The Ten Commandments

Adults

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The Ten Commandments Introduction

Today we will see that the Commandments were given, not out of thin air but in context of a relationship with the Lord. As Christians, we should not view the Ten Commandments as Ten rules to make life a bummer, but as the loving commands of our Heavenly Father who wants the best for us.

The covenant with God is primary. The commands were part of that binding together of God and His people. Treaty texts from the Ancient Near East have revealed to us that a treaty form was used by many nations. It is called a Suzerain Treaty.[1] We see an incredible amount of similarities between the patterns of these early treaties and Exodus 19-24. This also seems to be the pattern for the entire book of Deuteronomy.

These treaties were agreements or covenants between two parties. Most often it was a conquering king or a powerful king that delivered the terms of the covenant. He would make a treaty with the less powerful people and there would be blessings for keeping the covenant and curses for breaking it. The less powerful party was required to join in the covenant with the powerful king.

In his book, "The Christ of the Covenants," O. Palmer Robertson describes the treaties this way:

> "The most essential elements of the treaty form included:
>
> 1. A preambulatory declaration of the lordship of the conquering suzerain.
> 2. An historical prologue emphasizing past acts of benevolence.
> 3. An extensive defining of stipulations involving both demands for heart-loyalty and requirements for specific action.
> 4. Provisions for the official depositing duplicate copies of the treaty documents in the presence of the respective gods of vassal and suzerain.
> 5. An invocative witness, often involving the summoning of inanimate objects.

[1] O Palmer Robertson, "Christ of the Covenants"

6. A statement of potential curses and blessings related to covenant fealty."[2]

It doesn't take long to see the similarity between the Ancient Hittite treaties and the Ten Commandments.

1. Exodus 20:2 does function as a preambulatory declaration of a conquering king.

> *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.* (Exodus 20:2)

2. Exodus 19:4-6 and Exodus 20:2 do function as a historical prologue that emphasize past acts of benevolence.

> *"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and [how] I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. 'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.'"* (Exodus 19:4-6)

> *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."* (Exodus 20:2)

3. This longer section, that I will not copy here, does seem to function as an extensive defining of stipulations involving both demands for heart-loyalty and requirements for specific action. It is found in Exodus 20:3-24:2.

4. Then, provisions for the official depositing duplicate copies of the treaty documents in the presence of the respective gods of vassal and suzerain. This would be why there are multiple tablets. Like today, each party has their own copy.

> *"Now the LORD said to Moses, 'Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction.'"* (Exodus 24:12)

If this is correct, then all the commands were written on each tablet.

> *"It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony [were] in Moses' hand as he was coming down from the mountain),*

[2] O Palmer Robertson, "The Christ of the Covenants"

that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him." (Exodus 34:29)

And this would also be why the tablet of the testimony was put into the ark.

"Then he took the testimony and put [it] into the ark, and attached the poles to the ark, and put the mercy seat on top of the ark." (Exodus 40:20)

5. The invocative witness is not found surrounding the Ten Commandments. Yet, we see this repeatedly in the covenant given to the people of Israel. One such instance is found in Deuteronomy 30.

"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them." (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

7. The potential curses are not present in the Book of Exodus, but they are extensive in the Book of Deuteronomy. One example is Deuteronomy 27.

'"Cursed is the man who makes an idol or a molten image, an abomination to the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets [it] up in secret.' And all the people shall answer and say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who dishonors his father or mother.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who moves his neighbor's boundary mark.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who misleads a blind [person] on the road.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered his father's skirt.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who lies with any animal.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or of his mother.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who lies with his mother-in-law.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who strikes his neighbor in secret.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who accepts a bribe to strike down an innocent person.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' 'Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'"
(Deuteronomy 27:15-26)

All of this leads me to the conclusion, like most scholars, that the giving of the Ten Commandments was done very much like other Ancient Near Eastern treaties.

Now, this may seem rather unimportant. And, no doubt, some people who hear this will yawn through it. This does, however, help us to gain a better understanding of what the Ten Commandments are.

The Commandments were given within the context of a relationship. They were not just dropped out of Heaven with a "Do These Things" flashing sign beside them. God delivered them to His people in the context of a covenant relationship that He had with them.

