the word is *Hamad*. It refers to an inordinate, ungoverned, selfish desire.⁶¹

For a powerful example of coveting let's go to the very beginning:

Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4,5).

⁵⁹ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Baker Book House, 1973), p. 540.

⁶⁰ *Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Macdonald Publishing), p. 254.

⁶¹ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Volume 1* (Moody Press, 1980), p. 295.
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It was, and often still is, man's inordinate desire to be in control of his own destiny, to be "like God", that leads him into great and certain turmoil. The enemy knew that before he could get Adam and Eve to disobey God he had to get them to a boiling point of desire, lust, covetousness.

So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate (Genesis 3:6).

This particular sin affected the entire human race. It all starts with lying and coveting.

Ahab

Arguably, coveting is the sin that leads to all other sins. We see numerous accounts in Scripture where a covetous spirit leads to treachery. When we read the story of Naboth's vineyard it, a spoiled discontent child comes to mind.

NOW it came about after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. And Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, 'Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden because it is close beside my house, and I will give you a better vineyard than it in its place; if you like, I will give you the price of it in money.' But Naboth said to Ahab, 'The LORD forbid me that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.' So Ahab came into his house sullen and vexed because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he said, 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.' And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and ate no food"(1 Kings 21:1-4).

Poor, poor Ahab! We learn in the rest of the story that Jezebel plotted to kill Naboth and obtain the plot of land for her husband. Ahab, "sullen and vexed" and overcome with covetousness, made no effort to keep his wife from perpetrating this heinous act, and

eventually his wife, and his descendants, found themselves under great judgment.

David

Then there is the very popular example of David.

Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman (2 Samuel 11:2,3).

We see a similar violation and judgment upon King David who, due to his coveting, ended up taking Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, for himself and impregnating her. In order to hide this evil deed, he ended up killing her husband. He and his family found themselves under the judgment of God. In David's situation an entire nation was eventually affected. This all started with coveting.

Paul

Coveting was the sin that brought the Apostle Paul to his knees.

What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead....Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful" (Romans 7:7, 8, 13).

Universal Failure

One of the things we want to avoid is thinking we're pretty good at keeping the Ten Commandments. We must understand that you, and I, and everyone else, continually break all ten all the time. But even people who have deluded themselves into thinking that they're pretty good at keeping the commandments (at least generally speaking) cannot deny their violation of *this* commandment. No honest person denies the existence of covetousness in their life.

The Road to Covetousness

What is the road to covetousness? According to the *Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession Standards*,

The Tenth Commandment Requireth Full Contentment With Our Own Condition, With A Right and Charitable Frame of Spirit Toward Our Neighbour, and All That Is His.

Covetousness is established by our lack of contentment with the allotment of God's providence in our lives. This does not mean that we advocate a stoic lifestyle of apathy and indifference. Goals, ambitions and desires can be a very good thing. We are certainly called to run our race to win; to work heartily as unto the Lord; to pray that God will increase our flock and prosper our household. All the time remembering...

The horse is prepared for the day of battle, *but deliverance is of the LORD* (Proverbs 21:31; Italics mine).

The road to covetousness comes when we do not have the vision to find our chief happiness in God and what He, according to His divine wisdom, chooses to give us. Covetousness comes when we ignore thanking God for His graciousness in what we presently have. The Psalmist rejoices...

O LORD, YOU are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot. The lines have fallen to me in

pleasant places; Yes, I have a good inheritance (Psalm 16:5, 6).

Paul gives a warning regarding the place where being a malcontent can lead:

But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

Riches, material or otherwise, are not necessarily evil. But they can become very evil and destructive if we set our heart upon them.

If riches increase, do not set *your* heart *upon* them (Psalm 62:10).

And He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions” (Luke 12:15).

Paul, who was converted as result of realizing that he was covetous, later states that he had learned to be content:

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need (Philippians 4:11).

Enjoying God's Providence

Do we have—do we desire—the wisdom and vision to enjoy God's providence even now? As one brother is fond of saying, "It's all part of life's rich pageant, I wouldn't change a thing." The violation of this commandment comes from a heart of discontent. "Give me more Lord! Give me more!" is so often the cry.

Do we find ourselves longing to be in some other time, or somewhere else, or even to be someone else? Do we find ourselves cursing God's providence in our lives and longing, as some do, to be delivered from their present state by the so-called 'secret rapture'⁶²? I wonder if we know what an affront to God this actually is and how it leads to so many evils when we consider that God Himself "**ordained our days before there was yet one**" (Psalm 139:16) and Christ Himself challenges and assures us...

Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU (Hebrews 13:5).

Next week we'll speak of steps that can be taken in order to move toward contentment. Suffice it to say for now that mankind will never find contentment if their soul is merely empty and swept. We will ever seek to furnish the house. And it will be a never-ending journey of frustration and discontentment—dissatisfaction of the highest order. There is but one place where deep, true, abiding and everlasting contentment is to be found.

We will finish here, directing our thoughts toward the penetrating words of Augustine who, fifteen-hundred years ago, in Book I, Chapter I of his Confessions, said:

Great art Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Thy power, and Thy wisdom infinite. And Thee would man praise; man, but a particle of Thy creation; man, that bears about him his mortality, the witness of his sin, the witness that Thou resistest the proud: yet would man praise Thee; he,

⁶² I do believe there will be a rapture but I prefer to call it *the resurrection*. I certainly don't think, however, it's going to be a secret.

but a particle of Thy creation. Thou awakest us to delight in Thy praise; for Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee.⁶³

⁶³ Augustine, S., Bishop of Hippo. (1996). *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. (E. B. Pusey, Trans.). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What was the downfall of the demon possessed law-keeper?
2. What is the danger in successful law-keeping?
3. Review the examples of coveting in Scripture. Can you think of others?
4. What is the primary flaw in our character that leads us to covetousness?
5. Discuss the quote from Augustine. What does that look like in terms of our experience?

Part Twenty-Five: The Tenth Commandment, B

Exodus 20:17

August 26, 2018

You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s (Exodus 20:17).

Review

One of the dangers of studying the law comes when there is a limited amount of success in keeping it. We might feel that we are now demon-free. But, as William Hendriksen wrote, **“...harmlessness is not the same as holiness. Desisting from wrong differs by a whole heaven from being a blessing.”**⁶⁴ We must not allow our house to remain empty; otherwise we’ll be demon-free but open for business. We must be indwelt by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:11), which is evidenced by faith in Christ for the forgiveness of our lawlessness.

According to Vines, covet or *epithumeo* means to fix the desire upon (*epi*, upon, used intensively, *thumos*, passion).⁶⁵ It means to long for or lust after. Usually the word ‘covet’ is used with the meaning to covet evilly. In Hebrew, the word is *Hamad*. It refers to an inordinate, ungoverned, selfish desire.⁶⁶

Adam and Eve (food was pleasant to the eyes and desirable); Ahab sullen and vexed, sulking on his bed because he couldn’t have the vineyard he wanted; David’s escapades with Bathsheba; Paul uses

⁶⁴ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Baker Book House, 1973), p. 540.

⁶⁵ *Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Macdonald Publishing), p. 254.

⁶⁶ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Volume 1* (Moody Press, 1980), p. 295.

coveting as an example of the sin that revealed to him that he was spiritually dead.

We discussed the road to covetousness and how covetousness is a consequence of a lack of contentment with the allotment of God's providence in our lives. Paul wrote:

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need (Philippians 4:11).

Pursuing Contentment

Since lack of contentment is the primary stumbling block in regard to this commandment, how does one attain (or, at very least, pursue) contentment? I would like to finish instruction on this commandment by borrowing from the 17th century English Puritan Thomas Vincent's *Family Instructional Guide*,⁶⁷ which gives instructions on how we may approach contentment.

Godliness

First, by attaining true godliness, to which alone true contentment is accompanied.

Paul writes to Timothy that,

Godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6).

What is godliness but the earnest, heartfelt effort to obey God's commandments because they are wise and good? The person who trusts Jesus as Savior will certainly trust Him as Lord! How inconsistent to trust Christ with your eternal soul but not trust Him with our ethics and virtues! Seeking godliness, therefore, applies to the pursuit of every commandment.

⁶⁷ Vincent, Thomas, *A Family Instructional Guide*, (Escondido, CA: Ephesians Four Group) 1999.

A life full of sin is a breeding ground of discontent, which leads to covetousness, which precedes all other sins and their attending devastations. It may be true that perfection in this life will never be found, but if we don't know (and if we cannot agree upon) that which is right, then we will not even be moving in the correct direction.

I hesitate to quote football coaches, but I believe Vince Lombardi was onto something when he said:

Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection we can catch excellence.

...for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more (1 Thessalonians 4:9, 10).

God's Providence

Secondly, by being fully persuaded of, seriously and understandingly eyeing the wise and good hand of God's providence in his disposal of us, and bringing any affliction upon us.

Job writes,

The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD (Job 1:21).

