

The Commands of Christ

Theonomy
and
the Law of God

Paul Viggiano

*The Commands of Christ: Theonomy and the
Law of God*

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This volume was compiled using the notes from a 24-part series of sermons on Theonomy and 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

Contents

Part One—Liberty in God’s Law <i>James 1:25</i>	<i>Page 9</i>
Part Two—The Spirit and the Law <i>James 1:25</i>	<i>Page 23</i>
Part Three—Why I’m a Theonomist, A <i>Hebrews 2:2,3; 10:28,29</i>	<i>Page 39</i>
Part Four—Why I’m a Theonomist, B <i>2 Timothy 3:16,17</i>	<i>Page 51</i>
Part Five—Why I’m a Theonomist, C <i>Deuteronomy 4:5-8</i>	<i>Page 63</i>
Part Six—Why I’m a Theonomist, D <i>1 Corinthians 15:33; Proverbs 13:20;</i> <i>Ephesians 5:11,12; Leviticus 20:7,8</i>	<i>Page 77</i>
Part Seven—Why I’m a Theonomist, E <i>2 Timothy 3:16,17</i>	<i>Page 87</i>
Part Eight—The First Commandment <i>Exodus 20:1-3</i>	<i>Page 97</i>
Part Nine—The Second Commandment <i>Exodus 20:4-6; Acts 17:29</i>	<i>Page 105</i>
Part Ten—The Third Commandment <i>Exodus 20:7</i>	<i>Page 117</i>
Part Eleven—The Fourth Commandment, A <i>Exodus 20:8-11</i>	<i>Page 129</i>
Part Twelve—The Fourth Commandment, B <i>Exodus 20:8-11</i>	<i>Page 139</i>

Part Thirteen—The Fifth Commandment, A <i>Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16</i>	<i>Page 149</i>
Part Fourteen—The Fifth Commandment, B <i>Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16</i>	<i>Page 159</i>
Part Fifteen—The Sixth Commandment, A <i>Exodus 20:13</i>	<i>Page 167</i>
Part Sixteen—The Sixth Commandment, B <i>Exodus 20:13</i>	<i>Page 175</i>
Part Seventeen—The Seventh Commandment, A <i>Exodus 20:14</i>	<i>Page 187</i>
Part Eighteen—The Seventh Commandment, B <i>Exodus 20:14</i>	<i>Page 195</i>
Part Nineteen—The Eighth Commandment, A <i>Exodus 20:15</i>	<i>Page 207</i>
Part Twenty—The Eighth Commandment, B <i>Exodus 20:15</i>	<i>Page 215</i>
Part Twenty-One—The Ninth Commandment, A <i>Exodus 20:16</i>	<i>Page 225</i>
Part Twenty-Two—The Ninth Commandment, B <i>Exodus 20:16</i>	<i>Page 233</i>
Part Twenty-Three—The Tenth Commandment, A <i>Exodus 20:17</i>	<i>Page 245</i>
Part Twenty-Four—The Tenth Commandment, B <i>Exodus 20:17</i>	<i>Page 263</i>

Part One:

Liberty in God's Law

James 1:25

May 10, 2009

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).

Introduction

Having finished a study of the Gospel of Matthew, we saw Jesus concluding with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Within the Great Commission are the instructions, **“teaching them (disciples) to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20—parenthesis mine)**. We will now embark upon a brief study of the commands of Christ.

We may be tempted here to merely look at commands Jesus gave during His three-year earthly ministry. But since Jesus is the eternal Son of God, we should broaden our understanding of the extent of His law to include the commands of God revealed throughout the entirety of Scripture. In our study of the commands of Christ (or, the law of God) it will become necessary to determine what principle is to be applied which functionally abrogates certain laws.

For example, it was a law to sacrifice lambs and to circumcise believers, but we recognize those particular ceremonies (for some reason) are no longer commands for Christians in the New Covenant. Nonetheless, Jesus made it clear that He did not come to eliminate God's law.

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by

no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17-19).

The onus then is not to show which laws are still God's law, but which laws have been repealed and why. These are issues which we will approach in due time. This morning we introduce the subject in order to embrace a healthy perspective on the law of God.

I. Law or Love?

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 there is 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 first (foremost) commandment of all**" (Mark 12:28)? 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,

**The first of all the commandments is:
*'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is***

one. *And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.* This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29-31).

The Love Criteria

So the most important thing a person can do is love God and love his neighbor. Some might argue that the most important thing a person can do is believe in Jesus. But loving God while rejecting Jesus is a contradictory notion. So assuming we all agree that the most important thing any of us can actually do is love God and love our neighbor, allow me to 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 31. Jesus says, “**There is no other commandment greater than these**” or, as in Matthew, that “**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.

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 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!

II. 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 misinterpretations 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 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

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 Scriptures.

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 Christian, especially a Christian leader, who wants something from you. Or even a well-meaning friend who might give poor or ungodly counsel.

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 doesn't 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,

But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful

³ Our works will be judged, but we won't (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.

hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does (James 1:25).

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, miss-perception 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).

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

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?

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. We might even think that we’re walking the victorious Christian walk⁸. In this case 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).

⁸ I say this ‘tongue-in-cheek.’ The true victorious Christian is one who is ever dependent upon Christ over and above keeping the law--any law.

III. The Law and the Gospel

The law and gospel are very common biblical terms. In short, the law is what God demands and the gospel is what God provides. There aren't too many things more important than knowing what God demands and what God provides. The law and the gospel are not enemies with each other, nor are they mutually exclusive in their use.

Moses Versus Jesus?

John makes the statement in his gospel:

For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

Some read this to mean that Moses and Jesus were at odds with each other, as if there were two different plans. They believe that Moses taught that God's standard is the keeping of the law and that Jesus taught that God's standard is not the keeping of the law. Is John saying that the immutable (unchanging) God has changed His standards? Moses and Jesus were not at odds with each other. This is clearly stated in the Epistle to the Hebrews:

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward (Hebrews 11:24-26).

This passage seems to be teaching us that Moses was a Christian. Look at verse twenty-six. Moses was not looking to the law for his redemption but to Christ. Moses brought the law⁹,

⁹ It is interesting to note here that although the Old Testament has grace, it gives the full expression of the law. The New Testament has law but gives the full expression

but neither Moses nor today's Christians are saved by their keeping of it.

Three Purposes of the Law

The law has always had a specific purpose, actually three purposes: It reveals the righteousness of God; it reveals the standard for righteous living; it reveals to us our need for a Savior. It did that for Moses and it should do the same for Christians today. When man looks at the law of God he sees: an extension of God's character and nature; the perfect standard for human life and ethics and his own fallen state. The law of God should make us yearn for Christ. Nothing more efficiently leads us to Christ than the law of God.

A Standard Met, Not Changed

Is obedience to the law of God a necessary condition for salvation? The answer is an emphatic 'yes'! *God has not changed His standard. He fulfilled His standard through His Son and freely and graciously gives us the gift of righteousness.* Paul does not tell us that God's standard has changed; he tells us that God's standard was met by Christ and imputed¹⁰ unto us. Read one of the greatest 'one verse' summaries of the gospel:

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Nothing New

Jesus was accused by the Pharisees of being an iconoclast, a revolutionary, someone who was bringing a 'new' teaching into

of grace. Most people who use this verse to downplay law are getting their law from the New Testament, which does not appear to be the purpose of the New Testament at all.

¹⁰ 'Imputed' means to credit to one's account. It is as if someone graciously decided to put a large sum of money in your bank account. Having done nothing to earn it, you've become rich. Praise the Lord!

the kingdom of God. Jesus made it very clear that His mission was in no way inconsistent with that which came through the Old Testament (here referred to as the Law or the Prophets). Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill the law.

Abolished or Fulfilled?

To suggest that the law has been abolished and that keeping the law is no longer a requirement for salvation is to say that Jesus merely talked the Father into having a pleasurable disposition toward fallen man by changing the rules. To understand that the law has not been abolished is to understand that Jesus lived a righteous life for us, died for us, rose for us and didn't change the plan but fulfilled the requirements of the law and gave the free gift to us.

The removal of the law as God's standard diminishes how apparent our need for Christ truly is. The standard is perfect adherence to the law. When I understand that, I realize how much I need that which only Jesus can provide. The Law of God promotes a life-long dependence upon Christ. The standards haven't been changed; they've been met!

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What would you ask Jesus if given the opportunity? Why?
2. By what criteria do you define love?
3. What does it mean that the law “hangs” on loving God and others?
4. Is the law a burden or a blessing? Explain your answer.
5. From what does the law liberate us?
6. How does the law help us avoid being manipulated by false guilt?
7. Are there consequences for disobedience to the law? Explain.
8. Jeremiah 6:19 says that God brings calamity upon those who heed not His words. How do we see this happening today?
9. In Romans 7:7 Paul indicates a role the law played in his life. Examine and discuss this role.
10. What is the difference between the law and the gospel?
11. Was Moses a Christian?
12. Discuss the three purposes of the law.
13. Did Jesus abolish or fulfill the law? What is the difference?

Part Two:

The Spirit and the Law

James 1:25

June 14, 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 I 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.”¹¹

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 ethically 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 seeking to rationalize abortion, gay 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 objective¹² 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

¹¹ 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.

¹² The difference between objective and subjective is the difference between fact and opinion. *Two plus two equals four* is a fact—*chocolate is better than vanilla* is opinion. We live in a culture which approaches ethics the way they approach ice cream.

opinion, has become one of the greatest enemies of Christian ethics and the peace and harmony 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, 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 rather “right” which is the way of death. Keep in mind that just because you think, feel, or are convinced something is right—even as a Christian—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 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 others.¹³ 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? 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.

¹³ 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. 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 the laws which 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, your 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 legalist¹⁴ 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

¹⁴ A legalist is one who believes you're saved by your own law-keeping.

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, 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) 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 actually be 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 mind 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.”¹⁵

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.

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.

¹⁵ Essie Chamberlain, *Essays, Old and New* (Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, Chicago, 1926), pp. 112,113.

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 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 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-nominal?
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 being 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 or why not?

17. Should we think we have kept the law? Why or why not?

Part Three:

Why I'm a Theonomist, A

Hebrews 2:2, 3; 10:28, 29
July 5, 2009

For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him* (Hebrews 2:2, 3)?

Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace (Hebrews 10:28, 29)?

Introduction

Many years ago, after exercising in my health club, I was standing in line to get a drink from the water fountain; behind me stood an elderly man with a beard wearing a shirt, which read 'Born Again Atheist'. I couldn't resist—smiling, I said, "It must take a lot of faith to believe that." After a little interrogation he concluded that I was a Christian and was more than eager to enter into a fairly enthusiastic dialogue. I could tell he wanted to fight but I made the effort to keep things friendly—I think I succeeded.

A few days later my new friend found me at the club and asked me to step outside. I didn't think he wanted to fight so I accommodated him. He went to his car and pulled out an old dog-eared Bible. I thought to myself, I know few Christians who have such worn out Bibles and even fewer who are as evangelistic

as this born again atheist. He opened his Bible to some passages that I must have read at some point (I had read the Bible all through more than once) but they still had the shock value he was hoping for.

He turned to the Old Testament civil codes in Leviticus 20; they were highlighted and underlined. They were a list of behaviors that might be called capital crimes—crimes which incurred the penalty of death—and there were a lot of them. “Your God,” my friend informed me, “is a bloodthirsty despot!” He was waiting for a response. I must admit (although outwardly I was keeping my cool) I felt my back was against the wall. I felt like I had to defend a dark side of the God who had saved my soul. But I also knew that if there was a problem, it wasn’t with God or the Bible. If there was a problem, the problem was with me—perhaps I had become so accustomed and desensitized to sin that that which was worthy of death, according to the character and nature of God, seemed shocking to me.

I gave my friend an answer that, unlike many first answers I give when confronted with a new subject, is still my answer: “If God thinks those behaviors are worthy of death, they must be.” He grumbled mightily at that response, but there wasn’t much else he could say. This was my first encounter with a theological issue called *theonomy*.

I began testing the evangelical waters on this issue. What would others say if confronted by the same atheist with the same issue?

I remember speaking with a young woman who was in the ministry regarding the death penalty in general. She was against it altogether. Her reasoning was that the New Covenant was a covenant of grace and not law. I asked her if she thought there should be any penalty for severe crimes. She believed in life in prison. But how is life in prison gracious? It seems that if you wanted to be consistent with that thinking there would be no punishment for crime at all. Criminals need merely apologize, agree to repent and be set free.

Running the subject by a young Christian lawyer I knew, he indicated that if he were to serve in Washington, he would never propose to his fellow legislators that we follow the Old Testament civil codes. He said they would laugh him off the

floor. He was a knowledgeable Christian but believed there was some other standard more suited for the functioning of government than the standard given by Moses in the Law. I am still, genuinely, seeking to figure out how that standard works.

There is a general disposition, I have found, coming from both the world and the church that Christians ought to just keep their noses out of politics. I am routinely assailed by atheists and Christians alike for the columns I write (generally addressing some cultural or political issue) in a secular newspaper. Pastors, according to many, should restrict their dialogue to their pulpits and those narrow parishioners with their medieval minds still willing to imbibe the mythology of Scripture as a legitimate life and world view.

Secular society is willing to allow those who believe in the God of Scripture to govern their own lives, households and churches by biblical standards (although that is coming under attack in our culture which is increasingly hostile to biblical Christianity), but the idea that kings, princes, presidents and legislators ought to consult the word of God for wisdom on how to govern has been rejected by almost all. It is precisely here that even Christians, often unwittingly, are seeking to serve two masters.

In my opinion, the *zeitgeist* (spirit of the age) of the sixties has infiltrated the heart of Christ's church to the extent that we have willingly sent two-thirds of the Bible packing and have replaced it with a form of semi-biblical cultural relativism. I say *semi-biblical* because we still believe that the Bible ought to be consulted at some level. But I have continually noticed the Scriptures trumped by a system of thought which became prominent (and even taught in schools) during my youth.

This system of thought was made popular by a man named Joseph Fletcher—although some feel Fletcher was merely popularizing something taught earlier by a Swiss theologian named Emil Brunner who wrote *The Divine Imperative*.

Joseph Fletcher was an ordained Episcopal priest who later became an atheist—in 1974 he was named Humanist of the Year by the American Humanist Association. He served as president of the Euthanasia Society of America—later renamed the Society for the Right to Die. He was also a member of the

American Eugenics Society (sort of a selective breeding organization) and the Association for Voluntary Sterilization. But it was Fletcher's book *Situation Ethics* that made waves. The book came out in 1966 and became part of the perfect storm of rebellion and hedonism (living for pleasure).

Fletcher promoted a sort of discovery of ethic via situation. I remember sitting in a small group in class and being asked to make ethical decisions based upon various situations. For example, we had to imagine being in a lifeboat with ten people of various ages, background and health. In the scenario there was only enough food for nine people to survive so we had to decide who got thrown overboard—in other words, whose life is more valuable?

Ethics was determined by the situation. According to Fletcher there can be no pre-established rules of right and wrong. Every situation is unique—you cannot generalize—each case is handled on its own under a vague notion of love. In each case do what is most loving. And, of course, the definition of love was itself up for grabs.

Fortunately, by God's grace, I was also exposed to a unique theological personality who was a contemporary of Fletcher—a man named Francis Schaeffer. Schaeffer wrote a book called *A Christian Manifesto* addressing how during his life he had witnessed a cultural and political shift from a Christian life and world view to a Humanistic life and world view. Much of Schaeffer's work focused on maintaining a biblical commitment in the political arena.

Later I was exposed to the lectures and works of Rousas John Rushdoony who wrote *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, and also Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen who wrote *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*. These theologians, in my opinion, were able to address the issue with which my born again atheist confronted me, more reasonably and with more biblical integrity than I had heard elsewhere.

They were all experts on what became known as Calvin's Geneva—where John Calvin served to clarify the role of Christ in relationship to civil government. Many would disagree with their assessment of Calvin's position on theonomy (the word probably hadn't even been invented yet). But, of course, everyone wants

Calvin on their side. It will not be my intention to argue about which reformed theologians or theological camps agree or disagree with theonomy. What I would like to present is a biblical argument for the role of God's law in politics.

If you recall, this series was launched via the Great Commission where Jesus commissioned His followers to make disciples and teach them to obey all that He commanded. There isn't a lead case over politics that Christ doesn't see and isn't allowed entrance. So as a sub-topic of teaching the commands of Christ, I think it will behoove us to examine the issue known as theonomy.

Theonomy—A Definition.

What is theonomy? It's a combination of two Greek words *theos* (God) and *nomos* (law); in short, it simply means *God's law*. More specifically, it has become a term referring to the study of the extent of the application of the Old Testament civil codes to modern politics. In the Old Testament we see God giving laws to Moses, which were to be applied in the civil governing of Israel. Although we will see some of this in the New Testament, there is no place where the counsel of God is more thoroughly revealed in terms of how a nation ought to be governed than the law given to Moses.

It might be easiest to understand theonomy to be addressing things that are not merely sins but crimes. All crimes are sins, but not all sins are crimes. An easy way to determine which sins fall into the realm of criminal activity would be those sins which God calls men to punish after a due process. For example, the first theonomic statement in the Bible might be found in the ninth chapter of Genesis:

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

When someone commits murder, God is telling men that they must deal with that issue through a civil penalty—in this case, the death penalty. There are many objections by Christians

to theonomy. I will do my best to address those objections over the next few weeks. First, I would like to explain why I think the issue is important. It's not my desire to simply be a theological provocateur. I would like to offer at least four reasons why I think the subject is critical: The preeminence of Christ, the influx of relativism, the spread of the gospel and the justice of the gospel.

Why is Theonomy Important?

1. The Preeminence of Christ.

Not in order of importance, the first reason I believe theonomy is an important issue has to do with the preeminence of Christ. It is not the goal of theonomy merely to clean up Washington and make life better and safer for our children (although I think it would certainly include that). Over and above whatever pragmatic benefits there might be to godly government, above it all is the acknowledgement of Jesus as the **“King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15)**.

Over the years, theologians have come to recognize three offices of Christ—prophet, priest and king. These are not offices He will someday have, but offices He currently has. There is generally agreement today among evangelicals that Jesus is our prophet (His word is the word of God) and our Priest (presenting His own blood and interceding for us before His Father in heaven).