There is another lesson to be learned from all this. God speaks to us in ways that we understand. God very well could have dropped these commands down from Heaven with a flashing sign that said, "Do These Things", but He did not. He delivered the Ten Commandments in a way that people of that day understood.

God has always delivered His Word in ways that could be understood. He spoke to His people in Hebrew, their language. Then God delivered His Word in Koine Greek in the New Testament. Koine is not Classical Greek, it's Common or Vulgar Greek. Here we see God communicated the Ten Commandments in a way that His people could understand. It was done in the method of covenant used commonly in their day.

The covenant relationship is primary. The Ten Commandments are part of the relationship between God and His people.

This means that the context of the Ten Commandments is God's covenant love for His people. As the great Puritan writer, Thomas Watson said in his book on the Ten Commandments,

> "There is love in every command. It is as if a king would command one of his subjects to dig in a gold mine, and then let him keep the gold for himself."[3]

The Ten Commandments came down to a people that God loved and cared for. And they come to us today in the same manner.

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[3] Thomas Watson, "The Ten Commandments: Life Application of the Ten Commandments with Additional Chapters on Sin, Salvation, Prayer, and More"

Discuss

- Why is it important that the Ten Commandments were given in the context of a covenant relationship rather than as isolated rules?
- How does Exodus 20:2 shape the way we understand the commands that follow?
- What does it teach us about God that He communicated His covenant in a form His people could understand?

This was not the first covenant that God made with His people, and this further illustrates this point. The Abrahamic Covenant already existed. As Paul said in Galatians,

> *"What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise."* (Galatians 3:17)

The giving of the Law did not annul God's promise to Abraham. It was laid upon the promise and did not invalidate the covenant with Abraham.

So, the Ten Commandments were given to a people that God loved and cared for. He had already pledged Himself to them. Do not think of the Ten Commandments as God killing the joy of some people at Mt. Sinai. God gave them in the context of love and care for His people.

Are The Ten Commandments Still Useful Today?

There is a lot of confusion as to how the Law applies today. Does it even apply today?

There are many who say no. There are Christian teachers today who believe the Ten Commandments do not apply to us. The problem is that, though things are not the same as they were in the Old Covenant, the Law still has application to us today.

Let's look at a few of the passages of Scripture and see what's going on.

The first few passages are often separated from their context and the rest of Scripture to teach that there is no law for believers. You might hear someone say, "I am not under law. I am under grace" with regard to their being willing to sin in certain ways.

> *"For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace."* (Romans 6:14)

> *"But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter."* (Romans 7:6)
>
> *"But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor [to lead us] to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."* (Galatians 3:23-35)

Taken alone and with no context, we might agree that this is the case. But that is not the testimony of Scripture. If we read these passages in context and understand them rightly, we see that the Law does play a role in our lives today.

These last two passages help us to understand this concept a little better.

> *"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others [to do] the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches [them,] he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 5:17-19)
>
> *"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."… So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."* (Romans 7:7, 12)

Are the Ten Commandments still useful for us today?

Yes, they are still useful today, but not under a Mosaic Principle that makes your righteousness depend on good work. Speaking specifically of Galatians O Palmer Robertson said,

> "The purpose of law-giving was to lead to Christ, not to lead away from Christ." (O. Palmer Robertson, "The Christ of the Covenants")

That needs to be how we view the commands. And the three uses of the Law help with that.

The Three Uses Of The Law

How does this work?

Here is something you will read repeatedly in this study.

There are three uses of the Law for us today. As the Protestant Reformers and Puritans would often say that the Law's uses are as a mirror, the civil use of the Law, and to see what pleases God.

The first use of the Law is as a mirror. You look at your reflection in the mirror and find all the zits and dirt that needs to be removed. God's Law functions as a mirror that reveals to you the perfection of God and your sinfulness. This revelation of our sinfulness that we find in the Law should push us to seek cleansing in Christ.

> *"because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law [comes] the knowledge of sin."* (Romans 3:20)
>
> *"for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation."* (Romans 4:15)
>
> *"for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law."* (Romans 5:13)
>
> *"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. I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me."* (Romans 7:7-11)

Notice how the mirror works in these passages. We don't just see our wickedness in the mirror. We are moved at the sight of our wickedness to seek cleansing in Christ.