The Psalmist also records,

I know, O LORD, that Your judgments *are* right, and *that* in faithfulness You have afflicted me (Psalm 119:75).

Second Corinthians 4:4 (referring to Satan as the god of this age *aionos*) is often understood as if Satan is god or a god or some form of deity. That I (or an entire culture or world) make something or someone my god does not transform it/him/her into an actual god. We will not move in the direction of contentment apart from acknowledging God's hands, even in our darkest and most severe moments.

Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11).

The Fatherly chastening of God continues until we draw our last breath. Its ultimate aim is utter and unique dependence upon Christ in Whom the peaceable fruit of righteousness is found. It is God's goal in our lives and He is unwavering in His pursuit of it. This speaks closely to the next call.

God's Benevolence

Thirdly, by trusting in God's promise to cause all things, even the worst things that can befall us, to work together for our good.

There is not a thing that transpires in our lives that is not part of the divine orchestration of God for our ultimate well-being. Paul writes:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

We often read this verse as if there something out there that we will finally like or see to be good. We should rather recognize that we currently have this promise *this very moment*. The riches of heaven belong to us *now*! Our Lord orchestrates the course of events that we might begin to catch glimpses of a current truth. Is there a glorious future? Without question! But we need to begin to appreciate that, for a child of God, the present time is a gift from God as well.

Why this is so difficult for us is found in the next charge.

Humility

Fourth, by humility, and a deep sense of our undeservings and ill deservings at God's hands for our sins.

As one great reformed theologian stated, “You have no concept of the depth of your sin.” Do our attitudes reflect Jacob’s sentiment?

I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant (Genesis 32:10).

And again in Daniel,

O Lord, to us *belongs* shame of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You (Daniel 9:8).

We will find that we will covet less when we realize that God owes us nothing but judgment and grants us, as His children, nothing but mercy.

Perspective

Fifth, by looking to others better than ourselves, who have been lower in the world and more afflicted than we have been.

The Scriptures teach that our Savior had nowhere to lay his head. We read in Hebrews of those of whom the world was not worthy, who had no certain dwelling place, many of them were destitute, afflicted, and tormented.

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in* dens and caves of the earth (Hebrews 11:35-38).

We are told that all these obtained a good testimony through faith. The discontent which leads to covetousness is an odd thing when it comes to our condition in this life.

As a child I recall being so happy to have been given a bike, even though it had no tires. I rode it on its rims! It was incredibly loud. You can imagine the irritating sound. It didn't bother me. At seven years old, I had a bike! The screeching did quite bother the neighbors though and it didn't take long after that for me to get a bike with tires. In time I wanted one with a banana seat and high-rise handlebars and gears.

Then of course I got older and wanted a car, any car. My first was a fifteen-year-old Oldsmobile Dynamic 88 that I bought for \$125. It was awesome—for a while. It is weaved into our psyche to grow rapidly discontent. It requires a special type of maturity to appreciate. We, along with our children, scoff at the old saying, "I cried because I had no shoes until I saw a child with no feet."

We work with and bring our young people to orphanages and rescue missions and third-world countries to help. We hope there will be the collateral benefit of learning to appreciate what we/they have. But that seems so elusive. Frankly, we are a bit spoiled. But I do pray that it is a well-placed chastisement as we meditate upon the relative ease of our current condition as compared to that *great cloud of witnesses*.

We are so easily ensnared, the Scriptures teach (Hebrews 12), as we seek to run our race. We all say we want to be like Jesus (at least I hope we do), but we are not willing to endure what He endured.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls (Hebrews 12:3).

Contentment is approached when we begin to consider our spiritual lineage and the exacting means by which God made holy those who went before us and were superior to us.

We will continue this list in our next meeting. For now, let us not lose sight of that grace which informs us that it is not our success in keeping these commandments which brings us favor before God. In the midst of this call to holy living and the inspiration of others, we are reminded that we do not fix our eyes on our success for peace with God. We are rather to *fix our eyes upon Jesus*, who granted us faith and preserves us in faith. And it is in this faith alone that we have peace with God.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What is the primary flaw in our character that leads to covetousness?
2. What is godliness, and how is it obtained?
3. How does a proper understanding of God's providence lead to contentment?
4. Why is God's benevolence encouraging to Christians?
5. In what way (or ways) can humility contribute to contentment?
6. What does it mean to have a proper "perspective" regarding our condition?

Part Twenty-Six: The Tenth Commandment, C

Exodus 20:17

September 2, 2018

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's (Exodus 20:17).