But the majority of modern Christianity has a very truncated view of the third office. He may be King of our hearts, but He will not take that office, it is suggested, until He comes again. Or there are those who view His kingship as merely operating in heavenly or ethereal realms. But neither of those views work well with the biblical notion that Jesus is *currently* King of kings. “King of kings” is present tense, not future, and there are no other kings in the heavenly realm for Jesus to be king of.

As we finished the Great Commission, Jesus made it clear that all authority had been given to Him **“in heaven and on the earth” (Matthew 28:18—emphasis mine)**. The followers of

Christ are to make disciples based upon the fact that Jesus has *all* authority on earth—not just some authority.

In the second chapter of Philippians Paul uses the aorist (past tense) to explain that Jesus has been highly exalted and given **“the name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9)**. Paul explains in Ephesians that Jesus is *now* at the Father’s right hand **“far above all principality, and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come” (Ephesians 1:21)**.

In Psalm 2 the Father says to His Son, **“Ask of Me, and I will give you the nations for Your inheritance” (Psalm 2:8)**. Are we to assume Jesus didn’t ask? And who receives the warning in Psalm 2? **“Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth” (Psalm 2:10)**. Psalm 2 has unavoidably political undertones.

In Colossians 1:18 we are taught that Jesus is **“the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”** Preeminence *proteuon*, literally means *first place*. Jesus is to have first place in “all things.” This means in an ultimate sense television is to glorify Jesus, schools are to glorify Jesus, medical professionals should see themselves as serving Jesus, politicians and economists and entertainers, etc should recognize their efforts to be richer and deeper than they otherwise thought because they are doing their work to the glory of God.

At a time when the church had every reason to think Jesus had very little power over kings, the Apostle John gave a perspective we should still embrace today. He greets the churches in the name of Jesus Christ...

...the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood (Revelation 1:5).

In the one verse we see the “faithful witness” (Prophet) and the one who “washed us from our sins in His own blood”

(Priest). Notice also that Jesus is “the ruler over the kings of the earth” (King).

A God-glorifying aspect of theonomy is its recognition of the preeminence of Christ over all areas of life—including politics.

2. The Influx of Relativism

A second value to theonomy is its genuine answer to relativism in the monstrous arena of politics. What are we teaching our children and our watching culture when they see Christians spouting the verbiage of moral absolutes while functioning as political relativists? I have noticed that, at least in theory, it is here that almost all Christians are verbal theonomists.

What I mean by this is there is an almost unanimous agreement among Christians that allowing mere men to determine right and wrong has disastrous consequences. Almost all Christians believe that kings and presidents should be on their knees and govern in a godly manner.

In the many seminaries I’ve attended and interactions I have had with numerous Christians from a wide variety of theological persuasions, I must say I have yet to meet anyone remotely Christian (and often non-Christians) who doesn’t think that rulers ought to submit to the holy character of God.

At the same time, when the conversation gets down to practical discussions, our sources, in terms of what that character should actually produce is almost meaningless. In short, if you reject that special revelation given by God on how nations are to be run (primarily revealed in the Old Testament), you are generally left to leaders making decisions based upon their own vague notion of love or justice or jurisdiction. Politics is a giant blind spot where Christians like to claim absolutes, but have no idea where the absolutes are to be found.

3. The Spread of the Gospel

Thirdly, I believe this issue valuable due to the spread of the gospel. Paul exhorts Timothy to pray **“for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life”**

(1 Timothy 2:2). When missionaries enter unevangelized areas they are often met with violence and sometimes imprisonment. We pray that those in authority might come to faith and utilize their position to open doors for the gospel.

“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Oftentimes, in order for the word of God to be heard, doors need to be open by those who are hostile to Christ. We pray they will repent, come to faith and open otherwise shut doors. As a church we pray for the saints in China who attended a seminar I taught there a couple of years back. Many were imprisoned and separated from their families and churches. Little doubt they ministered in prison. But our prayer is that they would have the freedom to bring Christ’s message to all the world.

Governments and their laws play a large role in the advancement of Christ’s kingdom. Their efforts at halting the gospel will fail. Again, Psalm 2 speaks to them:

Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish *in* the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him (Psalm 2:10-12).

The gates of hell will not prevail against the kingdom of God (Matthew 16:18). Kissing means to respect the authority of (1 Samuel 10:1). It should be the prayer of Christians that judges and kings respect the law of Christ in order that, like with the king of Nineveh (Jonah 3:6-10), all under their authority would be blessed.

4. The Justice of the Gospel

Finally, theonomy upholds the justice of the gospel—the cross, after all, was a public execution where the **“just”** died **“for the unjust”** (1 Peter 3:18). It is in this civil arena where we see, more than anywhere else on earth, the full sense of the penalty for

sin. When a society loses its sense of justice, its citizens lose their sense of guilt before God and their need for a Savior.

When sins, which are crimes, go unpunished, a people become unacquainted with their own **“unjust”** (*adikos*—meaning *unrighteous* as compared to Christ who is “just” *dikaios*) condition. In the same way a church which refuses to discipline opens the doors of unacceptable behavior by failing, as the Westminster Confession teaches, to deter **“other from like offenses,”** a nation which calls **“evil good and good evil”** (Isaiah 5:20) becomes **“wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight”** (Isaiah 5:21).

The author of Hebrews utilizes the Old Testament civil system in this very way to punctuate man’s culpability before God.

For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him* (Hebrews 2:2, 3)?

This passage depends upon the unalterable justice of God (**“a just reward”** *endikon* fair or just *misthapadosian* reward or punishment) to make its point. The **“word spoken through angels”** was God’s law. This becomes even clearer later in Hebrews.

Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace (Hebrews 10:28, 29)?

Notice the author's premise! The premise is the civil justice of the Mosaic administration, the execution of the offender on **“the testimony of two or three witnesses”**. To remove the validity of the premise (as those who reject theonomy tend to do) is to remove the impact of the conclusion—**“the punishment”** of those who **“trample the Son of God underfoot.”** The writer seems to be saying, “Since you know those penalties are just, how much more the eternal penalties?”

The New Testament utilizes the Mosaic Law to confirm the justice of God as it relates to believing or rejecting Christ. To reject the civil codes of the Old Testament softens the impact of the justice of the gospel. A culture devoid of a proper understanding of justice will have difficulty grasping their need for Christ.

But assuming Christians affirm the preeminence of Christ, the danger of the influx of relativism, the desire spread of the gospel and the legitimacy of the justice of the gospel—how do we go about serving Christ in the political venue? What are the rules? What are the laws? Where are they to be found? How does the New Testament interact with the Old Testament to reveal this information to us?

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Have you ever been confronted with passages in the Bible that catch you off guard? How do you respond?
2. What are some of your initial thoughts about capital crimes and the death penalty as seen in Scripture?
3. How would you characterize our society's disposition toward Christ and politics?
4. What is relativism or situation ethics? Do you see strengths or weaknesses in these systems?
5. Define *theonomy*.
6. How does theonomy address the preeminence of Christ?
7. Does theonomy provide strength against the influx of relativism in politics? Explain why.
8. In what respect does theonomy more strongly promote the spreading of the gospel?
9. How does theonomy help bring to light the "justice of the gospel"?

Part Four:

Why I'm a Theonomist, B

2 Timothy 3:16, 17

July 12, 2009

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16, 17)

Review

Having finished the Gospel of Matthew we've embarked upon that portion of the Great Commission where Jesus instructs us to teach His law—**“all things that (He) commanded” (Matthew 28:20)**. We discovered that Jesus equates the commands of God with love. When asked which is the great commandment in the law, Jesus answers it is to love God and love our neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). To reject the law of God, at least in a certain sense, is to abandon God's definition and prescription for love.

We then examined some of the reasons James might call the law the **“perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25)**. The law of God liberates (or sets us free) from legalism and manipulation, consequences, bondage and, most importantly, pride (casting us to Christ for help).

The law of God reveals the righteousness of God (being an extension of His own nature and character), a holy and objective standard for ethics and, again, our need for a Savior. We spoke of how the law of God is fulfilled but not abolished (Matthew 5:17-19).

In our second message we reinforced the idea that without God's law there is no objective standard. We addressed the shortcomings of the idea of supposing that the leading of the Spirit is somehow at odds with being led or directed by God's law (that the spiritual man recognizes God's law as coming from God and seeks to walk in it).

The danger of the very subjective notion of a false understanding of what it means to be led by the Spirit results in an ethic which is neither universal nor transcendent (nothing can be said to be absolutely right or wrong). It also produces an ethic where the sins of others cannot be determined (thus halting us from seeking to lovingly correct the erring brother as the Scriptures call us to do). Walking in the Spirit means doing what is objectively right (according to God's law) opposed to what one feels like doing or feels is right.

In our third message we addressed the topic known as *theonomy*. Theonomy specifically addresses the extent of the application of the Old Testament civil codes to modern politics. I put forth four reasons why I think theonomy is important: 1. The preeminence of Christ in all areas, including politics; 2. It addresses the influx of relativism in the very large arena of civil law; 3. It is a key factor in the spreading of the gospel since it is generally civil leaders God uses to open or close doors to the preaching of the gospel; 4. It reveals the justice of the gospel (Proverbs 28:5), since there is no other arena which more clearly demonstrates the just and due penalty for sin than the civil arena—a society which loses its sense of justice will not so clearly perceive the due penalty for sin. We ended our last message with these questions:

How do we go about serving Christ in the political venue? What are the rules? What are the laws? Where are they to be found? How does the New Testament interact with the Old Testament to reveal this information to us?

It is this final question I would like to focus on this morning. How does the New Testament interact with the Old Testament when it comes to our Christian faith in general? If we can't answer that question, the issue of theonomy will surely be overwhelming. There is widespread confusion when it comes to grasping the extent that we, as New Testament/New Covenant

Christians, utilize the Old Testament/Old Covenant as a means to determine “**what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.**”¹⁶

We seem to forget that when Paul writes

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16, 17)

the New Testament had not yet been compiled. Virtually every reference given in the New Testament regarding the value of Scripture (for the New Covenant Christian¹⁷) is a reference to the Old Testament. Yet many of us, upon reading the Old Testament, are perplexed.

Many modern-day Bible teachers encourage their students to, for all intents and purposes, stay out of the Old Testament entirely. They argue that the Old Testament, especially the Mosaic economy (the period between the time God gave the Law to Moses until the time of Christ) is simply a different era, or *dispensation*, that has little to do with gentile Christians.

Even those who do not take such a radical approach of dividing up the dispensations find the Old Testament a difficult read. Unfortunately this has led to a paralysis among many Christians when it comes to the Old Testament. We have a difficult time finding the application. We may enjoy a verse here or a verse there but must ignore so much—so much of what Paul told us to study (2 Timothy 2:15).

This shortcoming has serious implications when it comes to the issue before us: *theonomy*. It is in the study of the Old Testament civil codes that many who generally agree regarding the continuing value of the Old Covenant message of God’s character and law, seemingly become dispensational in their approach—regarding the message of the Old Testament as either

¹⁶ The Westminster Shorter Catechism; Question 3.

¹⁷ That is, Christians during and after the birth of Jesus.

geographically or chronologically disconnected to today's Christian.

In light of this difficulty, I would like to present two points, points I think will help in terms of expanding our appreciation of the entire Bible as a source of light and truth. It will also help explain, whether you agree or not, why I find theonomy the most biblically tenable approach to ethics in the political arena (having already explained why I think this is of value in a previous message).

The two points are: the continuity of the message found in the Old Testament as it folds into the New (I believe the Bible teaches continuity versus discontinuity). And, in a related subject, the way the New Testament interacts with the Old Testament when it comes to law and ethics.

1. Continuity Versus Discontinuity

The first question is continuity versus discontinuity. At the risk of over-simplification, the question is, *'Does God need to repeat Himself in the New Testament in order for His Old Testament instruction to be valid, or does the Old Testament instruction continue to be valid unless God so indicates?'*

Should we assume some sort of sweeping abrogation of the entire Old Testament? Should we only embrace those portions of the Old Testament repeated in the New? It was recently pointed out to me that it wasn't the purpose of Jesus to repeat the entire Old Testament within the New Testament. Nonetheless, it's a fair question to ask if the New Testament teaches that we are to expunge the Old Testament, utilizing it only upon reference of the New Testament writers. I must argue that that is an inappropriate way to approach the Bible.

A Single Message

We must realize that the Bible essentially contains one message from a God **“with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17)**. The message builds from Genesis to Revelation, but is *one message*. Our confession beautifully expresses that we ought to have a **“high and**

reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the *consent of all the parts*, the *scope of the whole* (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God" (*italics mine*).¹⁸

The consenting message from Genesis to Revelation is the message of man's fall and God's redemption of fallen man (truly all of creation) through His only Son, to His own glory.

This gospel message is first revealed in Genesis 3:15 where God proclaims the eventual and inevitable crushing of Satan by the seed of the woman—that seed being Christ.

This unfolding covenant of grace is revealed in God's promise never to judge the earth again as He did during the time of Noah (Genesis 9:8-17)—a covenant signified by a rainbow (Genesis 9:13).

Further amplification of God's glorious gospel promise is given to Abraham, to whom God promised that in him "**all the families of the earth shall be blessed**" (Genesis 12:3). The Apostle Paul reveals that this promise to Abraham foretold of God justifying "**the Gentiles by faith**" (Galatians 3:8).

God would continue to utilize what we might call the 'redemptive history' of the Old Testament to reveal His plan of redemption in Christ. He would graciously hold the wayward Israelites within the boundaries of His wonderful promise by delivering detailed instructions to Moses regarding the depth of His law and grace.

The Law of God was given in detail from Exodus through Deuteronomy, as was a Levitical system (a system of priesthood). In this priesthood we saw sacrifices, cleansing ordinances, temple rituals, etc. all designed to instruct us regarding God's singular plan of redemption through our High Priest Jesus (the essential message of Hebrews).

¹⁸*The Westminster Confession of Faith*. 1996 (Chapter I, 5). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Paul labors to point out that that law/Levitical system given to Moses (what we might call the Mosaic economy) was not **“against the promises of God” (Galatians 3:21)**. In other words, God made this wonderful promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:18), which was merely a fuller expression of the promise already made directly after the fall (Genesis 3:15), and all the Mosaic economy did was keep us **“under guard” (Galatians 3:23)** until the Christ would come.

In short, the prophets, priests and kings (especially David of whom it was foretold that Christ would sit on his throne—Acts 2:30) of the Old Testament served to point to Christ. This is why Jesus taught that the Old Testament was essentially about Him (John 5:39; Luke 24:27).

My first point is that the promise of God—what we call *the covenant of God*—from Genesis 3 to Revelation 22 is a covenant of grace where God through Christ restores that which was lost in Adam. When you’re reading the Old Testament you’re reading the same story as the New Testament.

The Continuity

I emphasize this to overcome our natural aversion for the length and complexity of the Old Testament—an aversion which often times contributes to our willingness to view the Old Testament as less significant or even insignificant. I emphasize this in order to bring to light the reasonableness of my thesis in this first point, which is, ‘only God can make laws¹⁹ and only God can repeal them.’

If I make rules at home, my children should view those rules as being in full effect when we go to the grocery store or the bank, unless I so indicate. I shouldn’t be required to restate all my rules (no running, screaming, fighting and throwing stuff) for every venue. Nor should I be required to restate my rules every time they have a birthday.

The argument for the continuity of God’s message (both in law and gospel) is twofold. One, it is based upon the character and nature of God:

¹⁹ By “law” here I mean absolute standards, not the laws men might make (like a speed limit) in an effort to uphold God’s absolute standard.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning (James 1:17).

God *is* not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good (Numbers 23:19)?

My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips (Psalm 89:34).

Compare how Paul describes the law and how, in an ultimate sense, the words are descriptive of God.

Therefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good (Romans 7:12).

No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God (Mark 10:18).

God is “**just**” (1 John 1:9).

Holy, holy, holy *is* the Lord of hosts (Isaiah 6:3).

Certainly, it can be said, in a certain sense, that others are good, just and wise. But Paul’s use of these words, which are so powerfully assigned to God, to describe God’s law, is telling. God doesn’t flip a coin or research legal libraries for law. His law and His justice are found no further than His own character.

A second argument for continuity is found in the New Testament itself and its continual use (and recommendation for use) of the Old Testament as our source for the faithful.

2. The New Testament Use of the Old Testament

Three times Jesus is tempted by Satan and three times His response begins with **“It is written”** (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10)—all references to the Old Testament. Referring to the Old Testament, Paul teaches: **“All Scripture is...profitable for reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness”** (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Peter utilizes Leviticus 11:45 when instructing his readers to turn from their **“former lusts”** with the words: **“Be holy, for I am holy”** (1 Peter 1:15).

When there was only an Old Testament in existence, Jesus teaches that we **“live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”** (Matthew 4:4), then amplifies His point by stating that not **“one jot or one tittle”** has been abolished from the law (Matthew 5:18). Paul quotes the law as a justification for his argument for tithing: **“...does not the law say”** (1 Corinthians 9:8)? He also quotes the commandment in his instruction on how children ought to obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3).

Paul delighted in the law **“according to the inward man”** (Romans 7:22). In other words, even though he saw his flesh failing at keeping it, inwardly, similar to David (Psalm 1:2) he recognizes the law as a delight. James tell us to be doers of the law rather than **“judges of the law”** (James 4:11). Paul tells us that the **“carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God”** (Romans 8:7).

Again, I say all this to highlight the general positive disposition New Testament Christians are to have regarding the abiding respect of the Old Testament. Yet at the same time, the New Testament offers some dismissive and negative statements about the law.

Negatives Statements About the Law

Paul clearly didn't view himself as **“under the law”** (1 Corinthians 9:20; Romans 6:14). Paul taught that Jesus, at least in a certain context, **“abolished...the law”** (Ephesians 2:15). And clearly, the entire epistle to the Hebrews warns against going

back to the law and states: **“For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law” (Hebrews 7:12)**. Paul compares the law to a tutor and then explains that **“we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:24, 25)**.

Either the writers of the New Testament are double-minded, or else there is a way to be under the law (which can refer to the first five books of the Old Testament—not merely the Ten Commandments—which included both the commands and the gospel) which helps us to make sense of how we should read the Old Testament without violating the respect we should have for it, or have it become merely a **“ministry of death” (2 Corinthians 3:7)**.

Simply put, there are two aspects of the Old Testament/Old Covenant law to which the above passages speak. First (and this was never an accurate way to view the Old Testament law) is to view the law as a means by which we approve ourselves before God. I’ve addressed this more thoroughly elsewhere so I won’t pursue this here. Second is to view the ceremonial system as still binding upon Christians—this being the main point of Hebrews and the Galatians 3 passage.