God the Son took on human flesh to remedy our malady. We were lost in sin and death, rebellious, headed for condemnation and He came for us. Jesus Christ lived a perfect life for us. Then He died paying the price for our sins. Three days later, He rose from the grave.

Jesus accomplished our redemption for us. Now, how do we receive this salvation?

We receive this through repentance and faith. Repentance is turning from our sin and rebellion, and faith is trusting in Jesus Christ.

How do we find out that this is necessary?

We look into the mirror of God's Law. The Law is a mirror that reveals to us our wickedness. And this drives us to the remedy, which is Christ.

The second use of the law is civil. The Law also restrains evil in society. We see this plainly in a society like Israel that is set up with God's Law as its law, but we also see this in other societies as well. As there is an abandonment of God's Law in, we can expect for there to be chaos and disorder. These Scriptures are examples from the Old and New Testament.

> *"If your brother, your mother's son, or your son or daughter, or the wife you cherish, or your friend who is as your own soul, entice you secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods' (whom neither you nor your fathers have known, of the gods of the peoples who are around you, near you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other end), you shall not yield to him or listen to him; and your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him. 'But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. 'So you shall stone him to death because he has sought to seduce you from the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 'Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such a wicked thing among you.'"* (Deuteronomy 13:6-11)

Notice what happens because of the execution. They "will never again do such a wicked thing among you." The Law restrains evil.

And this does not change in the New Testament. Civil authorities are supposed to restrain evil.

> *"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 on the one who practices evil."* (Romans 13:3-4)

This is an easily observable fact of society. A place where God's laws are completely ignored is a place where you do not want to raise a family or even visit. In those places where violence and theft are tolerated, where lawlessness pervades the landscape, chaos reigns and you don't want to be there.

California has seen this in recent days. Years of progressive crime policies that didn't punish crime were rolled back in an instant when voters finally grew weary of the entire project.[4] People don't want to live in a lawless community. It's a chaotic nightmare akin to many of the horrible cities found in superhero films.

The third use of the Law is that it reveals what pleases God. How do we know what pleases God? How do we order our lives?

> *"and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight."* (1 John 3:22)

What is pleasing in the sight of God? Keeping His commandments.

And notice in the last passage, Colossians 3:20 why we are to keep the command to honor parents. It is "well-pleasing" to the Lord.

> *"Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord."* (Colossians 3:20)

Keeping the command of the Lord pleases Him.

As a parent, have you ever observed your child doing something that you had taught them to do and just had a moment of beaming pride?

It pleases the Lord when we keep His commands. Therefore, we should study the Ten Commandments, in part to grow in our faithfulness to Him or to please Him.

Discuss

- How would you respond to someone who says, "Christians are under grace, so the Ten Commandments no longer matter"?
- How has God's Law functioned as a mirror in your own life, revealing sin and pointing you to Christ?
- What happens to a society when it disregards God's Law?

[4] https://www.politico.com/news/2024/11/06/california-deals-criminal-justice-reform-big-losses-00187973, accessed 7/26/2026.

- In what ways does obedience to God's commands show love for Him rather than an attempt to earn His favor?

Conclusion

The Ten Commandments are not a list of rules meant to take all the fun out of life. They were originally given within the context of love and care for God's people. We should read, in the Ten Commandments, the love of a caring Father looking out for the good of His people.

And just because they were given in the context of the Old Covenant does not mean that they should be disregarded today. In them we see a mirror that reveals our own sinfulness, how society is supposed to be run, and how to order our lives in such a way that they are pleasing to the Lord.

The First Commandment

The commandment seems simple enough, but there is a lot more here than we first perceive.

Most of the laws given in the Pentateuch are case laws that are based upon the Ten Commandments. This means that The Ten Commandments are the foundational laws and the many other laws found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are applications of the Ten Commandments and how they are to be applied to the people of Israel. As Americans we understand this. Our Constitution serves as the foundational document and other laws created must uphold what is found in the Constitution. This is not a foreign concept, but it is a different way of thinking through the Ten Commandments than you may have been accustomed to.