Review

In quick review, we have discussed how one of the dangers of studying the law comes when there is a limited amount of success in keeping it. We might feel that we are now demon-free. We must not allow our house to remain empty otherwise, as Jesus taught, we'll be demon-free but open for business. We must be indwelt by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:11), which is evidenced by faith in Christ for the forgiveness of our lawlessness.

We also focused on the notion that coveting is a sin of *thought*. It means to *fix the desire upon*, generally in an evil sense. It is what is going on in our mind and heart prior to other evils. Adam and Eve beheld the food that was pleasant to the eyes and desirable; Ahab sullen and vexed, sulked on his bed because he couldn't have the vineyard he wanted; David desired Bathsheba. Paul cited coveting as the sin that revealed to him that he was spiritually dead.

We discussed the road to covetousness and how covetousness is a consequence of a lack of contentment with the allotment of God's providence in our lives. Since lack of contentment is the primary stumbling block in regard to this commandment, how does one attain (or, at very least, pursue) contentment? We then began to take advantage of the 17th century English Puritan Thomas Vincent's

Family Instructional Guide,⁶⁸ which gives instructions on how we may approach contentment.

First, by attaining true godliness, to which alone true contentment is accompanied.

Secondly, by being fully persuaded of, seriously and understandingly eyeing the wise and good hand of God's providence in his disposal of us, and bringing any affliction upon us.

Thirdly, by trusting in God's promise to cause all things, even the worst things that can befall us, to work together for our good.

Fourth, by humility, and a deep sense of our undeservings and ill deservings at God's hands for our sins.

Fifth, by looking to others better than ourselves, who have been lower in the world and more afflicted than we have been.

That ends the review. We continue:

Heavenly Minded

Sixth, by laboring so much the more to abound in spiritual riches, the less we have of temporal; and if we have no earthly inheritance to secure our right to, living by faith upon our heavenly inheritance; hereby the poorest some become the richest, and those that have most outward trouble have most inward joy.

As Christians, our treasure must be that which has the most value. For, it is the things which have the most value that God gives in abundance. Even though it is not very Christian to be anti-material, we must realize that material things can be taken from us at any moment. We must, therefore, set our hearts on that which is eternal.

...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not

⁶⁸ Vincent, Thomas, *A Family Instructional Guide*, (Escondido, CA: Ephesians Four Group) 1999.

break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:20, 21).

This is not to suggest we should not enjoy those things God has given for our physical, daily sustenance. We should pray for our daily bread and enjoy eating it. But it is just too easy for our possessions to possess us. Let us not grab our *ownings* (whether possessions or relationships) with a clenched fist. Let our hands always be opened to the possibility that God will desire, in His infinite wisdom and power, to remove something we *think* we need. Consider Abraham and Isaac! This relates to the next.

Earthly Destiny

Seventh, considering how we brought nothing into the world, and that we can carry nothing with us out of it.

We must keep everything in perspective. There was a bumper sticker that was popular for a while which read, *He Who Dies With The Most Toys Wins*. I always thought a more reasonable one would read, *He Who Dies With The Most Toys Is Dead*. (Though I'm not sure how well this one would sell!) As Job records:

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. (Job 1:21).

Paul instructs his young protégé in the ministry:

For we brought nothing into *this* world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content (1 Timothy 6:7, 8).

It seems little kids are most ill-behaved when they go to Disneyland. They allow their lust for enjoyment to bring out the worst in them. I recall walking through Disneyland and hearing this small child screaming and crying for a Mickey Mouse hat! The mom very casually informed her child that he was about to get a Mickey Mouse spanking.

We must be careful not to be babes in this respect. In the four score God granted us on this earth, we ought not allow His gifts to bring out the worst in us. Glitter pulls on our hearts. Again, this can be material possessions or even relationships. The other day I saw a small group of boys about thirteen or fourteen sitting in the parking lot in the Hollywood Riviera with their skateboards. They looked very hip and they were pretty good skaters. As a kid I would have strongly desired to be part of that group. We think we're more mature than that now. But that type of thinking still exists in the heart of adults also.

Example of Christ

Eighth, by going to Christ to teach us the lesson of universal contentment, and fetching strength from Him to exercise this grace in every condition.