The context of the necessity of the **“change of the law”** which we saw in seventh chapter of Hebrews was a context of the priesthood. Many Hebrews, because of persecution and other temptations, were re-involving themselves the temple practices, effectively going back to Judaism. The author of Hebrews was laboring the point that all those Old Covenant ceremonial practices (priest, sacrifices, washings, etc.) were merely **“shadows of the good things to come” (Hebrews 10:1)**. In short, they all pointed to Christ.

Separation and Tribal Laws

One other point, a point which is not always easy to discern. In the Old Testament, since God’s covenant was restricted to one nation, there were separation laws as well. These things included diet, fabrics, grooming, etc. These were all designed to remind the Israelites that they were different from the world by which they were surrounded. It is in this context that Paul writes that Christ **“abolished...the law” (Ephesians 2:15)**,

that law which was designed to accent the separation between Israelites and the gentiles. Paul taught that both Jew and gentile who believe in Jesus are **“one new man” (Ephesians 2:15)**; there was no longer to be a distinction. This also abrogated whatever laws were unique to the land and to the twelve tribes of Israel.

In conclusion, Christians are to *assume continuity unless instructed otherwise*. And when we see negative instruction regarding the law of God in the New Testament it is either addressing a misuse of the law as a means by which men approve themselves before God, or a temptation to continue in the ceremonial or separation laws. Ceremonial laws all pointed to Christ and are therefore no longer necessary (other than baptism and the Lord’s Supper, which succinctly deliver the same message—looking back—as the ceremonial laws looking forward) since He came, and separation laws are no longer necessary since the New Covenant is an international covenant (as Jesus would put it: **“all nations” [Matthew 28:10]**)—not merely tied to one nation.

So, how does this relate to theonomy? If one begins to see the way the Old Testament interacts with the New Testament, if we begin to understand the positive language the New Testament writers give the Old and the reasons particular laws are repealed, we begin to realize that the civil laws of Moses do not fall into any of those categories. The civil laws are never repealed in the New Testament. The civil laws were never designed to be a source of works righteousness (we’re not saved by them). The civil laws were not ceremonial (they didn’t prefigure the atoning work of Christ).

If you’ve been listening closely, that leaves only two options: 1. That the civil laws of Moses were a part of the separation rituals—basically a tribal distinction between Israel and the surrounding nations; or, 2. At some level, those civil laws are the best available wisdom given by God to man on how a nation is to be governed.

This morning’s message has been a presentation, more or less, of a principle.

Some questions still need to be answered: *Were the civil laws given to Moses part of the tribal or separation distinctives of Israel, or should be they viewed as eternally just? And if they are*

eternally just, what does that mean to us in terms of any practical application or expectation?

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. How does the law of God relate to love?
2. From what does the law of God liberate us?
3. What are three main purposes for the law?
4. Does being led by the Spirit contradict obeying the law of God? Explain.
5. What is *theonomy*?
6. Give four reasons why theonomy is important.
7. When the Apostle Paul wrote of the value of Scripture, to what Scripture was he referring?
8. Have you noticed the Old Testament either dismissed or downplayed? Discuss.
9. What is *continuity* and *discontinuity*?
10. Does the Old Testament contain a different message than the New? Explain.
11. Give some reasons for continuity.
12. How do the New Testament writers view the Old Testament Scriptures?
13. Discuss some ways the law can be misused.
14. What are some principles used to determine whether Old Testament laws are still in effect?

Part Five:

Why I'm a Theonomist, C

Deuteronomy 4:5-8

July 19, 2009

Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to *them* in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation *is there* that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God *is* to us, for whatever *reason* we may call upon Him? And what great nation *is there* that has *such* statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day (Deuteronomy 4:5-8)?

Introduction

Dead Man Walking was a movie that came out in 1995 seeking to address the issue of the death penalty. Directed by Tim Robbins, starring Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn (celebrities with openly anti-Christian sentiments), it sought to even-handedly address the positives and negatives of public execution.

Sean Penn played a murderer. They didn't try to downplay his guilt, but rather demonstrated the heinous nature of the brutal crime he had committed. Robbins, no doubt, wanted the audience to, at some level, feel that this man was getting what he deserved.

Sarandon played a nun who was opposed to the death penalty. The movie was well-made and clever. But it never addressed the real issue. There is this general disposition that

proponents of the death penalty are seeking to cater to the anger of the victim (or the victim's loved-ones); and the most efficient method to assuage that anger and desire for revenge is to see the perpetrator put to death.

It is this tension which generally takes center-stage in the debate—do we opt for the humane and more progressive road of removing the death penalty from the table of political policy, or do we take the lower moral ground by furnishing the victims with the gratification of seeing the assailant exterminated?

The movie was clever because it self-consciously avoided any discussion of justice. The means by which it avoids this discussion descends from clever to cunning by use of the nun—the person who would presumably understand biblical wisdom and justice. Scripture's impotence to sufficiently address the issue is brought to the fore in a scene where the nun, upon entering the prison for a visitation, engages the guards (who are casted as church-going hicks) in a brief dialogue that went so:

“Tell me something, Sister,” a guard asks, “What is a nun doing in a place like this...shouldn't you be teaching the children? And do you know what this man has done? How he killed them kids?” The nun answers, “What he did was evil. I don't condone it. What's the sense in killing to say killing is wrong?” A guard responds by quoting the Scriptures, “You know how the Bible says, ‘an eye for an eye?’” The nun's responds to the guard's use of Scripture with, “Know what else it asks for? Death penalty for adultery (seeking perhaps to play on John 8 where a woman is caught in adultery and Jesus asks for the one who hadn't sinned to cast the first stone), prostitution...homosexuality, trespass upon sacred ground...profaning the Sabbath and contempt of parents.” The guard, no doubt speaking for the entire audience on the utter insignificance of the Bible when it comes to the issue, throws up the white flag, “I ain't gonna get in no Bible quoting with no nun because I'm gonna lose.”

The nun had accused the simpleton guards of a logical fallacy known as *Argumentum ad Verecundiam* (Appeal to Unqualified Authority). And the unqualified authority, which

must be dismissed,²⁰ is the Bible. Notice she doesn't make an argument that the Bible does not teach the death penalty—she eliminates the Bible from being relevant to the discussion. Another logical fallacy employed might be the *poisoning the wells*. If the well is poisoned, no water drawn from it can be used—and again, the poisoned well is the Scriptures.

Sadly, this is to be expected from an anti-Christian, humanist driven media. But even more sadly is the church's inability to answer this fictional nun's objection. How would you respond to her disqualification of the Bible?

Perhaps you recall my mentioning this subject to a young Christian lawyer who indicated that if he were to serve in Washington, he would never propose to his fellow legislators that we follow the Old Testament civil codes. He said they would laugh him off the floor. He believed there was some other standard more suited to the functioning of government than the standard given by Moses in the Law. But David proclaimed,

**I will also speak of thy testimonies before
kings and not be put to shame (Psalm 119:46).**

To what kings would David speak these testimonies? After all, David is the king in Israel. Could not the answer be, "To any king of any land?"

Review

By quick review, we are seeking to obey Jesus' command in the Great Commission to obey all that He has commanded—the commands of God being His prescription for true love (Matthew 22:37-40). We have and will continue to address the danger of using God's law in an unlawful manner—as a means by which we seek to approve ourselves before God—i.e. we're not saved by our ability to keep God's law. One of the beauties of God's law is how it teaches just the opposite.

²⁰ It is worth noting that the dismissal of the unqualified authority usually has to do with: 1. Lack of expertise; 2. Bias or prejudice; 3. Motive to lie; 4. Lack of ability to perceive or recall—all pretty strong indictments against the sufficiency and trustworthiness of God's word.

Paul wrote that he **“through the law died to the law that”** he **“might live unto God” (Galatians 2:19)**. Should we not follow Paul’s example and keep the law ever before us (continually delighting in it—Psalm 1; Romans 7:22), that it might ever remind us of the one who delivers us **“from this body of death...Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:24, 25)!** But the question before us is ‘what is the standard by which we, who are saved by grace, live?’ And more specifically (here in our sub-series on Theonomy), is there a compartment of men’s affairs to which the law of God, recorded in Scripture, is not given access—specifically government? Is the nun correct?

We discussed the means by which the New Testament interacts with the Old Testament, how the New Testament writers continually appeal to the Old Testament regarding instruction on both Law and Gospel. We also discussed the issue of continuity versus discontinuity—that is, unless God repeals or modifies His law in the New Testament, we should view the law to continue as binding on human conscience. We discussed that God did not nullify or modify laws for no reason.

The nullified or modified laws were due to: 1. Their purpose, which was **“a shadow of the good things to come” (Hebrews 10:1)** (because the good things came in Christ, I no longer need a map telling me where to drive once I’ve arrived); 2. The separation laws which were used to distinguish Israel from other nations (also the particular tribal/land laws) are nullified since the New Covenant is an international kingdom.

The civil codes of Moses were not a shadow of the good things to come. That kidnappers should be prosecuted by the civil magistrate tells me nothing about the atoning work of Christ on the cross. There may be some very indirect ways in which we may see this, but they are so indirect that to employ the methodology would functionally remove all the commands in Scripture.

Future Questions

Some questions we will not ask this morning but will get to in the weeks to come are: Why is the New Testament silent on civil issues, or is it? Is this understanding of civil law harsh or

compassionate? What do the secondary standards of our church have to say about this issue? In a society that would view many of God's laws as extreme and ridiculous, how are we to reasonably apply this theonomic concept?

This morning we ask: *1. To what extent is the Christian to promote justice? 2. What is the standard for that justice? 3. Should we understand the civil laws of God, given through Moses, to be unique to Israel, or should we view them (as with the moral law) as transcendent (above everyone) and universally (applying to everyone) binding on all humanity?*

1. Promoting Justice

First, let's recognize a general call the Christian has to promote justice. The following are just two (of many) passages which tell the Christian not only to walk justly but to promote justice.

**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)?**

**Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;
put away the evil of your doings from before
My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek
justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the
fatherless, plead for the widow (Isaiah 1:16, 17).**

The Hebrew word for 'justly' or 'justice' (*mishpat*), it is worth pointing out, carries a very civil connotation. It means: "decision by arbitration, (a) legal decision, (a) legal case... what is in conformity to a case."²¹ It means to make a "judgment, i.e., the act. of deciding a legal dispute or case."²²

²¹Holladay, W. L., Köhler, L., & Köhler, L. (1971). *A concise Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament*. (221). Leiden: Brill.

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²²Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.) (DBLH 5477, #1). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Eye For Eye?

People often take the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in such a way as to eradicate any sense of justice of ever being employed.

You have heard that it was said, ‘*An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.*’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also (Matthew 5:38, 39).

This is often read as if Jesus is speaking contrary to the Moses (Exodus 21:24). But is this addressed to the civil magistrate? Is Jesus telling the civil magistrate not to resist “an evil person”? If that is the case, the critics of the Bible have found a clear contradiction, since Paul writes that civil rulers are appointed by God to be “**a terror**” to evil doers (Romans 13:3).

No, Jesus is speaking of *personal vindictiveness*, not civil justice. I am not to take vengeance into my own hands. It is worth noting the reasoning Paul gives regarding the same sentiment when he admonishes Christians to “**Bless those who persecute**” them, and not to “**Repay...evil for evil**” (Romans 12:14, 17). The basis Paul gives for Christians to cease from avenging themselves is that God has ordained the “**governing authorities**” as His “**minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil**” (Romans 13:1-4).

This should not be thought of as an excuse for vindictiveness or taking the law into our own hands, but when the civil law does not exercise justice, it tempts its citizens to do just that. Eye for eye is viewed as harsh in a culture where people get away with theft and murder on a regular basis. But in lands where hands are chopped off for stealing a piece of fruit, eye for eye is preferred. Eye for eye is neither harsh nor lenient—it is simple justice.

2. The Standard For True Justice

Where does one find the standard for true justice? As Christians we, of all people, ought to recognize the provision of God's word as a sufficient source of wisdom to thoroughly equip.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

“Thoroughly equipped for every good work” means God, through His word, has revealed everything we need to know, either directly or by implication. For example, Scripture may not give civil courts specific rules on how long of a chain to put on your dog, but they do inform them of their responsibility to create a safe environment when it comes to things that might be dangerous or a public nuisance (Exodus 21:28-32—a goring bull).

It is in the context of the law that God warns us not to **“add to...nor take from”** from His word (Deuteronomy 4:2). Paul also warns us **“not to think beyond what is written, that none of”** you **“may be puffed up...”** (1 Corinthians 4:6). So the short answer to question two is *the Word of God*.

To address this morning's issue—Is God's civil law to be considered universal or unique to Israel? If it is unique to Israel, we in the New Covenant, would either be excluded from the boundaries of that law, or, as the Israel of God, should understand it as binding on us but not on the world by which we are surrounded.

3. God's Laws—Unique to Israel or Universally Binding?

Finally, we ask if God's standards given in Scripture should be viewed as authoritative over all the earth, or are these laws restricted to Israel? It could be asked this way: When it comes to law, is Jehovah a tribal deity or God over all the earth?

In a few short minutes I will seek to make an argument that, I think, should be obvious. I am not questioning the motives of those theologians and sincere Christians who disagree with me. I must say, nonetheless, that the theological efforts made to restrict God's commands to Israel are either way over my head or creative beyond my level of comfort.

Right is Right—Mitigating Circumstances

The short and the long of it amount to this—Right and wrong are not geographically defined. *What's right is right and what's wrong is wrong.* I don't want to over-simplify this. We understand mitigating circumstances. But mitigating circumstances (circumstances which lessen the severity of the crime and its punishment) are found within the boundaries of the Old Testament itself.

People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he is starving (Proverbs 6:30).

The idea of a sweeping abrogation or mitigation of Old Testament civil law based upon date or geography is simply over the top. Having already spoken of how the New Testament writers comfortably use the Old Testament in all areas—thus addressing the date issue—we now discuss the boundary issue, which will be our final point this morning.

Our final point is the universally binding nature of God's law. Crossing county lines (or country lines) does not make right wrong or wrong right. This should hardly need proving, if we recognize the character and nature of God as the standard for all law. Nonetheless, the Bible is not silent on the issue. Moses' laws were not simply for Israel. God was not a tribal deity (we do not acquiesce to political polytheism). God is God over all the earth. His law was (and is) for all men.

How Israel Was Viewed

Prior to Israel entering into the Promised Land, God informs them of how they will be viewed by the non-Israeli inhabitants.²³

Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to *them* in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe *them*; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is *there* that has God *so* near to it, as the Lord our God *is* to us, for whatever *reason* we may call upon Him? And what great nation is *there* that has *such* statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day (Deuteronomy 4:5-8)?

Those outside of God’s covenant will view the laws of God observed by God’s people and say: **“Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.”** And the reasoning is explained by the rhetorical question, **“What great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law?”** Note **“all this law,”** not *some* of this law. People are happy to assign this typologically to the church, and in some respects that may be accurate. But given the civil nature of Israel, as a nation with just civil codes, why in the world would we eliminate that from the equation? Couldn’t these wonderful words be said of any nation governing in a wise and godly manner?

²³ Certainly not all of them, but some—Rahab for example.

This is Your Wisdom

Those Christians who reject Theonomy will often answer that they, given the opportunity to rule, would seek to rule with wisdom. But God says we ought to **“be careful to observe *them* (His laws); for this is your wisdom.”** I hesitate to go over-patriotic on you, recognizing the vicissitudes of human government, but wasn't there a time when the blatant Christian convictions of American government made this country a marvel to the world?

We see that the godly statutes of Israel were to be a light and a blessing, as it were, to those nations outside of Israel. But does that mean those nations were not obligated to God's law prior to this? Absolutely not!

Vomited From the Land

Again, observe the instructions of God regarding entering Canaan. Having given detailed commands, God then issues the warning:

Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit *any* of these abominations, *either* any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who *were* before you, and thus the land is defiled), lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that *were* before you (Leviticus 18:24-28).

The neighboring nations (non-Israeli) were vomited out of the land because they defiled themselves. How did they defile

themselves? By either doing or not doing those things which God had just commanded—**“for all these abominations (‘these’ referring back to the commands just given to Israel) the men of the land have done, who were before you.”** The idea of being vomited out meant God’s judgment. Those outside the borders of Israel were judged because they broke God’s law.

We haven’t time to fully address it here (some might ask how they can be accountable for a law they never knew), but either by oral transmission (for we’re all descendants of Noah) or by general revelation (Romans 1:18-23) or our being made in the image of God, (knowing good and evil—Genesis 3:22) or a variety of other theories...men know certain behaviors are worthy of death, yet practice them nonetheless and **“also approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:32).**

Friends, way before Moses, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of their sexual perversion (a gentile peoples without a written revelation—destroyed them for breaking God’s law). Nineveh was going to be destroyed if it wouldn’t repent. The Scriptures teach that God will judge the nations (Psalm 9:19; 110:6; Isaiah 2:4). We read in Isaiah,

The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant (Isaiah 24:5).

The gentiles were under the laws of Moses just as much as the Jews. Is it genuine love and forbearance to approach our neighbor, culture or nation with anything less than a statute which God says will be viewed as “wise and understanding”? Should we hesitate because of the mockers and scoffers? Or should we, like David, speak the testimonies of God **“before kings and not be put to shame” (Psalm 119:46)?**

What Next?

In the weeks to come we will seek to answer other questions, such as: *Why is the New Testament silent on civil issues/or is it? Is this understanding of civil law harsh or compassionate? What*

do the secondary standards of our church have to say about this issue? In a society that would view many of God's laws as extreme and ridiculous, how are we to reasonably apply this theonomic concept?

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Discuss the logical fallacies employed in the movie *Dead Man Walking*.
2. Review what has been discussed so far regarding the commands of Christ.
3. Should Christians promote justice? What does it mean to promote justice?
4. Does Jesus' admonition to turn the other cheek contradict Moses' admonition of "eye for eye"? Explain.
5. Where do we find our standard for true justice?
6. What is a mitigating circumstance? Should we view all of the laws in the Old Testament as mitigated or abrogated?
7. How was Israel to be viewed by the neighboring nations?
8. Is the law of God binding only on Israel or on all? Explain your answer from Scripture.