This gets a little tricky to think through because there are three types of laws in the Pentateuch.

These three types are:

- Civil—These are laws that deal with the government of Israel in this context. There are times when there is application to be made to our own laws, but this deals mostly with the ordering of Israel as a physical nation set apart for God.
- Ceremonial—These deal with the different purity rites and ceremonies that were part of the physical nation of Israel that was a nation set apart for God.
- Moral—These are laws that are based upon God's character. These things are wrong or right simply because they are wrong or right.

As New Testament Christians, we understand that the civil and ceremonial laws passed away and are not in usage today. Even so, they help us to understand what was meant by the Ten Commandments and how to apply them to today.

What we will see is that this command calls us to devote our entire lives to God and to have no other gods.

As we dig through the Pentateuch we will find that there is both a positive aspect and negative aspect to all the commands. The negative command is given to protect something. Here, God is to be our God, and we are to have no other gods.

Our lives are to be totally devoted to Him, and we are to worship no other gods.

> *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before Me."* (Exodus 20:2-3)

We Are to Have No Other Gods

There are many commands given throughout the Pentateuch pertaining to this aspect of the Law. Let's look at a few of these commands and better understand their application.

> *"You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, for the LORD your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the LORD your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth."* (Deuteronomy 6:14-15)

> *"When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. "For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you. "You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. "For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you [to do] so."* (Deuteronomy 18:9-14)

> *"When the LORD your God cuts off before you the nations which you are going in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, beware that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How do these nations serve their gods, that I also may do likewise?' "You shall not behave thus toward the LORD your God, for every abominable act which the LORD hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. "Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it."*
> (Deuteronomy 12:29-32)

> *"You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am the LORD."* (Leviticus 18:21)

In the worship of Molech, babies were given as sacrifices in worship. When the people chased Molech and abandoned the worship of the One True God, they sacrificed their children.

> *"Do not turn to mediums or spiritists; do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God."* (Leviticus 19:31)

It has traditionally been thought that dabbling in mediums, spirits, and conjurers to seek answers from them is breaking the First Commandment. Instead of seeking these answers from the One True God, the people would turn to the practices of the false religions of the land.

Belief in other gods seems like a thing of the past. Pagan beliefs are more prevalent than one would think.

Mormonism is polytheistic. They believe there are more gods than one. And that people become gods.

In 2018 Newsweek ran an article entitled, "Number of Witches Rises Dramatically Across U.S. As Millennials Reject Christianity." One paragraph in the article stated:

> "The number of witches and Americans practicing Wicca religious rituals increased dramatically since the 1990s, with several recent studies indicating there may be at least 1.5 million witches across the country. A Trinity College study conducted in 1990 estimated only about 8,000 Wiccans in the U.S., but the increase has been led by a rejection of mainstream Christianity among young Americans as well as a rise in occultism."[5]

And to add to this, my wife recently told me that there was a book for sale at a popular bookstore called, "How to Become a Witch".

Here is the danger that I see: as our culture embraces polytheistic religions, there may very well be a danger out there of "other gods." When a person, or a society, rejects God, they don't replace that with nothing. They replace it with something. Oftentimes

[5] *Newsweek, "Number of Witches Rises Dramatically Across U.S. As Millennials Reject Christianity*

it is paganism. Oftentimes it is a paganism that they don't understand to be paganism, such as discussing "Mother Earth." Some go so far as to say that Mother Earth will have her revenge when discussing climate change. They don't seem to understand how pagan they are acting in the moment.

God alone is to be exalted, not other gods.

But I do think that it is the case that the greatest danger for us is still subtle. As Matthew Henry, the Puritan Commentator, stated,

> "The sin against this commandment which we are most in danger of is giving the glory and honour to any creature which are due to God only. Pride makes a god of self, covetousness makes a god of money, sensuality makes a god of the belly, whatever is esteemed or loved, feared or served, delighted in or depended on, more than God, that (whatever it is) we do in effect make a god of."[6]

Discuss It

- What do you think of the statement, "whatever is loved, feared, served, delighted in, or depended on more than God becomes 'in effect' a god?"
- Are there any "gods" that you struggle with in your life?
- Do you see any gods that people in this society struggle with a lot?