We must continually go to Christ and learn from Him. His promises are great and His promises are sure. If we are going to have any chance at moving in the right direction, of walking in the light rather than being overcome by the darkness (1 John 1:5-7) we must avail ourselves of the means of grace. Prayer, the preaching of the word and participation in the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper) have fallen on tough times. They barely make the list of those things which are necessary for Christian living. It has been said:

Preaching is not a powerless human explanation of the biblical text, for the Spirit accompanies it so that God's Word achieves its purposes (cf. Isa. 55:10–11). Prayer is more than empty words; it establishes communion between us and the Creator, thereby empowering us for belief and faithful, effective service (cf. James 5:16b–18). Baptism and the Lord's Supper are not mere memorials that we do simply because Jesus tells us to do them; rather, we participate mysteriously in Christ Himself when by faith we take part in these ordinances (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16).⁶⁹

⁶⁹ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/means-of-grace/>
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These are the means that God has chosen to keep us close to Christ in light of His ascension. We should seek to be consistent and faithful in them.

Beloved, covetousness is a sin whose food is discontent and whose symptoms are ruin and destruction. I pray that we would all have the ears to hear and eyes to see the graciousness of God's grace! I pray that in our headlong pursuit of those things in this world, some which are good and proper, we would never lose sight of the beauty of today and the glory of God's providence in every small and wondrous creature and event that crosses our paths. Before we attempt to change the world to suit our fancies, let our hearts be changed to delight in the Lord, that He might give us the desires of a sanctified heart according to His infinite wisdom and goodness.

A Buffeting

Before we conclude this series on the Ten Commandments I would like to make two more observations as it relates to our perseverance in seeking to walk in them. The first has to do with the following two verses, both written by the Apostle Paul. In his efforts to walk faithfully he wrote of himself:

...but I buffet (*hypopiazo*, to strike or wear down) my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27).

This effort to do what we ought, rather than what we feel, should be a lifelong endeavor for a Christian. But God has not left us at the mere disposal of our own discipline. When it came to pride, Paul's self-discipline seemed insufficient. So what did God pull from His holy satchel to address Paul's pride?

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet (*kolaphize*, to beat or strike) me, lest I be exalted above measure (2 Corinthians 12:7).

Where we may be inept and grow weary in our pursuit of holiness, God is without fatigue. And He utilizes all of creation, including evil and the devil himself, to sanctify us. As Augustine stated:

“The poison of pride...cannot be cured except by poison.”

Calvin states:

“But what does this mean -- that Satan, who was a manslayer from the beginning was a physician to Paul, and that too, not merely in the cure of the body, but -- what is of greater importance -- the cure of the soul? I answer, that Satan, in accordance with his disposition and custom, had nothing else in view than to kill and to destroy, and that the goad, that Paul makes mention of, was dipt in deadly poison; but that it was a special kindness from the Lord, to render medicinal what was in its own nature deadly.”

Similarly, after Joseph was mistreated by his brothers, sold into slavery, endured false accusations, and imprisonment, he understood Who was ultimately in control.

And as for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive (Genesis 50:20).

Justification By...

We have now studied the Ten Commandments. And although we have spent numerous weeks in them, we have only scratched the surface of the fullness of God's law. As we conclude our devotions here, let us be reminded of how we are to think of the law. The Apostle Paul treats law in some detail in Galatians.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and

not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified (Gal. 2:16).

Justification

If we place the law of God in the wrong category of our redemption, the consequences are critical. I cannot think of too many things in Christianity, or in life, more important than understanding justification by faith. *What is justification?* Justification is a forensic or legal declaration of acquittal; to be justified means to have the confidence that no one can bring an eternal charge against us as God's elect (Romans 8:33).

To be justified means that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ—not tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword! To be justified means that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord! Justification is a wonderful thing!

So, *how is one justified?* The verse just cited teaches us that we are not justified by the works of the law. In other words, justification has nothing to do with our character, our intellect, our morality, our presence of mind, the meritorious nature of our own faith, or any other attribute or quality we may possess. Romans 8:33 teaches us that *it is God Who justifies*.

If we are looking to any aspect of our own being for our justification, we err. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. That is to say, the condemnation we deserved, He took. And the righteousness that He lived, we freely received. The promise to Abraham was that through his seed all the nations of the world would be blessed. And if we have been made right before God it is because of God fulfilling His promise through Christ Jesus.

Our best efforts to keep the law of God should, and will, yield better churches, families and nations. But our best efforts to keep the law will also yield eternal damnation apart from a God-given faith in Jesus Christ. And as much as we should desire to see strong churches, families and nations, what we should desire the law to achieve even more is a hunger and passion for the cross of Christ.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Discuss what it means to be “heavenly-minded”.
2. What is our earthly destiny and how should it govern our thinking?
3. How does one seek Christ for contentment?
4. What is justification? Why is this important?
5. Discuss the role of the law in terms of justification.
6. How is one justified?