Part Six:

Why I'm a Theonomist, D

*1 Corinthians 15:33; Proverbs
13:20; Ephesians 5:11, 12; Leviticus
20:7, 8*

August 2, 2009

**Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits”
(1Corinthians 15:33).**

**He who walks with wise *men* will be wise, but the
companion of fools will be destroyed (Proverbs 13:20).**

**And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of
darkness, but rather expose *them*. For it is shameful even to
speak of those things which are done by them in secret
(Ephesians 5:11, 12).**

**Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I *am* the
Lord your God. And you shall keep My statutes, and perform
them: I *am* the Lord who sanctifies you (Leviticus 20:7, 8).**

Introduction

In my younger years I was a track and field athlete—a high-jumper, to be specific. While participating in my event I found that I had developed a nasty habit. Every time I would feel my body knock the crossbar off of the standards—thus constituting a missed attempt—an expletive would, almost involuntarily, be launched from my lips. This would happen in mid-air. No time to think, no time to plan, no time to form a support group.

This became an issue for me. Articles in the newspaper openly chronicled my Christian faith. Spectators would come to watch the Christian high-jumper, only to hear a Richard Prior routine at every of my failed efforts. I approached a mentor in the faith for counsel. I explained my problem to which he responded, almost immediately, “It’s probably the company you’re keeping.”

There is a general biblical principle, expressed by the above passages, that Christians are to keep themselves **“unstained”** by the world (James 1:27). Some Christian sects (I think mistakenly) take this admonition so seriously that they remove themselves entirely from society and create their own sub-cultures. But it is not the prayer of Jesus that we entirely isolate ourselves from the world by which we are surrounded. Jesus’ prayer is not that the Father take us out of the world, but that He **“should keep”** us **“from the evil one”** (John 17:15).

When we think of the effects of bad company, it might bring our minds to the friends our children might choose or the friends we, as adults, might choose, and their influence upon us; and it certainly includes that (perhaps primarily includes that). But the principle of contamination is not limited to the friends we choose. As our culture becomes increasingly lax in terms of what is acceptable and legal behavior, we are simply foolish to think we, and our children, will be left unscathed.

Back in 1994 I was watching a movie starring our governor, where he was playing a secret agent who was losing control of his teenage daughter. His partner (played by Tom Arnold) offered what I found to be an accurate analysis, explaining:

“Yeah, but you're not her parents, anymore, you and Helen. Her parents are Axl Rose and Madonna. The five minutes you spend a day with her can't compete with that kind of constant bombardment. You're outgunned, amigo.”

We are being fed a constant diet of ungodliness. Movies, books, video games, television shows, billboards, bus-stops routinely portray behaviors which the Bible teaches to be capital crimes, as acceptable recreation with no consequences. How

many television shows highlight adultery, homosexuality and fornication in such a way that every one is healed by the next program!

How many Christians have been so infected by the world that they engage in pregnancy terminations, divorce, pornography, drug and alcohol abuse, etc., as if these sins (many of which the Bible considers crimes) are standard operating procedure!

Perhaps you recall the strife between Abram and Lot, where Abram offered Lot whatever land he pleased. Lot found the plain of Jordan a pleasing terrain, pitching his tent **“as far as Sodom”**. Moses then records, **“But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord” (Genesis 13:12, 13)**. Lot’s decision effectively destroyed his family—his wife eventually becoming a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26) and his daughters engaging in unseemly behavior (Genesis 19:30-38).

My point in all of this is to state what should be obvious, that a corrupt environment will be corruptive. This, by the way, in no way alleviates our responsibility to pursue holiness. I think many of us need to re-think what we watch, read, play and allow our children to do along the same lines. We may find ourselves in an ungodly environment, but that doesn’t mean we need to be immersed in it. We may wish to carpet the world, but in the meantime, we should put on a comfortable pair of shoes which insulate us from the current pollutions!

I am not going to make a list of rules (rules will come into play when we specifically look at the Ten Commandments), but I’m here to tell you that we are foolish to think that when we engage in a culture unrestrained by godly statutes that it will not have negative consequences on us and our children.

How does this relate to Theonomy? The law of God, revealed in the civil codes, primarily in the Old Testament, is God’s prescription for the restraining of sins/crimes, which will eventually decimate a culture. I would guess that 70 to 80 percent of people who come to my office seeking to put together their crumbled lives have been, at some level, the victims of a culture that has scoffed at and ignored sins which the Bible would classify as crimes. We will pursue these particular sin/crimes in

detail when we start unpacking the Ten Commandments, but for now I am just seeking to lay the groundwork.

If I may parenthetically say, you've been patient students. Though I realize there is a sense in which you just want to know what to do, rather than all the theological nuts and bolts behind it—you just want to know what time it is, not how to build a clock. But it is my conviction that we must be careful of that mentality. The Apostle Paul would generally dedicate the first half (or more) of his efforts in his epistles to enlightening us to the great theological truths of who we are in Christ. Then, *after many chapters*, he would write “**therefore**” and tell us what to do or how to behave.

Our country provides a great example of a people who have, during the past 150 years, maintained the outward veneer of Christian morals and convictions while de-emphasizing the theological substance of those convictions. Churches have, therefore, descended to be relief stations or counseling centers while the secular universities inherit the mantle of truth and wisdom. All this to say, it is not enough to just know *what* to do, we need to know *why* we are to do it and be firmly convinced of these convictions—parenthesis over.

Friends, not all sins are crimes. But God, in His word, tells us which ones are. And I believe it is our responsibility, as Christians—as those who have been saved not by the works of the law but by faith alone—to seek to cultivate an environment that looks as little like Sodom and Gomorrah as possible.

This all may seem obvious. I have found that basic laymen who read their Bibles are in general agreement with Theonomy. In this respect, for the most of you, I may be preaching to the choir. But I guarantee if you, as the choir, start singing theonomic hymns, there are plenty in the world and within the church who will seek to quell your song and you'll then want to refer back to these notes.

This morning I'll ask and seek to answer just one question: *Is the New Testament silent on the issue of Theonomy?*

1. Is the New Testament Silent on Theonomy?

When I was being examined at Presbytery to be admitted as a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, there was, apparently, common knowledge that I held this theonomic perspective. Many questions I received were, therefore, thus directed. I appreciated that members of the presbytery weren't mean about it and I found a number of advocates and "amens" along the way.

Arresting the Brethren?

But it was those who lovingly sought to correct me that further confirmed my commitment—largely due to the flawed logic (at least in my opinion) of their objections. Much of this was based upon the New Testament's supposed silence on the issue. One pastor quoted Galatians 6:1, **"Brethren if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness."** He then asked, "If you're a theonomist, it would seem that, instead of restoring, you would arrest him."

But the answer to that objection is simple. Galatians was written not to the civil magistrates in Galatia but to the **"churches of Galatia"** (Galatians 1:2). It is not my job as an officer in the church to arrest anyone. But if the particular trespass is a crime, then I would recommend that offender turn himself in to the civil magistrate who should arrest him.

People who object to theonomy based upon the New Testament tend to ignore the primary purpose of the New Testament (which was to reveal that Christ the Messiah had come) and the historical/political context of the New Testament church—it was a monarchy and no one was asking Christians to run for the senate or what they thought the law ought to be—unlike the republic and democracies which would follow and now exist.

Do we, for a minute, think that if first century Rome had a representative form of government in which Christians could run for and be elected as lawmakers, that they would not seize that

opportunity for good as they watched their brothers and sisters in the faith being eaten by animals and burned to light gardens?

A Lawful Use of the Law

That being said, I would argue that the New Testament is not silent on Theonomy. Here are but a few examples:

Paul indicates that it is a lawful use of the law to restrain evil.

But we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for *the* lawless and insubordinate, for *the* ungodly and for sinners, for *the* unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust (1 Timothy 1:8-11).

John Calvin comments on this that “the law of God was given in order to restrain the licentiousness of wicked men; because they who are good of their own accord do not need the authoritative injunction of the law.”

Someone might assume that we all fall into the category of “lawless and insubordinate”. After all, who is actually righteous? But here I would again agree with Calvin, who explains that the righteous person Paul writes of here is not “absolutely perfect” but one who desires to “aim at what is good.”²⁴

God’s Ministers of Wrath

I also heard, as an objection to theonomy, an appeal to Romans 12 and 13 where God has “**appointed**” all governing

²⁴Calvin, J. (1998). *Calvin's Commentaries: 1 Timothy* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries (1 Ti 1:9). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

authorities. The general objection here is that that's God's business and we shouldn't worry ourselves about it. We, of course, recognize that God makes and deposes kings. But that is begging a question: If these appointed authorities are, as the text indicates "**God's ministers**" who are to "**execute wrath on him who practices evil**" (**Romans 13:4**), what is their standard? Has God left His ministers with no standard?

It would be particularly cruel of God to establish civil ministers and then leave them to their best guesses regarding that which is just—especially in light of the great judgment that falls upon those who lead in an ungodly manner! It was in a very political context that God said, "**Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees**" (**Isaiah 10:1**). It is in the New Testament that we are told that God's minister bears "**the sword**" (**Romans 13:4**), the sword being an instrument of civil punishment.

Jesus' Use of the Civil Law

It is in the New Testament that Jesus appeals to the one of the most commonly ridiculed civil laws of Moses (from Exodus 21:17) in expressing the due condemnation of the Pharisees. Jesus rebukes the Pharisees, saying,

Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, '*Honor your father and your mother;*' and, '*He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.*' But you say, '*Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God"*— then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition (Matthew 15:3-6**).**

We haven't time to get into the particular infraction by the Pharisees; the point is Jesus' use of the civil code of Moses without a hint of lessening its continuing authority. There is

nothing in that text, or any New Testament text, which abrogates or alleviates God’s civil law given through Moses.

And when people appeal to tradition as the basis of their legal standards (as is often the case today with popular conservative radio personalities—people holding to the traditions that made this country great—traditions that, for the most part, are good), those traditions, if not grounded in the Scriptures, by the very nature of the case, make the commands of God of no effect.

Other Examples

Other examples of the civil law of God, at least surfacing in the New Testament, would be the efforts of Jason and the brethren in Acts 17 who were **“turning the world upside down...acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus” (Acts 17:6, 7)**. The accusation here had political overtones to it.

When the Jews wanted to convince Pilate that they were not followers of Jesus, their chant was one which served to unveil their political convictions: **“We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15)**. It is a fairly common held position that the phrase “Jesus is Lord” was a response to the required phrase in the Roman Empire acknowledging that “Caesar is Lord” (*kyrios Kaisar*).

When Pilate expressed his own political power over Jesus, Jesus made it clear that Pilate’s power was given to him from above. In all the talk of worldly kingdoms versus the heavenly kingdom, Jesus made one thing clear—if Pilate would be savvy enough to understand—it is not that there is no relationship between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of men—but the kingdom of which Jesus is King is the one which appoints all kings.

It is in the New Testament that we see John the Baptist beheaded for openly criticizing the ungodly marriage of a political figure (Matthew 14:3-5). It is also in the New Testament that we are introduced to *that* which is anti-Christ and *he* who is anti-Christ. Instead of the law of God written on our hands and foreheads (Deuteronomy 6:8—signifying how we are to think and act) it is the name of this beast of a political figure who can likely be identified as the **“man of Lawlessness” (2 Thessalonians 2:9)**

who demands our thoughts and deeds. Friends, we will either have God for a ruler or end up with a beast for a ruler.

Is Theonomy taught in the New Testament? Quite frankly, it doesn't have to be since, as Christians, we believe in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. And when we read of all the promises associated with the coming of the Messiah recorded in the Old Testament, it speaks of One who will rule over (Psalm 22:28) and bring justice to the nations (Isaiah 42:1). That is the expectation of the Messiah. And we should think no less of it. Nonetheless, the answer to the question is *yes*.

One Last Point

In all this talk of law and cultural transformation, I need to make one last point—especially as we proceed to the Lord's Table. None of this should be thought of as man-made triumphalism or carnal culture wars or a moral majority pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps and creating a utopia on earth through human innovation; it is, in fact, just the opposite.

It is by a God-given recognition of our own sin, folly, weakness and need for Christ that any good thing will happen in this world. *The redemption of the world does not come through law-making or law-keeping or transformed cultures but through the blood of Christ redeeming souls one at a time through word and sacrament.*

If we do not have humility before God, continually confessing our utterly incapacitated state and need for forgiveness—if we do not, day by day seek to drink from the cup of Christ's tender mercies, praising God alone for our salvation—all this talk of law means nothing and will amount to nothing. May that subdue our hearts, as we come to eat, drink and remember the broken body and shed blood of our righteous Savior.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What is the general principle expressed in the opening passages of this message? What are some ways people have attempted to obey God's counsel regarding this principle?
2. Does the general principle apply only to friends or can it also apply to cultures?
3. Why is it important for Christians to understand why we believe certain principles in Scripture?
4. If theonomy is true, shouldn't the church be arresting sinners instead of restoring them?
5. Why is it important to understand the historical/political climate of the first century when discussing theonomy in relationship to the New Testament church?
6. Is the restraining of evil a lawful use of the law according to the New Testament?
7. How does Romans 12 and 13 speak to the issue of theonomy? Should we simply view those in authority as God's business and not concern ourselves at all? What standard should these authorities use?
8. Did Jesus ever use the civil code of Moses to make a point? Explain.
9. Can you give some other examples of theonomy in the New Testament?
10. Should theonomy be thought of as man's attempt to make the world a better place? What must come before all talk of transforming cultures?

Part Seven:

Why I'm a Theonomist, E

2 Timothy 3:16, 17

August 30, 2009

One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established. If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, then both men in the controversy shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days. 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. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot (Deuteronomy 19:15-21).*

Introduction

Psyche 5 was the basic introductory psychology class taken by all college freshmen. Though 35 years is the gap between then and now, there were two things I remember my instructor pounding into my 19-year-old newly-converted head: “Spare the rod, spoil the child” (a rough interpretation of Proverbs 13:24) was absurd; and, the death penalty was ineffective as a deterrent to crime. This second point was something I heard in every psychology and sociology class I attended.

That the death penalty is not a deterrent just didn't seem right to me—at very least the person executed wouldn't commit

another crime. But it also seems so basic to human nature, and the survival instinct, that people wouldn't commit certain heinous crimes if they knew the consequences were severe. The above passage seems to verify that which is obvious: **“and those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you.”**

But even more shocking in the above passage is instruction coming from God, which appears contrary to so much of what we read in Scripture. **“Your eye shall not pity,”** God says. But does not God also say,

**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)?**

How does one love mercy yet show no pity? The words are almost synonymous!

Review

This morning we will complete what has amounted to a seven-lesson preface to the Ten Commandments.

In quick review, this series, which I have entitled *The Commands of Christ*, is a follow-up on the Great Commission where Jesus taught that disciples are to be instructed to obey **“all things that (He) commanded” (Matthew 28:20).**

Hopefully we are beginning to appreciate the beauty of God's law as His inscription of genuine and authentic love. When Jesus was asked what commandment was greatest, His answer was to love God and love our neighbor. Jesus defines love as *obedience to God's commands* (Matthew 22:37-40).

We also discussed how James calls God's law the **“perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25).** The law of God liberates (or sets us free) from legalism and manipulation, consequences, bondage and, most importantly, pride (casting us to Christ for help).

A recurring theme in our study of God's law is how the law is not the means by which we approve ourselves before God;

we are approved by God's grace in the gospel—by the blood of Christ. Even our desire to obey God's law does not come from God's law but by the grace of God in the gospel.

I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*. (Ezekiel 36:27).

Another common error we addressed is the supposed conflict between Spirit and law—that the leading of the Spirit is somehow at odds with being led or directed by God's law. The spiritual man recognizes God's law as coming from God and seeks to walk in it.

We then embarked upon a sub-issue known as Theonomy. Theonomy specifically addresses the extent of the application of the Old Testament civil codes to modern politics. I put forth four reasons why I think theonomy is important: 1. The preeminence of Christ in all areas, including politics; 2. It addresses the influx of relativism in the very large arena of civil law; 3. It is a key factor in the spreading of the gospel since it is generally civil leaders God uses to open or close doors to the preaching of the gospel; 4. It reveals the justice of the gospel (Proverbs 28:5), since there is no other arena which more clearly demonstrates the just and due penalty for sin than the civil arena—a society which loses its sense of justice will not so clearly perceive the due penalty for sin.

This morning I would like to complete this somewhat lengthy preface with some brief answers to some practical questions regarding Theonomy **and, finally, a thoughtful look at what God says as a preface to his commands.** So here are today's four questions:

Questions for today:

- Is God's civil law harsh or compassionate?
- What do the Secondary Standards of our church say about Theonomy?

- In a society which views God’s laws as extreme and ridiculous, how are we to reasonably apply this Theonomic concept?
- A proper approach to God’s law?

1. Is God’s Civil Law Harsh or Compassionate?

I’m Guilty—So the Law Must Be Wrong

Our first question: *is the civil law of God harsh or compassionate?* To be sure, the civil laws of God, especially as they are presented in Leviticus 20, give a harsh appearance. Adultery, homosexuality, kidnapping, rape, etc. are capital crimes and are given the death penalty. Many of us look at those laws realizing that we’d be in San Quentin, on death row, if they were still enforced today.

But frankly, the fact that I might deserve the death penalty simply doesn’t address the issue. How amazingly self-centered have we become that we evaluate and dismiss God’s law based upon the fact that we’re transgressors of it! That God chose not to execute David for his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah did not mean that David was not deserving of death. If God, according to His own wisdom and providence, chooses to let those who are worthy of death live (something which happens quite frequently—how many murderers are never caught?!) does not mean the murderer does not deserve death from a perspective of civil law.

But the passage we read earlier, where God tells us to show “no pity”, is a passage which also reveals how merciful and compassionate God truly is.

No False Witnesses

The passage reveals God’s concern for the innocent who are accused. Not only does a conviction require two or three witnesses, but those witnesses, if they are shown to be false, will have done to them what they **“thought to have done to (their) brother” (Deuteronomy 19:19)**. By this standard, most people on death row today in America wouldn’t be on death row. By this

standard, those who are truly innocent of particular crimes will seldom be falsely accused. God is very compassionate toward the innocent.

Compassion for Society

We also learn from this passage that God is compassionate toward a society. Evil people should fear to do evil, and that fear will deter them. God is very compassionate. He will not suffer the innocent to be convicted nor victimized by the evil which surrounds them. This brings us to that funny sounding comment where we're told that our **“eye shall not pity”**.