We Are to Treat God as God Over Our Lives

Because God is our God we are to live lives that are set apart for Him, worship and adore Him above all others, live as if everything is His even our own lives, and trust Him. In short, I am saying that we are to treat God as if He really is God over our lives.

God is holy. He is our God. And so, we are to be holy.

> *"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."* (Leviticus 19:1-2)

[6] From Matthew Henry's Commentary

The word "holy" means "cut or separate". We are God's people; therefore we are to live separate from the world and devoted to Him.

Discuss

- What would we say about a person who says that they worship and adore God but have no desire to live separate from this world?
- Do you want to live separate from this world?

The second thing we notice is that we are to worship and adore God above all others. This idea is presupposed in the command itself and is seen elsewhere in the Scriptures. Texts like Psalm 29:1-2 make that plain.

> *"A Psalm of David. Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty, Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in holy array."* (Psalm 29:1-2)

You will notice that many of the commands we look at in the following section deal with how we are to dispose of our things in the context of worship. But this does cause us to think through some things in our lives.

Discuss

- What are some things in our society that take the place of worship and adoration that is reserved for God alone.

The third thing we notice is that we are to live as if everything is His and can be disposed of as He pleases. This also means that we should be willing to bring our offerings before the Lord. Here is a list of passages of Scripture that deal with this idea.

You will notice in these texts that the firstborn of animals and the people's own children were to be "sanctified" or set apart for God's usage. In some of them the children are to be "redeemed" because the first child was the Lord's. The parents were to buy them back or redeem them. Animals and people were set apart in different ways, but God is God, and it's all His. That's the point of these many commands.

God is God and it is all His.

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me.'" (Exodus 13:1-2)

"Now when the LORD brings you to the land of the Canaanite, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and gives it to you, you shall devote to the LORD the first offspring of every womb, and the first offspring of every beast that you own; the males belong to the LORD. "But every first offspring of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, but if you do not redeem [it,] then you shall break its neck; and every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. "And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' then you shall say to him, 'With a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. 'It came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.' "So it shall serve as a sign on your hand and as phylacteries on your forehead, for with a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt." (Exodus 13:11-16)

"You shall not delay [the offering from] your harvest and your vintage. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me. "You shall do the same with your oxen [and] with your sheep. It shall be with its mother seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to Me." (Exodus 22:29-30)

"The first offspring from every womb belongs to Me, and all your male livestock, the first offspring from cattle and sheep. "You shall redeem with a lamb the first offspring from a donkey; and if you do not redeem [it,] then you shall break its neck. You shall redeem all the firstborn of your sons. None shall appear before Me empty-handed." (Exodus 34:19-20)

"However, a firstborn among animals, which as a firstborn belongs to the LORD, no man may consecrate it; whether ox or sheep, it is the LORD'S." (Leviticus 27:26)

"You shall consecrate to the LORD your God all the firstborn males that are born of your herd and of your flock; you shall not work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock. "You and your household shall eat it every year before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses." (Deuteronomy 15:19-20)

"The LORD also spoke to Moses, saying, "When you take a census of the sons of Israel to number them, then each one of them shall give a ransom for himself to the LORD, when you number them, so that there will be no plague among them when you number them. "This is what everyone who is numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as a contribution to the LORD. "Everyone who is numbered, from twenty years old and over, shall give the contribution to the LORD. "The rich shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less than the half shekel, when you give the contribution to the LORD to make atonement for yourselves. 'You shall take the atonement money from the sons of Israel and shall give it for the service of the tent of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the sons of Israel before the LORD, to make atonement for yourselves.'" (Exodus 30:11-16)

God's primary role in our lives is also seen as the reason for the payment of the tribute offering to the Lord.