The Hebrew word which is used for pity (*hûs*), means to “show mercy, have compassion, with a focus on sparing or delivering one from a great punishment.”²⁵ So how do we square this with the clear biblical admonition to be merciful? The answer is simply *context*. In a context of that which is personal and within the church, it is the responsibility of the faithful Christian to exercise mercy and seek to restore the erring brother.

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted (Galatians 6:1).

But when a criminal is brought before the civil magistrate (a judge or jury) he is to be tried and given a fair due process. If he is indeed guilty, the judge or jury should not view themselves as having the right to reduce or forego the due punishment. By what standard would they do this for some and not for others? This would result in judicial anarchy with judges and juries capriciously convicting some and releasing others based upon what kind of mood they're in or how friendly the defendant might happen to look.

²⁵Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.) (DBLH 2571, #1). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Criminals who are guilty of capital crimes are often set free (perhaps in the name of compassion or a perceived rehabilitation) only to commit crimes again. It is a highly compassionate prescription of God to protect a society from those who would harm the innocent.

Just Laws

When it comes to the civil arena, it is up to God's ministers (Romans 13:4) to be just. The passage teaches, "**life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.**" These words are often used by the world as a criticism—as if the Bible were overly austere. What it actually asserts is that punishments for crimes are not to be overly harsh or overly lenient—they are to be *just*. You don't cut a hungry man's hand off for stealing a loaf of bread nor do you set a murderer free because he seems nice or because there is no room in the prison.

2. What Do the Secondary Standards of Our Church Say About Theonomy?

Our primary standard as a church is the Bible. All churches have secondary standards. Secondary standards may be a statement of faith or they may simply be whatever the pastor might teach on a given Sunday. The secondary standards at our church include a document called the Westminster Confession. It's sort of an elongated statement of faith.

There is a portion of the Westminster Confession (Chapter 19—Of the Law of God) that addresses this issue:

General Equity

To them (Israel) also, as a body politic, He gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.

Again, at first glance this appears contrary to what we've been teaching. But it really isn't. It is not the Theonomic position (at least, as I would teach it) that we are to simply take the laws of Old Covenant Israel and plop them down in the middle of twenty-first century America.

God had given laws unique to certain tribes which wouldn't apply to the New Covenant. And the laws given by God, though detailed in many respects, are not exhaustive. When God's law demands restitution of four sheep for one stolen and five bulls for one stolen, one must seek to understand why there is a difference. Perhaps it can be compared to stealing one's car versus stealing one's tractor (one being a vehicle of transportation, the other necessary for production and income).

And, of course, the Bible doesn't mention every type of thing or animal that can be stolen or every type of crime that can be committed. But this portion of the Westminster Confession, I believe, is highly Theonomic. It basically teaches that the Old Covenant political laws serve as a model for us; that we are obliged to utilize them to determine what is fair or just. "General equity" means fair or just.

Let me provide a scenario:

If a man committed a capital crime, say kidnapping, in 20 B.C., the crime would incur the death penalty. Say he was not caught. Now say the same man commits the same crime at the same place in 20 A.D. If we answer anything other than that the man still deserves the same punishment for the crime, we are not holding to our church's secondary standards of general equity.

3. In a Society Which Views God's Laws as Extreme and Ridiculous, How Are We to Reasonably Apply This Theonomic Concept?

Who is Actually Foolish?

So often the argument against Theonomy is that it is harsh, weird and simply impossible to apply. I hope we can begin to understand how arrogant we are when we suggest that God's

laws, which reflect His character, are overly harsh—to suggest that is to suggest that God Himself is overly harsh.

My friends, if we think God’s laws are foolish and ludicrous, it is very likely that God thinks *we’re* foolish and ludicrous! So we really need to decide who we are going to trust—the wisdom and law of man, or the wisdom and law of God.

How is God’s Law Applied?

What is the practical application of Theonomy in a secular society? Some would argue that it is so impossible to fully apply that we shouldn’t apply it at all. But how many of us govern ourselves that way—because we fail to do everything, we do nothing? I think there is a simple principle that needs to be applied.

In logic it is called *argumentum a fortiori*, which denotes ‘argument from the stronger reason’. For example, if God’s law teaches that homosexuality is a capital crime, how much more should we vote against laws which aim toward sanctioning gay marriage! If God’s law teaches that adultery is a capital crime, how much more should we vote against laws which seek to justify and promote pornography!

I am not sure if Theonomy should be the first conversation we have with our non-Christian friends. There are many topics I might not delve into with my non-Christian friends: Calvinism, eschatology, views on the sacraments, sign gifts, women in ministry, etc. I wouldn’t avoid these, but there is something more critical and basic for people to understand—which is my final, and ever critical, point.

4. A Proper Approach to God’s Law

What God Has Done

Before God tells us what to do, He tells us what He *has done*. How do the Ten Commandments begin? **“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exodus 20:2)**. It is after this preface

that the commands are given. God does not say, “Keep these commandments and I will bring you out of bondage.”

The Apostle Paul uses the bondage of the Israelites in Egypt as an example of being in bondage to sin and death then drinking from the spiritual Rock which was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:1-5). If we approach the law thinking that by keeping it we can find peace with God, we will be sadly mistaken. With that frame of mind the law is a minister of death (1 Corinthians 3:7).

We are to rejoice in the superior and more glorious **“ministry of the Spirit” (1 Corinthians 3:8)** where the veil (which blinds our minds to the truth of God’s grace) is taken away in Christ. We must approach the law of God with humility—recognizing its danger. Like a small child who runs to his parent whenever a threat appears, we must run to the cross of Christ in light of the convicting power of the commandments of God.

May that subdue our hearts this morning as we prepare to partake at the Lord’s Table.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Is the death penalty a deterrent to crime?
2. Give a quick review of why we are to study the law of God. Where are the blessings?
3. Is God's law harsh or compassionate? Explain your answers.
4. Does the Westminster Confession teach or oppose Theonomy?
5. How do Christians practically apply Theonomic principles in a society which is indifferent or hostile to the law of God?
6. What must man always remember as he seeks to obey God's law?

Part Eight: The First Commandment

Exodus 20:1-3

September 6, 2009

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).

I. Atheism

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.²⁶

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 believing 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

²⁶ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 3* (Eerdmans, reprint 1989), p. 280.

notion that makes even the natural mind cringe. And there are some very good reasons for this.

The Sin of Unbelief

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 of stealing. Being a committed atheist is not morally different than being a committed thief. The first commandment forbids atheism in either a theoretical or practical sense. What I mean by this 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: **“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 manifest 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 suppress that truth in unrighteousness.

Illegitimate Objections

We must keep this in mind in our witnessing. People who have intellectual objections regarding the existence of God (and here we must argue that Paul is writing about the Christian God) are actually putting forth a red herring or a smoke screen. I don’t

think it would be right to initially accuse them of being insincere; they may be convinced that their objections are legitimate. At the same time, whether it is apparent to them or not, we know that somewhere in the recesses of their soul they are denying what they know to be true. Somewhere in the conversation this should come forth.

For example, I may tell my eight-year-old that it's time for bed. She doesn't want to go to bed so she starts asking me if it's okay to try on her new dress. I say "No". She says, "But it's my dress." Now we start arguing about whether or not she should have the right to wear a dress that belongs to her. I begin arguing that I'm the one who bought her the dress so I have primary jurisdiction over the dress. She may be utterly convinced that she is in the right. I need to remind her (and myself) that the wearing of the dress is not the issue. The issue is that it's time for bed and she knows it.

I am not saying we should not seek to answer objections to the Christian faith. What I am saying is that the conversation, at some point, needs to turn to the gentle confrontation that the person in question is denying something they know to be true.

These commandments are the essential criteria of what is moral and immoral. Unbelief is not merely an error or a mistake. It is a sin.

II. Common False Gods

Another, perhaps more evident, violation of the first commandment is when we place our trust, or deposit the primary seats of our affections, toward any entity other than 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.

Obvious False Gods

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 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.

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, the standard for love is measured by God. If another person is God, the standard for love is measured by the other person. Inevitably that will be a lower standard.

No Hope For Tigers

I saw a special on tigers. 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.

III. The God Substitutes

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, or of God's decrees, is to grant that power to someone or something else and therefore violates the commandment. We must know and acknowledge that He is the creator, preserver and governor of all things.

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. 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 violates the first commandment. 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; we are to, by faith, appropriate (make them ours) these things. 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. 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).

We are also 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.

IV. The Foundational Commandment

The acknowledgment of this commandment is the foundation for at least two major things:

Morality

First, it is the foundation of all morality. This may be one of the reasons people cringe at atheism. If there is no God there is no objective or absolute morality. Everyone seems to agree in a thing called *morality*.²⁷ If it is genuine morality it must be (as we learned previously) above us all and outside us all. The violation of the first commandment removes the sense that anything is absolutely right or wrong. If God is not setting the standard for what is right and wrong, it just becomes the subjective opinion of men and women who, as we all know, have the stain of sin upon their judgments.

Faith in Jesus

Finally, it is the acknowledgment that there is, in fact, a God—a God from Whom we have strayed and to Whom we should be reconciled. Jesus taught that our response to Him revealed our response to God. **“If God were your Father,”** Jesus taught, **“you would love me” (John 8:42)** It is belief in Christ that demonstrates a genuine belief in God and a desire to have no other god but God Himself.

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. But 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 iota 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.

²⁷ There may be disagreement in the particulars of morality, but not in the existence of morality.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Is atheism a morally neutral position? Why or why not?
2. How should our knowledge of this commandment effect our witnessing?
3. What are some common false gods who seek our affections?
4. How can a violation of this commandment have a subtle destructive effect upon the people we love?
5. If we wish to excel in keeping this commandment, what are some things we must know?
6. Name some God-substitutes.
7. Is mere knowledge enough?
8. The first commandment is foundational for at least two things. What are they? Can you think of others?
9. How does this commandment help you appreciate the cross?

Part Nine:

The Second Commandment

Exodus 20:4-6; Acts 17:29

September 13, 2009

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).

I. Not How But Whom?

“It’s not 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 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 proper 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 or likenesses 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.”**²⁸ 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.²⁹

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. In one of my seminary classes we were instructed to read a book which promoted something I now view as a violation of the second commandment.

²⁸ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprint 1989), p. 291.

²⁹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 39.

A Selective Image

Richard Foster, in his book *Celebration of Discipline*, recommends using pictures of Jesus for deep meditation.³⁰ Foster taught that images of God the Father or God the Son help us create a mental picture, making it all more real. I discovered upon reflection and deeper examination that this might not be a good thing.

We tend to be selective when coming up with an image, likeness or portrait; we pick ones we like. Suppose my wife hired someone to paint a picture of me. Suppose she advised the artist 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 personality.” The painting may, in fact, be a hindrance to our relationship rather than a help.

Just a Decoration

I remember reading 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 have 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*. 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

³⁰ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (Harper and Row, 1978), p. 21.

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?

II. False Images

Images Are Not Truthful

We must recognize that images are 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."**³¹

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 of God they wanted as they sought deliverance from the wilderness, a big strong animal who does your 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.³²

Crucifix

Packer also points out that a crucifix (portraying the crucified Christ on the cross) also obscures the glory of Christ, for it hides His deity, 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. Looking at pictures should not be used to move us to worship because they can never show us His glory.³³ Artists may make an

³¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 40.

³² J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 40.

³³ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 41.

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).³⁴ 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 overly autocratic or domineering. 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 He may have been doing at the time of the event.

Screenplay

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.

³⁴ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 41.

An Unavoidable Disposition

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 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.

Naming Our Children

When naming our children we accept or reject names, often times, 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?

Who Plays Jesus?

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 very thought 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.

III. 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 judge."³⁵ 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 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 ours³⁶.

The Incomprehensible God

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.

God in a Box

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 mental image of Him. Both Isaiah and the Apostle Paul had personal glimpses of the heavenly throne. Yet even they recognized God's incomprehensibility.

³⁵ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 42.

³⁶ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Intervarsity Press, 1973), p. 42.

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

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, so 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. Moses teaches that God expressly forbids the use of images. The images made, even by well meaning men, will eventually war with the God of the Scriptures.

More Than a Friend

We will often hear orphans or widows refer to Jesus as their husband or father. After all, God is the Father to the fatherless. We must take care when we worship that we are not imagining God to be the father, husband, wife or friend we never had. We will then seek to endow Him with the traits we wished they had had. He is all that and more, but not merely that.

IV. Visiting Iniquity

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).

Jealousy

Have you ever been curious as to why it is proper for God to be jealous? The term '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 who is seeking to have a father's place in their lives, I am going to be jealous. Whoever that man is, he does not love my children the way I do.

V. Conclusion

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 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? Do my findings 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?

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.”
2. What harm is there if pictures of Jesus helps in your Christian life?
3. In what respect are images not truthful?
4. How will perverse thoughts about God result in perverse actions?
5. What is wrong with the “I like to think of God as a…” comment?
6. How do images violate God’s incomprehensibility? Why is this important?
7. Discuss what people mean when they speak of putting God in a box.
8. Why does God call those who disobey this commandment *God-haters*?
9. Discuss the sanctions and blessings of disobedience and obedience.
10. Why is it proper for God to be jealous?
11. How do you know when you’re worshipping the one true God?

Part Ten:

The Third Commandment

Exodus 20:7

September 27, 2009

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 had commanded at the end of the gospel of Matthew. A summary of **“all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20)** is found in 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 me reminding my children that I'm 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. 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”**.

I. What's In a Name?

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; to the best of my understanding, if I were to attend that church, I would hear the congregation all somehow calling out God's name. I don't think that's what *to call on the name of the Lord* 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.³⁷

God is Not a Rose

We are not merely talking about a ‘handle’. Some might say, “What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” This might be true when it comes to roses. But a rose is a physical entity that can be known by its 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.

³⁷ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprint 1989), p. 306.

How God Reveals His Name

Firstly, God reveals Himself by His name. He states, **“Tell them that ‘I AM’ has sent you.”** God’s names tell us about Him. 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.

Secondly, the name of God is **“to be taken generally and comprehensively for anything whereby God makes himself known.”**³⁸ 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*. God also makes His name known through the sacraments and through the Scriptures.

We are to acknowledge this, and reverently appreciate and use these things, with an eye toward Him who has created, maintains and reveals these things to us. In short, to use God’s name in vain means to either disavow or disrespect His rightful ownership of all things.

II. This Commandment Does Not 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).

There are many occasions where prominent biblical individuals swore and made vows:

³⁸ Thomas Vincent, *A Family Instructional Guide*, (Simpsonville, SC: Christian Classics Foundation) 1997.

Paul swore by God. **“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, in order **“to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath”; and that, ‘because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself.’”**

It is evident, therefore, that the words of our Savior in 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 at weddings, by witnesses in court, commitments as elders, deacons, church members, etc. These are all acceptable before God and should be considered very binding.

A Deeper Level

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 TNG 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.

Marriage Versus Engagement

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. I may tell my wife that I’ll be home by 5:00 PM. But if someone comes into my office that has just lost a loved one, or is in dire straits, I may not live up to that commitment. This is something my wife understands and accepts.

III. This Commandment Forbids

So what does this commandment forbid? *Using God’s name in vain or misusing the name of God.* To misuse the name of God, or to use His name in vain, 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.³⁹

³⁹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprint 1989), p. 306.

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 just 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 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 a Christian, 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).

Making His Name Common

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 nextdoor neighbor. We might seize Christian jargon in order 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 or indecorous 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. Be 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).

One-Upping Others

To use one’s faith, knowledge of God and the Scriptures to lord over others is a violation of this commandment. It is a common temptation to one-up others and make them feel less significant 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 is a very common example of the violation of the third commandment.

I made a commitment long ago 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 contents 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 violation of this commandment is to be found with televangelism. Robert Tilton, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland 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 the unadulterated word of God, breeding upon the weak and the sick for financial gain.

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

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.

The Church

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 the 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? This is a universal issue to which I don't think anyone is immune. Let me see if I can help us grasp the problem.

The Upper Room

I wonder, if we were invited into the upper room the day before the cross to hear the words of Christ and partake in the Lord's Supper, 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 begin to realize that no matter how hard we try, we simply cannot dispense with our selfishness? Would our hands tremble as we held the cup, realizing our need for it yet also our fear and 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 recognizing this holy event and how far short I truly come to 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.

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 kept this commandment without flaw. When we place our trust in Him, His righteousness becomes our righteousness.

Questions for Study and Meditation

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

Part Eleven:

The Fourth Commandment, A

Exodus 20:8-11

October 4, 2009

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).

I. The Best Discipline

Personal Spiritual 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 stale in their faith or some such description of the feel of their relationship with God. I empathize. I think Jesus empathizes. And there are numerous methods we can employ to address this issue.

Methods

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, 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).

The First Table

As we conclude our study of the first table of the Ten Commandments (remembering 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. 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 (and these all are valuable things); He determined a day. On this day we are to take our minds off of the mundane and the routine, and place 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.

Holy and Unholy

A fair question might be ‘should not our thoughts continuously be heavenward?’

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).

We have sadly lost the sense of what is *holy* or *sacred* or *Sabbath*. We assert that all our money belongs to God, so 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 even considers withholding 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!

II. The Neglected Commandment

Associated with Rebelliousness

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?’

The Hardest to Preach

Of the Ten Commandments, this may be the hardest to preach, and to accept, as a twentieth-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. 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.⁴⁰

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 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.

⁴⁰ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. II, Harmony of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Baker Book House, reprinted 1993), p. 435.

Sabbatical

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 had 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 dating 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 as well as having civil punishments) its inclusion in the Ten Commandments demonstrates that it is also moral in nature and should be perpetual in observance.

An Abrogated Commandment?

Does the following verse abrogate (eliminate) 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 sacrificed to idols). The natural and fair interpretation is, that he means 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. There were Sabbaths which separated Israel from the surrounding nations—these 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 in such a way 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, 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 burdensome tutelage of the law, enjoyed it. But now that the last, the fullest, the most gracious and blessed dispensation of all has come, this blessed institution is 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 Twelve:

The Fourth Commandment, B

Exodus 20:8-11

October 11, 2009

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

We have discussed how the Sabbath is God's design, not only for His own glory, but also for our benefit as His children. It was made for us as the ultimate discipline in our pursuit of piety. If we lose a proper pursuit of the Sabbath we will begin to lose the heart of the first three commandments, which will utterly incapacitate us from keeping the last six. The first four commandments are God's transcription for how we ought to love Him. The Sabbath can be compared to the family meal.

I tried to make the argument of the continuance of the Sabbath by pointing out that it existed *before* the law (Moses), *during* the law, and that Jesus referred to Himself as the *Lord of the Sabbath* in the New Testament; the New Testament references which seemed to downplay the Sabbath were likely referring to sabbaths that were unique to Israel rather than *the* Sabbath which existed before Israel.

III. 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? 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?

1. 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, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight” (Acts 20:7).** 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).

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.

Multiple Sabbaths?

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 was to be applied universally. The command involves you, your household, your servants (which could include anyone who might serve you), your animals and even strangers. The problem with the Sabbath being on multiple days 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.

My father-in-law really enjoys his family. He has four children and looks forward to seeing them. Although he enjoys them individually, there is an increased sense of joy when they all come together for special occasions. It is a glory to God for the church universal to recognize this commandment in harmony.

2. Reasons 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:

1) To commemorate the work of Creation (Exodus 20:11).

2) 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.

3) It is a day when we turn our thoughts toward that which is unseen and spiritual (Luke 4:16).

4) It is a day that is set aside for instruction and worship of God (Luke 4:16).

5) 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).

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

A Humane Reason

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!

3. Allowed, and Not Allowed, on the Sabbath

Reading from the Gospel of Mark we see a New Testament record of Sabbath activity:

AT that time Jesus went on the Sabbath through the grainfields, and His disciples

became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, ‘Behold, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.’ But He said to them, ‘Have you not read what David did, when he became hungry, he and his companions; how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent? But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, “I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,” you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.’ And departing from there, He went into their synagogue. And behold, there was a man with a withered hand. And they questioned Him, saying, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?’—in order that they might accuse Him. And He said to them, ‘What man shall there be among you, who shall have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it, and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.’ Then He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand!’ And he stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. But the Pharisees went out, and counseled together against Him, as to how they might destroy Him (Matthew 12:1-14).

Biblical Versus Legalistic Sabbath Keeping

The whole drift of Jesus’ argument is to show that when properly understood, His disciples had not broken the Sabbath at

all. They had complied with it, and there was no need of lowering of its sense in order to escape its condemnation. In this passage Jesus is not repealing the Sabbath, He is giving instruction on what the Sabbath truly is. If He were repealing the Sabbath, all He had to do was tell the Pharisees that the Sabbath is no longer.

Allowed on the Sabbath

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 in forth to your three-year-old, I can't say. But it certainly means avoiding all unnecessary commerce and missing church twenty-two times a year because of soccer and little league.

4. The Sabbath Focus

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, such as: *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.

5. Where Will Ignoring the Sabbath Lead?

So, what are the consequence for neglecting the Sabbath? To a society that neglects the Sabbath 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:

a) The family will suffer for lack of unity and worship together.

b) 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.

c) 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 teenagers and counselors. We were plucked out of our routine and were required to think about life and God and deeper things. Honoring the Sabbath each week would make this a regular thing in the life of the Christian.

d) As a society, like that 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.

6. 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).

The Difficulty of Resting

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.

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, "So I can't say hi or think about my job...even for a minute!"

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 not in the Sabbath, but in the Sabbath-keeper.

Resting in the 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 call upon His name we become, in the eyes of the Father, the righteousness of God. It is in this, what the Scriptures call *the gospel*, that we 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 this is?

8. What does it mean to rest in the Sabbath Keeper?

Part Thirteen:

The Fifth Commandment, A

Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16
October 18, 2009

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—Go Ask Dad

One day, a fifty-year-old high-powered executive walked into my office seeking advice. He was stuck on the horns of a dilemma. A combination business/personal matter was plaguing him. He asked me what I thought he should do. He was a Christian man and desired to honor God. At the same time he was considering the welfare of his business. His dilemma had no easy solution. He could make any number of decisions that would be within the boundaries of God's law.

I had no idea what to tell him, so I shocked him. *What does your dad think you should do?* He looked at me like I had three heads. He hadn't considered talking to his dad about the matter. He wasn't even sure if his dad was a Christian. I pressed the issue. *Go ask your dad. And, assuming his counsel isn't unbiblical, heed it.* He asked his dad, who actually had a pretty strong opinion on the matter, and followed his father's counsel.

Whether or not the long-term effects of this decision will be positive or negative (at least from a worldly perspective) will be difficult, if not impossible, to tell. But both he and I rested in

the knowledge that a biblical method of decision-making was followed. To this extent, God was trusted, honored, revered and obeyed. What can be better than that? Perhaps the most difficult type of faith is the faith that an infallible God can work through a fallible authority.

I. A Neglected, Yet Profitable, Commandment

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 personal holiness and direction. The obedience of this commandment is to be equated with the pursuit to holiness.

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).

All Authority

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 authority in our lives.⁴¹ 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 with as much force in different spheres, it applies to the multiplicity of authority figures in our

⁴¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprint 1989), p. 348.

lives, e.g., husbands, employers, policemen, civic leaders, elders, etc..

The Benefits

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 guide us. 2) We move in the direction of personal holiness (as well as long life and well-going), which is a promise attached to this 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.

That Guy is *Heavy*

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.⁴²

In the sixties we might have said in regard to a certain person, "That guy is really heavy!" This meant that he 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 disposition in a very genuine and heartfelt way. There should be a certain sense of awe in our attitudes.

You Don't Know My Parents!

This may be very difficult for some people. I can almost hear you saying, "You don't know my parents! They're thorny, meddlesome and argumentative." Naturally, as those in authority, we should labor to make this role easy for our children. Paul challenges parents regarding this in his epistle to the Ephesians.

⁴² *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Moody Press, 1980), p. 426.

He writes, “**And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord**” (Ephesians 6:4).

However, we must keep in mind that there are no conditions of this sort attached to this commandment. The commandment does not say, “Honor your father and mother if...they are wise, good, kind, responsible, and caring.” There is only one thing we need to know which should satisfactorily compel us to keep this commandment—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).

You have, or had, the parents, president, pastor and employer God ordained specifically for you from eternity past. This means that you have the exact parents that you need (that may say something about you). There is an old saying, “We pick our friends, but God picks our relatives.” In a sense, this statement is quite true. You certainly don’t think you could have done a better job of picking your parents than God. This passage tells us that when we resist our authorities, we are resisting the very ordinances of God.

II. How to Honor

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).**

Our first assumption is the acknowledgment that God appoints authorities in our lives. Our second assumption is that a proper response to those authorities will yield blessings in our lives (and also in the lives of those around us). How, then, does one honor authority? We can get started with the following list:

Honor

We've already discussed what it means to honor, so I won't be repetitious. But I would like to point something out. 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

**Therefore I exhort first of all that
supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving
of thanks be made for all men, 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 that 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 real people with wives and children and feelings. 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 Expose Iniquities

And Noah began *to be* a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid *it* on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces *were* turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness (Gen 9:20-23).

An iniquity is a weakness of character. Even though Noah was, generally speaking, a righteous man, we do see an indiscretion here. 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. Shem (the line of the promise) and Japheth sought to cover their father's shameful act.

They didn't say, "See, I knew the old man wasn't as righteous as he pretended to be!" Rather, theirs was an act of respect. Many years ago 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).

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 authority or equal, 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.

Obedience

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).

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. 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.

Provision

In his pastoral epistle to Timothy, Paul instructs the church:

Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family, and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God...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 5:3,4,8).

Taking care of your parents in their old age is part of honoring your father and mother. It was a common behavior of the Pharisees to actually neglect their parents in the name of religion.

Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem, saying, “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” And He answered and said to them, “And why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘Whoever shall say to his father or mother, “Anything of mine you might have been helped by has been given to God,” he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ And thus you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship

**Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men””
(Matthew 15:1-9).**

The Pharisees taught that a son might evade the obligation to honor, i.e., to support his father or mother, by saying that his property was consecrated to God. Based upon the passage just cited I think it is safe to surmise that God is not interested in your ministry at the expense of the welfare of your mother and father.

Authority of Self

We all must keep this in mind when we begin to question and despise the leadership God has appointed for us. Whether it is mother and father, politician, policemen, employer, elder or pastor, the rebel who improperly subverts the authorities God has established is assigning ultimate authority to himself.

Responsibility of Authorities

Surely, much can be said regarding the responsibility of those in authority. Time does not permit a full study of this here. Suffice it to say that godly leaders should love (Colossians 3:19), pray for (Job 1:5), bless (Hebrews 7:7), teach (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7), admonish (which means to reprove mildly, but seriously. Ephesians 6:4), be understanding towards (1 Peter 3:7), honor (Esther 6:3), reprove strongly (Romans 13:3), chastise (Proverbs 29:15), train (Ephesians 6:4), provide for (1 Timothy 5:8), and be a good example to (1 Timothy 4:12) those God has put under them.

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 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. Is it true that God picks our relatives? What conclusions should we draw from this knowledge?

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

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

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

10. Is obedience to parents necessary?

11. Can you think of other ways to honor?

12. When rebels have dismissed all authority, where has the authority gone?

13. Discuss some of the responsibilities of leaders.

Part Fourteen:

The Fifth Commandment, B

Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16
October 25, 2009

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).

Review

This is a much-neglected commandment wherein we forfeit holiness and direction. It is a summary command regarding all those in 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; obedience; make provision (esp. for parents).

III. 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.

It may be shocking to some of our parents if we let them know we still need them, trust them and wish to learn from them.

“For they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck.” If this is what you’re pursuing then you are honoring your father and mother. We must also recognize the consequences of neglecting this commandment. The dishonoring of parents and others in authority has consequences.

Evil Disobedience

Disobedience to parents is named among the most heinous of sins. Take a look at the list Paul puts together of sins that proceed from a debased mind. Disobedience to parents is right in the middle.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them (Romans 1:28-32).

There is no age-limit or time-limit for children to be obedient to their parents. But there *are limits*.

Promises and Sanctions

A sanction is the same as a curse; it is God holding back His blessing. Before one nation actually enters into war with another they may hold ‘sanctions’ against that nation. This means that they refuse to help that nation with trade and provisions.

They cut that nation off from the blessings of their own nation. We see sanctions riddled throughout Scripture regarding many different types of sins. 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 we may think that they are.

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 you dishonor your parents, plan on having your children dishonor you.

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):

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).**

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 be most appreciative of their godly ancestor!⁴³

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

Second 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 you. 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.

Eventually, there came a great conspiracy and Absalom sought to seize the king's throne. Many of the Psalms are written by David during this heart-wrenching encounter with his

⁴³ This promise isn't always individual in nature, but are the general blessings that come upon a people who obey this command of God.

rebellious son. In the end, 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.

Valiant Versus Rebellious

Then Samuel explained to the people the behavior of royalty, and wrote *it* in a book and laid *it* up before the LORD. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house. And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and valiant *men* went with him, whose hearts God had touched. But some rebels said, “How can this man save us?” So they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace (1 Sam. 10:25-27).

First, the men of Israel despised God’s judges. Then they despised the king God had anointed for them. “How can this man save us?” they uttered. Clearly they thought they had a better idea than God. Well, maybe they had a point. After all, in the final analysis, Saul didn’t really work out. God displaced him. And surely there are proper ways to handle those who misuse authority. But in this account, the valiant men, whose hearts God had touched, went with Saul. The others were rebels. Of course there are limits to any human authority.

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 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, 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 parents, and each other, given the nature of the situation. 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.

IV. The Obedient Son

Yet in all this we must all 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 by the world to be 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. What are some of the promises and sanctions accompanying this commandment?
2. Is it proper to degrade your parents if you think it will help you psychologically?
3. How does 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 that authority figures, even godly leaders, have in your life?
7. Who was the only obedient Son and what does that mean to us?

Part Fifteen:

The Sixth Commandment, A

Exodus 20:13

November 1, 2009

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

I. 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! They cozy up in their at-least-I’m-not-a-murderer couch and fully expect the Holy Tribunal to be impressed. Jesus sheds a little extra light on this 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 here that the sixth commandment applies to the heart of man. 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 virtually all men guilty. We may be innocent before men,⁴⁴ but we are all assuredly guilty before God.

This commandment forbids malice in all its degrees. 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 those who have done evil—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”) reveals whether or not our faith in God is actually genuine—**“that you may be sons of your Father.”** Read the penetrating words of John:

⁴⁴ 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).

There are times when anger is justified; malice is never okay. 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.⁴⁵

Love but not Like?

If I might 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 saying this is that they will 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 Corinthians 13:5, 7)**. The statement just seems to accommodate our own selfish and carnal desires. We all recognize that there are things about ourselves 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?’

⁴⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprinted 1989), p. 362.

When you make yourself the standard for another person's acceptability, the Scriptures indicate that God will deal with you in a similar manner. You have opted to operate in the arena of justice rather than mercy. None of this is to say that evil should not be addressed. But evil is defined as an offense before *God* over and above an offense before men.

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).

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 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 belongs to God, and to show contempt for my neighbor (even my non-Christian neighbor) is to show contempt for God, because my neighbor is made in the image of God (Genesis 9:6).

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.

II. 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. 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 (or bestowed upon) to men (to a limited extent) His very own attributes—attributes like wisdom, logic, creativity, commitment, love, etc... When a man kills another man, he is defiling the 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.

Next Time

To be responsible to this brief commandment, we must address what falls under the categories of: Blatant murder; what I call *subtle murder*; and the justifiable or necessary taking of a life; and finally, how all of this informs our understanding of the cross of Christ.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. To what extent can we take comfort in the fact that we are not murderers?
2. What is Jesus' take on the sixth commandment?
3. Explain *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 Sixteen:

The Sixth Commandment, B

Exodus 20:13

November 8, 2009

“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 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 stick it to somebody. We are called to love even the most unlovely and unlovable people. Our lack of willingness or ability to accomplish this testifies to our sinfulness before God.

This commandment, similar to all the commandments, pushes 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, subtle murder, the justifiable taking of life, and how all of this informs our understanding of the cross of Christ.

III. Blatant Murder

The violation of this commandment, as interpreted by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, should convict every man and bring all to Christ for forgiveness and redemption. The nature of the offense (defiling the image of God) should help us develop a deeper understanding of the commandment. 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.

He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee. But 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 21:12-14).

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 or momentary anger that receive a lesser punishment. It is explicitly clear, however, that there should never be plans made to unjustifiably kill another person. This crime should be punishable by death.

Suicide

Suicide would fall into the category of the premeditated taking of an innocent (by innocent, I don't mean sinless, but 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.

Is suicide an unforgivable sin? This is a difficult question. Let us consider a biblical answer. If someone in the church were to murder another person, along with the civil penalties, they would begin a process of excommunication. We must then ask the question, "How would the excommunication be lifted or halted?" The answer is

repentance; clearly the person who commits suicide cannot repent and be restored to the church. Jesus says of such a person (in a passage specifically addressing church discipline) **“...let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:17).**

Our perceptions of such matters are to be guided by the words of Christ. We must realize, however, that simply because a person is excommunicated, and we have a certain perception of them, doesn't necessarily mean our perception is accurate. After all, Jesus said, “let him be to you like a heathen.” He didn't say “such a person is a heathen.” Here, I will defer to the Thomas Vincent Family Instructional Guide:

QUESTION 4: Is it possible for those who kill themselves to be saved when there can be no repenting afterwards for this kill?

ANSWER: 1. It is possible for some to give themselves their death wound, and yet repent before they die, and be saved, although this is very rare. 2. It is possible that some, who are children of God, may in a frenzy (Satan taking advantage to inject temptations hereunto) kill themselves yes, and yet, through habitual faith and repentance attain to salvation.”⁴⁶

Abortion

Abortion is the pre-meditated taking of an innocent life. 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

⁴⁶ Thomas Vincent, *A Family Instructional Guide*, (Simpsonville, SC: Christian Classics Foundation) 1997.

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 not to be 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 the either the mother or the unborn child.

IV. 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.

Neglect of Others

Turning your back on those who would die without your attention falls into the boundaries of this commandment. Read the words of both Jesus and James.

For I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me (Matthew 25:42,43).

If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? (James 2:15, 16).

This would be known as a *sin of omission*.⁴⁷ To turn your head and allow someone to die of starvation or exposure is a violation of this commandment.

Carelessness

Improper or imprudent care of your own safety, or the safety of others would be a transgression. Consider the words of Jesus.

And He said to them, “When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?” So they said, “Nothing.” Then He said to them, “But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one” (Luke 22:35, 36).

⁴⁷ A sin of omission is neglecting something we should do. A sin of commission is doing something we shouldn't.

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).**

Neglect of Self

Many people are slowly killing themselves through their diets,

**For the drunkard and the glutton will come
to poverty,
and drowsiness will clothe *a man* with rags
(Proverbs 23:21).**

**Have you found honey? Eat only as much
as you need, lest you be filled with it and vomit
(Proverbs 25:16).**

...lack of medical care,

**No longer drink only water, but use a little
wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent
infirmities (1 Timothy 5:23)**

...lack of sleep,

**The sleep of a laboring man *is* sweet...
(Ecclesiastes 5:12)**

...and, among others things, 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.

V. Justifiable and Necessary Killing

There are some exceptions when it comes to the taking of human life. The sixth commandment is so often quoted by pagans out of context that they've somehow convinced people, 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.

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 by outsiders 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 who will inflict injustice and persecution upon the innocent, the godly may be called to take up arms against them.

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. But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee. If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die (Exodus 21:12-14).

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).

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. And if the witnesses lie, they receive the punishment of the defendant (Deuteronomy 19:18, 19). In cases of murder, there should be no doubt.

Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness (Deuteronomy 17:6).

Some people might be concerned that more murderers might go free if two eye-witnesses are necessary. We have all 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 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.

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?⁴⁸

Defense of Others

Another exception regarding taking a human life is the defense of others. The Psalms teach us:

⁴⁸ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprinted 1989), p. 364.

Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them out of the hand of the wicked (Psalm 82:4).

Deliver those who are being taken away to death, and those who are staggering to slaughter, O hold them back (Psalm 24:11).

Since the vast majority of people who are being taken to death are taken to death by people who are willing to go to war and kill, it is a safe assumption that to deliver the innocent may require the taking of human life.

Self-Defense

Self-defense is also a biblical exception to the taking of human life.

If the thief is caught while breaking in, and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account (Exodus 22:2).

This is a far cry from what we read about today where the thief actually sues if he gets hurt while robbing somebody's house. The Scriptures teach, **"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 33:12a)**. Nations are to obey God just like individuals are; they are to obey His laws. Oh, that the nations would heed His counsel!