"Then it shall be, when you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and live in it, that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground which you bring in from your land that the LORD your God gives you, and you shall put [it] in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name. "You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, 'I declare this day to the LORD my God that I have entered the land which the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.' "Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God. "You shall answer and say before the LORD your God, 'My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation. 'And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor on us. 'Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and wonders; and He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 'Now behold, I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which You, O LORD have given me.' And you shall set it down before the LORD your God, and worship before the LORD your God; and you and the Levite and the alien who is among you shall rejoice in all the good which

> *the LORD your God has given you and your household. "When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied. "You shall say before the LORD your God, 'I have removed the sacred [portion] from [my] house, and also have given it to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed or forgotten any of Your commandments. 'I have not eaten of it while mourning, nor have I removed any of it while I was unclean, nor offered any of it to the dead. I have listened to the voice of the LORD my God; I have done according to all that You have commanded me. 'Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel, and the ground which You have given us, a land flowing with milk and honey, as You swore to our fathers.' "This day the LORD your God commands you to do these statutes and ordinances. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul. "You have today declared the LORD to be your God, and that you would walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments and His ordinances, and listen to His voice. "The LORD has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments; and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, for praise, fame, and honor; and that you shall be a consecrated people to the LORD your God, as He has spoken."* (Deuteronomy 26:1-19)

This is the reason that the firstfruits offering was to be given to the Lord.

> *"You shall bring the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God. "You are not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother."* (Exodus 23:19)

Discuss It

- What is the difference between merely avoiding false gods and positively devoting our whole lives to the Lord?
- What does this tell us about how we use our money, home, vehicles, and basically everything else in our lives?
- What does this tell us about our children?
- Does God give us anything that is not His to dispose of as He pleases?

Lastly, we see that we are to trust God.

> *"When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots [and] people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, is with you. "When you are approaching the battle, the priest shall come near and speak to the people. "He shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or tremble before them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.'"* (Deuteronomy 20:1-4)

Why is it that the people of Israel were not to be afraid of the approaching army?

Why is the priest supposed to speak to the people as they approach their enemy?

Look at what Thomas Watson says about this passage.

> "The immovable is undisturbed by any commotion. Only God is a sufficient foundation to build our trust upon. When we trust Him, we make Him God to us."[7]

And again he said,

> "Faith cures the trembling in heart. It gets above fear, just as oil swims above the water. Trusting in God makes Him to be God to us."[8]

And Martin Luther's words in his Large Catechism are also very helpful.

> "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.
>
> That is: Thou shalt have [and worship] Me alone as thy God. What is the force of this, and how is it to be understood? What does it mean to have a god? Or, what is God? Answer: A god means that from we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress, so that to have a God is nothing else than to trust and believe Him from the [whole] heart; as I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust be right, then is your god also true; and on the other hand, if your trust be false

[7] Thomas Watson, The Ten Commandments
[8] Thomas Watson, The Ten Commandments

> and wrong, then you have not the true God; for these two belong together faith and God. That now, I say, upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your God."[9]

Discuss It

- So, where do you turn when things go awry?
- When trouble comes, what is your first instinct: control, fear, escape, self-reliance, prayer, Scripture, counsel, or something else?
- Do you seek to fix it yourself?
- Do you seek help from God?
- Do you trust the One True God in your time of need?

Before God

We don't normally even think about the last part of this text. What is meant here when God says, "before me"?

Question 54 of Keach's Catechism, which was associated with the London Baptist Confession of 1689, stated:

> "Q. What are we especially taught by these words, "before me," in the first commandment?
>
> A. These words, "before me", in the first commandment, teach us, that God, who sees all things, takes notice of, and is much displeased with the sin of having any other God. (Deut. 30:17, 18; Ps. 44:20-21; Ps. 90:8)"[10]

As Matthew Henry stated,

> "In the last words, "before me", it is intimated, (1) That we cannot have any other God but He will certainly know it. (2) That it is a sin that dares Him to His face, which He cannot which He will not, overlook."[11]

[9] Martin Luther, "Martin Luther's Large Catechism"
[10] Keach's Catechism Question 54
[11] Matthew Henry's Commentary

When we sin, we do it before God. When we worship other gods, God sees us do it. When we prioritize other things above Him, it does not go unnoticed. We do it right in front of His sight.

Does God know when we have kept His Law? Does God know when we have broken His Law?

Conclusion

As will be done repeatedly, we need to examine ourselves against God's Law using the three uses of the Law. Remember, the three uses are as a mirror, the civil use, and as a guide to understand what pleases God.

When we consider the First Commandment in the mirror sense we ask ourselves questions like these.

How have you failed to keep the First Commandment? Do you need to repent of some things before the Lord? The idea is that we are driven to Jesus by our failures because in Him we find forgiveness of sins.

> *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:9)

When we consider the First Commandment in the civil sense, there is a bit of trouble applying it. I would argue that honoring the One True God does have a tremendous effect on the morality of a society. I would also argue that the loss of this is a huge part of the reason our society is in the moral rot that it is in.

When we consider the First Commandment as a guide we will ask questions like these. Do you better understand what pleases God? Do you understand some changes that need to be made in your life to live in a way that pleases Him?

Let us be a people who devote our entire lives to God and have no other gods.

The Second Commandment

The Second Commandment may be more controversial in the church today than many people realize. I want to begin this discussion by saying that there may be some disagreement over the proper application of the Second Commandment. And we all must approach topics like this understanding that we will have to answer for our own failings.

As a church, we should not shy away from this sort of thing. Teaching the "whole counsel of God" is important. (Acts 20:27) Therefore, we will not shy away from it.

> *"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness 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 or 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 the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."* (Exodus 20:4-6)

Last week, in the first command, God taught us that He alone is to be worshipped. Now He tells us how we are to worship Him.

There is a great emphasis in the Pentateuch on how God is to be worshipped, so there is a massive amount of material to wade through. That just tells me that this is important, and so we need to really think through it and get it right.

What we will see today is that God has commanded how He should be worshipped, and that it is to be without the use of images.

Do Not Make Idols to Worship

This command is not just about the worship of other gods. That is certainly not to be done, and to do so would also break the First Commandment. I am amazed at the foolishness of such a thing. Repeatedly in Scripture, the idea is lampooned as such. It's hard to imagine a person cutting down a tree, making an idol out of wood, and then worshiping it, but that is what we see repeatedly. It is also what we see shortly after the giving of the Ten Commandments.

The people had just been rescued from Egypt, yet they made a golden calf to worship. They were not creating a different "god"; they were making a visual representation of the God who had brought them out of Egypt. Israel was not trying to worship other gods. They wanted a visible object of worship like the surrounding nations had. At the base of the mountain, they worshipped the One True God through an idolatrous image.

This was adopting a pagan method for worshipping God. The people of Egypt didn't believe their shrines were gods, but that those idols were vessels for the divine essence associated with that idol. The people of Israel had adopted a pagan practice and God was furious.

> *"Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring [them] to me." Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought [them] to Aaron. He took [this] from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." Now when Aaron saw [this,] he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow [shall be] a feast to the LORD." So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play."* (Exodus 32:1-6)

The phrase, "rose up to play" in conjunction with worship means something akin to "revel". It is not an innocent phrase. It depicts activities that were associated with pagan celebrations such as . It usually meant something lewd and possibly means that there were sexual acts being done as an act of worship. They were adopting pagan worship practices and attempting to worship the One True God.

As Matthew Henry, the great Puritan commentator stated:

> "Yet he calls it *a feast to Jehovah;* for, brutish as they were, they did not imagine that this image was itself a god, nor did they design to terminate their adoration in the image, but they made it for a representation of the

> true God, whom they intended to worship in and through this image; and yet this did not excuse them from gross idolatry…"[12]

Discuss

- What does the golden calf incident in Exodus 32 reveal about the danger of trying to worship God through an image?

Do Not Worship Images

Protestants have historically, and I believe rightly, understood the Second Commandment to be about how the One True God is to be worshipped.

God is God. We are to worship Him and He has told us how He will be worshipped. In the command He says that no images are to be made.

I want to look at some viewpoints on this text from different time periods and traditions. I think you'll find that helpful when thinking through this commandment.