VI. 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 from which 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.

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.

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 baby and unborn baby? What can we deduce from this?
5. Discuss subtle forms of murder. Do you really consider these things murder? Why or why not?
6. When is the taking of a life either justifiable or necessary?
7. How does one's view of capital punishment affect their view of the cross?

Part Seventeen:

The Seventh Commandment, A

Exodus 20:14

November 15, 2009

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

I. 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.

- Firstly, the law reveals to us something about the moral character of God.
- Secondly, the law is the ultimate and final authoritative declaration of what is good and ethical.
- Finally, in our greatest efforts to obey God's law two things will happen—we, and those around us, will begin to know the blessings that come with obedience and we will come to a greater understanding of our need for a Savior; since the Spirit indwelt Christian cannot help but discern how they fall short of God's perfect standard, this will happen. Speaking of the law Paul wrote:

Therefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful (Romans 7:12, 13).

In short, the law reveals the depth of our sin—“**sin that it might appear sin.**” Apart from the law man develops a natural proclivity to call good evil and evil good; for that reason Isaiah writes:

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to *those who are* wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight (Isaiah 5:20, 21)!

Those who reject the law and gospel of Christ will inevitably transition from shame to boldness, seeking to justify sinful behavior by an unwarranted transition in ethics. This is why those who contend to maintain a biblical view of marriage, for example, are now accused of being mean, hateful and bigoted. Nothing is new under the sun!

2. Law Keeping

Understanding that we’re not saved by our keeping of the law, one might still ask, “Knowing that obedience does yield blessing, at least in a temporal sense, how can I more successfully adhere to these laws?” I must restate that by *blessings* I am not speaking of mystical or magical fortune.

A person may seek to be obedient yet die of cancer or be struck by lightning. I am speaking of the very general and natural curses or blessings attending those who choose to lie or tell the truth, steal or help preserve property, exercise faithfulness or infidelity, etc. Simply put, it is better to do good—and doing good, generally speaking, produces the best in life.

Perhaps too often we find ourselves uttering the words of the Apostle Paul, “**For what I am doing, I do not understand. 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? Volumes of Christian literature are

dedicated to this, some good some bad. Toward the end of obedience, I think the following is helpful:

Watch Your Hearts

We are to be watchful over our own hearts.

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

We are to be aware of initial desires or early temptations, which are to be avoided.

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.

Control Your Environment

Take deliberate control over your senses and your 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 movies and music. Don't be so naïve as to think these things are not getting into your heart.

Temperance

Exercise early temperance in your behavior.

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.

Pray and Fast

Prayer and fasting are appropriate. Although I would not promote an intensive ascetic, monastic pietism, since its roots and essence are a bit Gnostic,⁴⁹ Jesus **“fasted 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 for me to include in this sermon of Jesus praying. Suffice it to say that if Jesus, the righteous, saw a need to pray and fast, how much more do we?

Fear of God and Consequences

Fear of God is a legitimate motivation for obedience. Although it is not in vogue to speak this way, make no mistake about it: disobedience results in curses and consequences. I was recently speaking with a man who has an infant and a toddler. His behavior toward his wife has caused his wife, and others, to get a restraining order. He can't control his temper. I wrote down the names of his children and his wife on a piece of paper, then told him to put it in his pocket; the next time he feels like giving into his anger, pull the paper out and see the price.

⁴⁹ 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.

Various Means of Grace

Then there are the various means of grace God has provided for His children. Faith in Jesus, and regular attendance at church and His table of communion; study of, and meditation in, the Scriptures; patience in the continuing work of the Spirit in your life; fervent prayer; accountability, and so on, can all help in increasing our steadfastness and obedience. So why don't we talk about this sort of stuff more often?

3. A Pragmatic Danger

Having said all this (and certainly much more can be said), let me now address a pragmatic danger I see in the church. It has become the obsession in many churches (and I myself am not immune to this temptation) to focus on successful, or victorious, Christian living. Therefore, counsel on successful Christian living (although perhaps very Biblical) becomes the main message. Personal growth takes precedence over the glory of God and the grace of the gospel and something unwittingly takes place.

Lists Replacing Lists

It is inevitable that one list will merely replace another list. Instead of feeling bad because I am violating the law, now I feel bad because I am not keeping all the tips that help me keep the law. So now I need tips on how to keep the tips. We develop an iterate Christianity. It's like when I offer an explanation and my children just keeps asking, "*Why?*"

It is a common temptation for pastors to remove the burden of the law from the necks of their congregation by simply giving them a lesser, more obtainable, law. A law they will no doubt eventually find themselves burdened by nonetheless. Instead of feeling bad about lying, you'll feel bad about missing your quiet time.

A Sanctifying Law

So what is the answer? The answer is that our best efforts at keeping the law, whether it be regular attendance at our small accountability group, or a hard core, tightening-of-our-Reeboks, volitional, willful effort to be obedient, is not the end. It is the means to an end.

The end result of our best efforts to keep the law is an increased perception of our need for Christ. Somehow we have developed the idea that we must learn to be more spiritual, we must sanctify ourselves, in order to be better law-keepers. But we don't sanctify ourselves in order to be better law-keepers. Our effort of law-keeping, whether it be fasting or running like Joseph from Potiphar's wife, is itself sanctifying and demonstrates that God is sanctifying us.

II. Sanctifying Fidelity

Making every effort to avoid adultery, and everything related to adultery, is an act of sanctification (personal growth, if you will) and manifests the reality of God's work in our hearts. Promoting a holy household is a spiritual enterprise. It may be more spiritual than any conference, seminary or cloister with all their promises of victory.

I fear that a modern evangelical pietism brushes the Romish assertion that it is much more spiritual not to have a wife or family. It is asserted that acts of piety and devotion can be pursued in an unencumbered fashion apart from familial constraints. "How holy I would be if I didn't have to care for my little ones! Of what great service I could be to my Savior if my wife made no demands of my time and energy!" 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.⁵⁰

Troth

In the old days there was a statement made in weddings that we seldom hear any more. The groom would say to his bride, “I pledge thee my troth.” Troth is another word for fidelity – it’s where we get our word ‘truth’. Fidelity is the essence of who a person is. It is the truth of their character and existence.

There is a more modern term with which we serenade characters of ill-fame. This common derogatory term goes something like, “He’s nobody!” What’s being said about that person is that their fidelity is such that they aren’t even to be considered as a person. Our very womanhood and manhood are wrapped up in our fidelity.

Next

As we pursue the Seventh Commandment in our next meeting we will ask and seek to answer: *Why is this such a monstrous sin (deserving of the death penalty)? What is the essence of this sin? What is included under this commandment? How does one engage in this battle? What do we learn of Christ and His faithfulness to His bride?*

⁵⁰ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprinted 1989), p. 371.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Discuss the nature of our relationship with the law.
2. What is biblical counsel for better law keeping?
3. To what extent should these things be emphasized?
Why shouldn't they be the central focus of the church?
4. Discuss the relationship of law keeping with sanctification.
5. How is the promotion of a healthy and godly household sanctifying? Discuss the quote by Hodge.

Part Eighteen:

The Seventh Commandment, B

Exodus 20:14

November 22, 2009

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

Introduction

I find myself in the odd place of spectator who simultaneously occupies the perimeters of fantasy and reality. This bizarre epiphany came to me years ago when I, as one who enjoyed prime-time television sit-coms, found myself amused by these light comedies which regularly presented adultery, homosexuality and pre-marital intimacy as a mere, and sometimes comical, annoyance (if that), which was 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* first hit me some twenty-five years ago 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 any one person I had known who had lost a spouse to death. 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 either him or the fond memories of a household. It would have been easier for her if he had died!

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

Review

The Law

In quick review of the law of God in general, we learn the law of God accomplishes numerous things. Firstly, the law reveals to us something about the moral character of God. Secondly, the law is the ultimate and final authoritative declaration of what is good and ethical. Finally, in our greatest efforts to obey God's law two things will happen—we, and those around us, will begin to know the blessings that come with obedience, and we will come to a greater understanding of our need for a Savior (Romans 7:12, 13); since the Spirit indwelt Christian cannot help but discern how they fall short of God's perfect standard, this will inevitably happen.

Toward the end or goal of obedience, we discussed being watchful of our hearts (Proverbs 4:23), controlling our environment (Proverbs 5:8), temperance (Proverbs 23:31-33), praying and fasting (Matthew 4:2; Luke 6:12), fear of God, and consequences/benefits of availing ourselves of God's various means of grace.

At the same time we must all recognize that our battle with sin is a lifelong endeavor. As we pursue the Seventh Commandment we will ask and seek to answer: *Why is this such a monstrous sin (deserving of the death penalty)? What is the essence of this sin? What is included under this commandment? How does one engage in this battle? What do we learn of Christ and His faithfulness to His bride?*

III. Essence of Adultery

Let us take a moment to examine the essence and depth of this commandment.

Building Block of Society

This, the Seventh Commandment, is directed toward protecting the sanctity of the home—the fundamental building block of society. The marital vow is a holy commitment that

should not be violated by sexual unfaithfulness under any circumstances. Adultery refers to infidelity on the part of either the man or the woman. In general, a wife who loves, and is faithful to, her husband, and a husband who loves, and is faithful to, his wife will yield a society of physically, emotionally and spiritually healthy children.

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 being not merely a sin but a crime!

The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death (Leviticus 20:10).

Our natural shock of death being the just penalty for adultery has birthed numerous brands of theology designed to either mitigate or altogether eliminate the above passage and the church's embarrassment of it. What this passage should do is reveal how heinous this sin is and how corrupt we have become that we should think God's laws to be ridiculous. If we think God's laws are ridiculous, it stands to reason that God thinks *we're* ridiculous.

It is not my purpose here to address the entire due process necessary for this to become the law of the land; I highlight this merely to show the widespread and egregious nature of the sins contained in this commandment.

Pictures Faithfulness to God

Pursuing further the essence of this commandment, we learn that the marriage relationship is designed to reflect a believer's relationship to God. People who are unfaithful to God are referred to as adulterous. Like a jealous husband, Ezekiel uses this intimate language as he records the judgment of God:

Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations to which they will be carried captive, how I have been hurt by their adulterous hearts which turned away from Me, and by their eyes, which played the harlot after their idols (Ezekiel 6:9).

Similarly to other commandments the adulterer is expressing contempt, not only for his own body and the others involved, but (as we'll see in a moment) God Himself.

Protecting Chastity

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?

IV. To What Does This Command Pertain?

What behaviors fall under the heading of "You shall not commit adultery?"

Adultery

Adultery is the primary violation of this commandment. That is, when you have made vows to another, consummated those vows in the marriage bed, and then violated those vows through sexual union with someone other than your spouse, you have violated this commandment. Marriage vows are binding except in the case of adultery by the other spouse, desertion⁵¹ or death.

⁵¹ Adultery by your spouse or desertion by your spouse is not so much a justification for the termination of the marriage covenant as an understanding that the covenant has already been violated by the unfaithful partner.

Fornication

As we learned earlier, the commandments are far-reaching in their application. The Ten Commandments are summary laws extending beyond the seventeen verses of Exodus. Fornication is also a violation of this commandment. Galatians 5:19 states, **“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness...”** I mention this verse because there is a distinction between adultery and fornication. Though there is a distinction (adultery referring to married persons and fornication referring to unmarried persons), both are forbidden by this commandment.

Fornication *porneia* broadly refers to “any sexual sin.”⁵² We must understand not only the letter of this commandment but the spirit of it as well. The spirit of this commandment is a matter of sexual purity. If you are single, you are to be faithful to your future spouse. If you never intend to marry – a state of mind that you may not always hold to – you are to be faithful to Christ and in Christ as well as providing a model of chastity to those around you.

Reproach Upon Christ

What we see in this sin is that it brings reproach upon Christ. Paul teaches that our intimate association with Christ actually brings Him into this sin. Paul draws a picture of this sin in such a way that it drags the very body of Christ into the harlot’s bed.

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)

⁵²Zodhiates, S. (2000, c1992, c1993). *The Complete Word Study Dictionary : New Testament* (electronic ed.) (G4202). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

Destruction of Oneness

God created sex in such a way as to build a mysterious union between two people that makes them one. Multiple sexual partners robs men and women from experiencing the union that God designed as the most intimate union a human can experience with another person. 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. Although the following passage is often applied to physical fitness, 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).

Like Joseph, who left his coat behind, the Christian should flee (run away—physically, if necessary) sexual immorality.

Homosexuality

Homosexuality also falls into the realm of this commandment. It is not merely homosexual rape or homosexual infidelity, as some suggest, but homosexual behavior itself.

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error (Romans 1:26, 27).

You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination. Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion (Leviticus 18:22, 23).

Other Violations

Other violations of this commandment, according to The Larger Catechism of the Westminster Standards⁵³ include:

...rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts; all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections; all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto; wanton looks, impudent or light behaviour, immodest apparel; prohibiting of lawful, and dispensing with unlawful marriages; having more wives or husbands than one at the same time; unjust divorce, or desertion; unchaste company; lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays; and all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others.”

⁵³ I would strongly recommend acquiring the Westminster Catechism and Westminster Confession. These historically sound and precious documents give well-studied, well thought out, and Biblically sound statements regarding the commandments and other critical issues of the Christian faith.

In light of these things, we may wish to rethink what we watch, read, attend, the company we keep, etc.

Lust

Who can give a sermon on this commandment better than Christ Himself?

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell” (Matthew 5:27-31).

As usual, Christ gets to the heart of the matter. First 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. Quite frankly, you are absolutely out of your mind if you have unfiltered internet access.

The ability you, and your children, have to access unlimited information and images through your computers or tablets, etc., can be a source of good or tremendous evil. We are unwise to leave ourselves or our loved ones at the mercy of our own will-power.

This should also cause us to be careful about the way we dress. Christians should be careful not to cause others to fail in this area. It is one thing to dress cute and creatively; it is quite another to dress provocatively. This is very subjective and you may wish to consult others as to the appropriateness of your attire.

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."** 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."

The idea that Jesus introduces of plucking your eye out or cutting your hand off is not an argument for self-mutilation. What Jesus is expressing is that we should take drastic action to get rid of whatever, in the natural course of events, will tempt us to sin.

Use your eyelids. Resist the second look. Avoid sexual materials in books or movies. Paul advises us regarding what we should observe and think about:

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things (Philippians 4:8).

A Healthy Sex Life

One word of advice that Paul gives to aid in the keeping of this commandment involves not depriving your spouse.

The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control (1 Corinthians 7:4, 5).

Your body is not your own and you should be ever-willing and never begrudging to share intimacy with your husband or your wife. How often? As one pastor said, “As often as necessary.” Hopefully, husbands are willing to be romantic when it comes to their relationship with their wives and wives are willing to respond positively to their husbands.

Flirting and Deep Struggles

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.” Simply put: don’t even entertain the thought.

Another key element to resisting is not to allow a person other than your spouse to be the one with whom you regularly share your deep truths and struggles. It is too easy to fall into the “she understands me” trap.

V. 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 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? 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. Why is fidelity so important?
2. Discuss the protection of chastity.
3. Why does the commandment contain the term *adultery* rather than *fornication*?
4. How does the violation of this commandment bring reproach upon Christ?
5. Is homosexual monogamy a legitimate union?
6. Discuss the topics covered under the Westminster Catechism on this commandment.
7. How is lust different than actual adultery?
8. Why is a healthy sex life with your spouse important?
9. How are simple flirting and deep talks dangerous?
10. What has Christ done for His bride?

Part Nineteen:

The Eighth Commandment, A

Exodus 20:15
December 6, 2009

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?

I. 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 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? Not hardly! A thorough examination of this passage reveals that this is not a command but the record of a unique historical event where people helped each other motivated not by civil law but by love. 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.

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 should accomplish, He has done for us.

II. 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 your 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 the 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 God ultimately 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 should therefore 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.

There is no shortage of Biblical proof-texts for these admonitions (see end of chapter).

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, and God bought us back—that is the gospel. We are, therefore, now 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 Biblical? 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
December 13, 2009

You shall not steal (Exodus 20:15).

Review: The Earth is the Lord's

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 (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 grace (Isaiah 26:12).

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 robbing ourselves. God holds us responsible for what He gives us. We are to look at the things we own as ultimately belonging to God and should act accordingly. So the most subtle infraction of this commandment involves how we handle what 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).

Things we've addressed:

- Since God owns everything, should we assume people own nothing, thus producing a mentality which supports a sort of Christian socialism? No.

- 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? We can rob ourselves and possibly lose the things we are responsible to care for.

Today we will address:

- In what ways can we rob others?
- How do men rob God?
- Who is the master thief and what has he stolen?

III. Robbing Others

Larger Catechism

The stealing of our own stuff may be subtle. The stealing of other people's stuff is pretty obvious. Again, we look to chapter 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.” Christians are not to depend upon the “fine lines” 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).

Time, honor and reputation may also be included. Stealing can be in the realm of time -- making people wait because of your irresponsible planning. Honor -- taking credit for, or not giving credit to, someone else for their accomplishments. Reputation -- this will be addressed in more detail in the Ninth Commandment. But 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.”**

According to the Scriptures, a thief is to pay back what was stolen plus a fifth more (in some cases, even more). There shouldn't have to be both civil and criminal cases for the same crime (Leviticus 6:5).

“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).

“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—when children do not care for their aged parents, they are robbing from them. God has determined that we are to do these things. 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 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 are also to teach our children likewise.

IV. 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” (Malachi 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, 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. He is clearly alluding to the Mosaic system of tithing.⁵⁴ 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. Tithing was never repealed in the new covenant. One of the major causes of the impotent state to 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.

V. Defeating the Thief

Having said all this, we are reminded of the master thief. Jesus spoke of this master thief in John's gospel.

⁵⁴ Tithing was even before Moses. Abraham tithed to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:20).

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly (John 10:10).

There is a master thief—the master usurper. Through temptation and deception (which we will discuss in the Ninth Commandment) the master thief brought all of creation, including the very will of man, into bondage and death. And beyond this, we are not merely captives of the thief, but we became his children, and thieves ourselves. As Paul writes in Ephesians,

And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others (Ephesians 2:1-3).

But Jesus defeated this master thief, this strong man, and took back what was rightfully His. This included *those* who were rightfully His (John 17:2). Jesus explains in the gospel of Mark how He does this:

No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house (Mark 3:27).

So Jesus defeated and bound that strong man, that he would deceive the nations no longer (Revelation 20:2). He did this at the cross.

Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing

**over them in it (“it” referring to the cross—
Colossians 2:15).**

Therefore Paul goes on to teach,

**But God, who is rich in mercy, because of
His great love with which He loved us, even
when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive
together with Christ (by grace you have been
saved) (Ephesians 2:4, 5).**

And it is in this grace that we stand (Romans 5:2). The enemy owned us; he owned our very hearts and dispositions. But we were rescued. Speaking of Jesus, Paul writes,

**He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to
men (Ephesians 4:8).**

The will that was owned by the enemy is now owned by God. The death, which was our inevitable outcome, was vanquished on the cross. Our hearts of stone were turned to hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26), and instead of being slaves of sin and death we became slaves of righteousness and life (Romans 6:16-20).

**What man can live and not see death? Can
he deliver his life from the power of the grave?”
(Psalm 89:48)**

Beloved, the assumed answers to these questions are ‘no one’ and ‘no’. Let us heed the wisdom of God recorded in Isaiah, where God proclaims:

**Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of
the earth! For I am God, and *there is no other*
(Isaiah 45:22).**

May God grant us hearts to hear the truth of His word and dispositions to enjoy the glory of His gospel.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Discuss, or consider, ways we can rob others; 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?
4. How has the master thief been defeated?
5. What does this mean to you and me?

Part Twenty-One: The Ninth Commandment, A *Exodus 20:16* December 20, 2009

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor (Exodus 20:16).

I. Useless Religion

Let's begin with one of the most disquieting verses in the Bible.

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).

The word *religious* used by James here (the adjective *threskos*) speaks of the divinely ascribed duties of outward service to God; in other words, your religious behavior. The second word *religion* (the noun *threskeia*) is James' description of the useless religion that results from useless or vain religious behavior.

The behavior that reveals this is the lack of willingness to bridle (or properly guide) our tongues, which James equates with self-deception. 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, who is the self-deceiver (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).

It would appear there was a major problem among the Jewish Christians (James 1:1—the “twelve tribes...scattered”) when it came to the taming of the tongue.

Most Common Sin

Although there is a great proclivity in both the world and the church to violate all the commandments of God, there is very little doubt in my mind that the violation of the Ninth Commandment (although there is a general theoretical agreement in the church that improper talking is sin) is the most common grievous sin invading 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.

A Tale From Two Women

Years ago I was having a conversation with a church member who began saying some pretty negative things about a mutual friend. I remember her speaking to me in such a way as to give the impression that she was merely musing on her own. The criticism was something I knew to be false and I sought to clear up the misconception.

Less than two weeks later I heard another lady (the first lady's friend) make the same criticism about the same person. It appeared that these women had spoken to each about the third party. This common sin causes great damage in the household of Christ.

Collecting Feathers

There is an old 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, asking 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.

II. Preserving Truth

If inappropriate language does damage to human relationships, how much more critical is its effect upon man's relationship with God!

The duty involved in this commandment is the duty of preserving truth. I shall not speak in detail about truth. Suffice it

to say that Christ referred to Himself as truth (John 14:6); the word of God is truth (John 17:17); truth, like law liberates, i.e., sets us free (John 8:32). 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.⁵⁵

The Necessity of Truth

From the laws of nature and order to the laws of ethics, logic and thought, truth is essential. Truth is an extension of the character and nature of God. If God did not extend His truth into the natural order, that which is food today might be poison tomorrow. Truth is the essence of humanity. A man who violates the truth, sins against the moral foundation of his very being. As a false god is no god so a false man is no man. Jesus taught that the Devil is the father of lies (John 8:44).

Truth, logic, epistemology (the theory of knowledge), call it what you will—when we lose these things we lose everything. That products, policies, politicians, religion, etc. are often presented by emotive appeal rather than reasonable appeal should be a matter of great concern.

The First Sin

The first sin of man was based upon the falsehood of Satan.

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said” (Genesis 3:1).

⁵⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprinted 1989), p. 437.

The serpent questioned the integrity of God's truth and his lies began.

The search for truth will always lead to the true God.

And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart (Jeremiah 29:13).

Men are apt to bear 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 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).

This is He who came by water and blood— Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. 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 our bitterly reluctant hearts.

As an apologist (one who gives defense for the faith) I must know that the testimony of God through the preaching of Christ and Him crucified, and risen, is the means by which God's illuminating Spirit gives life. Not that there is nothing to be said by man and man's testimonies and evidences, but they are subordinate to the certain knowledge of Christ and His word.

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) has chosen to call God a liar (something we see men emboldened to do these days).

We must be wary of those who would downplay truth in the name of love. Love is dependant upon truth for its very definition. When Paul writes that those who have not love are **“sounding brass or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1)**, he doesn’t leave us to our own definition of love. The entire remainder of the “love chapter” is a treatise on the truth about love.

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 discuss:

- What the Ninth Commandment protects.
- If lies are ever permissible.
- Can the truth be slanderous.
- What our lips 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 meant by the statement, “As a false god is no god, so a false man is no man”? Do you agree?
5. How was mankind set up for the fall?
6. What is *the witness of God*?

Part Twenty-Two: The Ninth Commandment, B

Exodus 20:16

December 27, 2009

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor (Exodus 20:16).

Review

Last week we began with a discussion of how James used the example of 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 truth (John 14:6); the word of God is truth (John 17:17); truth liberates (John 8:32). To give up the truth is to give up God Himself and the freedom He provides through the truth of the gospel. 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's word.

We also spoke briefly how the Triune God bears witness of 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 certainly 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).

As much as people don't like it, there is structure to truth. Throughout history there are 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 some outward laws of logic or reason—as we might initially think. True logic 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.

This morning we will complete our study of the Ninth Commandment by discussing what the Ninth Commandment protects; if lies are ever permissible; can the truth be slanderous; and what our lips tell us about ourselves.

III. 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.

False Witness

In its purest 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, 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.

A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed. If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the

LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days. 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. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. And the rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you. Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot (Deuteronomy 19:15-21).

It was such a heinous crime to perjure yourself that you would receive the punishment you were hoping your victim would receive.

Destroys Relationships

Of all the commandments this one that may be the most destructive in terms of personal relationships.⁵⁶ If you're found to be a liar, you can no longer be trusted. A husband or a wife can work through almost any problem or sin in a marriage, 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.

IV. Okay Lies

There is disagreement, even among the great theologians, as to when it is okay to lie. I don't want to spend undue time on this so I'll summarize. There does seem to be a Biblical precedent for deception. Some examples of okay lies might be the deceiving of a mad dog in order to destroy him, or the deceiving of a villain in order to prevent a murder, or deception in a military battle, etc.

⁵⁶ Except for murder, of course.

Jesus

Jesus clearly uses fiction when He tells a parable. He also uses deception to give a lesson.

And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He would go farther (Luke 2:28).

Rahab, Hebrew Mid-Wives, God's Instructions to Samuel

Other examples would be 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 examples of lying found the reward of God rather than His curse. In 1 Samuel 16:1, 2 we actually read of God instructing Samuel to deceive Saul. Again, there is Elisha's deception of the Syrians in 2 Kings 6:19 when God blinded them and Elisha led them into Samaria.

Violating an Obligation

We can conclude that this commandment is blatantly violated when there is an intention to deceive, along with the violation of some obligation. The Hebrew midwives were under no obligation to speak the truth to Pharaoh. A general at war should not expect truthful strategic statements from his opposing general.

Deception seems to be approved when it is not malicious and when it is designed for good, e.g., telling parables or preparing for a surprise party. Deception may be acceptable when the person deceived is abjectly evil and seeking to use the information to perpetrate ungodliness. However, this is a very difficult call. We should not seek to justify ourselves or look for loopholes in the law of God. I bring it up these examples simply because biblical precedent demands it.

We must realize that the obedience of some laws may require the disobedience of others. I may speed to bring a dying

person to the hospital or trespass to administered CPR on a person in need.

V. Playing Favorites

Summary Laws

Bearing false witness has a legal ring to it. We must realize that the Ten Commandments are summary laws. A summary law is the basic statement of the law, but it does not cover every specific violation contained in the law. For example, the Sixth Commandment addresses adultery, but further examination of the Scriptures reveals this law extending to fornication, homosexuality, bestiality, etc.

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.

VI. Truthful Yet Slanderous

Slander Can Be Truth

Slander can be lies, fabrications and half-truths. They might also be things that are true. Even the truth can be sinful. John Calvin wrote,

...but if the reproach be the ebullition (state of boiling) of our anger, or the accusation proceed from ill-will, it will be in vain for us to allege in excuse that we have advanced nothing but what is true.⁵⁷

To say that we are speaking the truth, or that we also “said it to their face,” is no defense for an ungodly motivation. Calvin went on to write,

We must also go further, and not be suspicious or too curious in observing the defects of others; for such eager inquisitiveness betrays malevolence, or at any rate an evil disposition.⁵⁸

A Dump for the Dirt

Christians must make every effort to stop improper chatter. If you’re the type of person who receives a lot of ‘dirt’ you must ask yourself why. It may be because people think that you’ll enjoy hearing it, or because they think they have an advocate in you as a co-grumbler. This type of talk is self-serving and reveals an evil disposition. Don’t cater to it. Take a deep

⁵⁷ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. III* (Baker Book House, reprint 1993), p. 180.

⁵⁸ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. III* (Baker Book House, reprint 1993), p. 181.

breath and tell them to take their information to the proper person, or keep it to themselves.

VII. Rejoicing in Righteousness

It seems to be the nature of man to gravitate toward the negative. It is much easier to get someone to agree that the cafeteria lunch is garbage rather than delicious. There is something that comforts our carnal nature to agree with others that a certain person is flawed in his character. We must resist this and try to focus on righteousness. Read the instruction and examples of the Apostles Paul and John.

(Love) does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth (1 Corinthians 13:6).

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world (Romans 1:8).

I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father (2 John 4:4).

For I was very glad when brethren came and bore witness to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth (3 John 2:3, 4).

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).

VIII. Purging Unclean Lips

What flows from our lips may be most telltale 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 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.

It is like one of my children, when they have a bad dream at night; their fear might overwhelm them. There have been 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. 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. 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 (Deuteronomy 9:15-21).
3. Why is lying so detrimental in relationships?
4. Discuss *okay lies*.
5. When should we give certain people the benefit of the doubt over others?
6. Is it possible for slander to be truthful? Discuss.
7. Why are some people a dump for dirt when it comes to gossip?
8. Why is it against our nature to rejoice in righteousness?
9. Discuss the inauguration of Isaiah. What was his role? What was his disposition? What happened to him?

Part Twenty-Three:

The Tenth Commandment, A

Exodus 20:17
January 3, 2010

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).

I. 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.

Second, we 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 himself 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.

The Danger of Success

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.

II. A History of Coveting

Covet Defined

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

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.

with the meaning to covet evilly. In Hebrew, the word is *Hamad*. It refers to an inordinate, ungoverned, selfish desire.⁶¹

The First Sin

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).

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 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. Read the story of Naboth's vineyard:

NOW it came about after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was

⁶¹ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Volume 1* (Moody Press, 1980), p. 295.

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 (with less than honorable motives) 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 killed 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.... 13 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. If you've read this far you, hopefully you understand that you and I and everyone else continually break all ten all the time. Even people who have deluded themselves into thinking that they're pretty good at keeping the commandments cannot deny their violation of this commandment. No honest person denies the existence of covetousness in their life.

III. 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.

Lack of Contentment

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. While all the time remembering...

**The horse is prepared for the day of battle,
but deliverance is of the LORD (Proverbs 21:31).**

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 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 what must take place in order to obtain contentment.

IV. Obtaining Contentment

Since lack of contentment is the primary stumbling block in regard to this commandment, how does one obtain contentment? I would like to finish instruction on this commandment by borrowing from Thomas Vincent's, *A Family Instructional Guide*,⁶³ which gives instructions on how we may attain contentment in a low, poor and afflicted condition.

Godliness

First, by attaining true godliness, to which alone true contentment is accompanied.

Paul writes to Timothy that,

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.

⁶³ Vincent, Thomas, *A Family Instructional Guide*, (Escondido, CA: Ephesians Four Group) 1999.

Godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6).

Seeking Godliness applies to the pursuit of every commandment. A life full of sin is a breeding ground of discontentedness and covetousness.

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 was mute, I did not open my mouth, because it was You who did *it* (Psalm 39:9).

And again,

I know, O LORD, that Your judgments *are* right, and *that* in faithfulness You have afflicted me (Psalm 119:75).

Some find more comfort in thinking Satan is in charge. Not only is that unbiblical, but it escapes all logic to take comfort in thinking that your life is in the control of Satan over Christ.

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).

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 that those of whom the world was not worthy had no certain dwelling place in the world and many of them were destitute, afflicted, and tormented. People talk about how bad times are, but where and when would you rather be than in twentieth century (or twenty-first century) evangelized America? Would you rather be a victim of Lenin or Stalin? Would you rather be one of the oppressed during of the reign of terror or Spanish Inquisition? Would you rather be living in the dark ages, where a birth complication or appendicitis meant certain death? Would you rather have lived during the Roman conquests? During the time of Babylon? The list goes on. It may be worse in America in 2000 than it was in America in 1960, but you can't judge history in forty-year chunks. You need to look at four or five hundred year chunks. Personally, I'll take the one I'm living in.

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 the things which have the most value, 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.

“Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him*” (James 2:5)?

Worldly 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. The well-known bumper-sticker reads, “He Who Dies With The Most Toys Wins.” It should read, “He Who Dies With The Most Toys Is Dead.” 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. 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.

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. Paul writes,

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. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:11–13).

Beloved, covetousness is a sin whose food is malcontent 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 of which are even 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, allowing Him to give us the desires of our heart according to His infinite wisdom and goodness.

Meditate On Them

Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper (Psalm 1:1-3).

Only Two Counsels

It is my prayer that these pages have been a blessing to you. We must always keep in mind that since the time of Adam it has been an unlawful use of the law to seek salvation by the

keeping of it. That comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. He kept the law perfectly, and freely gives us his righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). Nevertheless, the law of God is a source of great blessing. The only alternative to the law of God is the counsel of the ungodly. I pray that we all, through the course of our lives, will take the advice of David and meditate on God's law day and night—that we will be like a tree firmly planted by the rivers of water—that we will bring forth fruit in our season—that our leaf will not wither and in all we do we will prosper.

V. Obtaining

We have now studied the Ten Commandments. And although we have written much, 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

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 not guilty. To be justified means to stand before God and be acquitted. To be justified means to have the confidence that no one can bring a 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. As you can see, justification is very important.

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. Paul goes on to teach in Galatians,

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “*Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.*” But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “*the just shall live by faith.*” Yet the law is not of faith, but “*the man who does them shall live by them.*” Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*”), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:10-14).

If we are looking to any aspect of our own being for our justification, we are truly lost, for we are required to succeed perfectly in all things which are written in the book of the law, and who has done that but Jesus? *But the justified man lives by faith.* 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 I desire to see strong churches, families and nations, what I desire the law achieve even more is a hunger and passion for the cross of Christ. Amen.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What was the downfall of the demon-possessed law-keeper?
2. What is the danger is 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 to covetousness?
5. Discuss enjoying God's providence. How can this be achieved when things are tough?
6. Go over the Family Instructional Guide regarding the obtaining of contentment.
7. What are our two options when it comes to receiving counsel?
8. What is justification? Why is this important?
9. Discuss the role of the law with justification.
10. How is one justified?

Part Twenty-Four:

The Tenth Commandment, B

Exodus 20:17

January 10, 2010

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

I. The Demon Possessed Law-Keeper

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.

II. A History of Coveting

Covet Defined

According to Vines, covet or *epithumeo* means to fix the desire upon (*epi*, upon, used intensively; *thumos*, passion).⁶⁵ It

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.

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

The Biblical History Includes, But Is Not Limited To:

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 coveting as an example of the sin that revealed to him that he was spiritually dead.

III. The Road to Covetousness

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).

IV. Obtaining Contentment

Since lack of contentment is the primary stumbling block in regard to this commandment, how does one attain contentment? I would like to finish instruction on this commandment by borrowing from Thomas Vincent’s, *A Family Instructional Guide*,⁶⁷ which gives instructions on how we may attain contentment in a low, poor and afflicted condition.

⁶⁶ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Volume 1* (Moody Press, 1980), p. 295.

⁶⁷ Vincent, Thomas, *A Family Instructional Guide*, (Escondido, CA: Ephesians Four Group) 1999.

1. 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. It would be pretty inconsistent thinking to trust Christ with your eternal soul but not trust Him with your ethics and virtues. Seeking godliness, therefore, applies to the pursuit of every commandment. A life full of sin is a breeding ground of discontentedness and covetousness.

2. 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 was mute, I did not open my mouth, because it was You who did it (Psalm 39:9).

And again,

I know, O LORD, that Your judgments *are* right, and *that* in faithfulness You have afflicted me (Psalm 119:75).

Some find more comfort in thinking Satan is in charge. Not only is that unbiblical, but it is unreasonable to take comfort in thinking that your life is in the control of Satan rather than Christ.

3. 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).

4. 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.

5. 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 that those of whom the world was not worthy had no certain dwelling place in the world and many of them were destitute, afflicted, and tormented.

People talk about how bad times are, but where and when would you rather be than in twentieth-first century evangelized America? Would you rather be a victim of Lenin or Stalin? Would you rather be one of the oppressed during of the reign of terror or Spanish Inquisition? Would you rather be living in the dark ages, where a birth complication or appendicitis meant certain death? Would you rather have lived during the Roman conquests? During the time of Babylon? The list goes on. It may be worse in America in 2010 than it was in America in 1960, but you can't judge history in fifty year chunks. You need to look at four or five hundred year chunks. Personally, I'll take the one I'm living in.

6. 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 the things which have the most value, 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.

Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him (James 2:5)?*

7. 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. The well-known bumper-sticker reads, “He Who Dies With The Most Toys Wins.” It should read, “He Who Dies With The Most Toys Is Dead.”

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. 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.

8. 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. Paul writes,

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V. Justification by...

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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. Paul goes on to teach in Galatians,

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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 can humility contribute to contentment?
6. What does it mean to have a proper "perspective" regarding our condition?
7. Discuss what it means to be "heavenly-minded."
8. What is our earthly destiny and how should it govern our thinking?
9. How does Christ give an example of universal contentment?
10. What is justification? Why is this important?
11. Discuss the role of the law with justification.
12. How is one justified?