In recent days, John MacArthur wrote,

> "The mode or fashion of worship appropriate to only one Lord forbids any attempt to represent or caricature Him by use of anything He has made. Total censure of artistic expression was not the issue; the absolute censure of idolatry and false worship was the issue."[13]

In 1693 Benjamin Keach wrote his catechism that accompanied the 1689 London Baptist Confession. This was the most prominent statement of faith from Baptists for a long time. His catechism was written to be taught by families to their children. In it he wrote,

> "Q. 56: What is required in the Second Commandment?
>
> A. The Second Commandment requires the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances, as God has appointed in His Word. (Deuteronomy 32:46; Matthew 28:20; Deuteronomy 12:32)

[12] Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary, https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Exd/Exd_032.cfm?a=82006, accessed 08/11/2026.
[13] John MacArthur, MacArthur Study Bible

> Q. 57: What is forbidden in the Second Commandment?
>
> A. The Second Commandment forbids the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in His Word. (Romans 1:22-23; Deuteronomy 4:15-16; Matthew 15:19; Colossians 2:18)"[14]

In the 1500s, the foremost thinker among Protestants was John Calvin. Concerning this commandment, he wrote,

> "The purport of the commandment, therefore, is, that He will not have His legitimate worship profaned by superstitious rites."[15]

Elsewhere, he wrote,

> "In the First Commandment, after He had taught who was the true God, He commanded that He alone should be worshipped; and now He defines what is His legitimate worship."[16]

As we examine the rest of the Pentateuch, there is much to say about how God was to be worshipped. Both making idols and worshipping God using images are prohibited.

Making Idols is Prohibited

The First Commandment was not to worship other gods. So it makes sense that creating idols to worship these false gods is prohibited by God.

> *"You shall not make for yourselves idols, nor shall you set up for yourselves an image or a [sacred] pillar, nor shall you place a figured stone in your land to bow down to it; for I am the LORD your God."* (Leviticus 26:1)

Making Images to Worship the One True God is Also Prohibited

God prescribed how He was to be worshipped. His people were not to come before Him and worship Him in any way they saw fit. They were to come before Him and worship Him as He told them to do. Like last week, there is both a negative and a positive in this command. We memorize the Ten Commandments and leave off the last part of the command.

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[14] Keach's Catechism, Questions 56-57.
[15] John Calvin, Calvin's Institutes Book 2, Chapter 18:17
[16] John Calvin, Calvin's Commentary over this passage.

> *"You shall not make for yourself an idol,* ***or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth****."* (Exodus 20:4)

In Deuteronomy 16, God directs the people as to how they are to observe Passover (Deuteronomy 16:1-8), the Feast of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:9-12), and the Feast of Booths (Deuteronomy 16:13-17). He then discusses the importance of justice in the land (Deuteronomy 16:18-20) and forbids the use of images in worship.

> *"You shall not plant for yourself an Asherah of any kind of tree beside the altar of the LORD your God, which you shall make for yourself. "You shall not set up for yourself a [sacred] pillar which the LORD your God hates."* (Deuteronomy 16:21-22)

The context of this passage is not about pagan idolatry. This is firmly couched in a discussion about the right worship of the Lord. In fact, the next few verses state that it is an abomination to offer blemished animals to the Lord (Deuteronomy 17:1-2). So why is Asherah suddenly mentioned, and why is the prescription so broad?

An Asherah pole was a tree or pillar set up to worship the ancient goddess Asherah. That is not supposed to be placed beside the altar, nor is any other kind of tree, nor is any kind of pillar. The point is that God is not to be worshipped like other gods. He is spirit and has told His people how He is to be worshipped.

Something similar is seen in Exodus 20, after the giving of the Ten Commandments. The people saw that God brought them out of Egypt and gave them the Ten Commandments. They were not to make gods to worship, and they were not to use images to worship the Lord. They were to make an altar for sacrifices instead.

> *"Then the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven. 'You shall not make [other gods] besides Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves. 'You shall make an altar of earth for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you. 'If you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it. 'And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it.'"* (Exodus 20:22-26)

The fact is that God stated how He was to be worshipped repeatedly in the Pentateuch. In these prescriptions, He did not tell people to use images.[17]

Discuss

- Who gets to choose how He is worshipped, us or God?
- What does this tell us about our worship?

Images in Worship

Now, I want to get to a sticky point for many people. And really this is the point that a lot of people discuss at great length. What about images of Jesus?

Is it okay to have images of Jesus up in our homes, churches, or during worship?

This topic is discussed and debated among different groups of believers. It was a major topic during the Protestant Reformation because of how much images were used in the Roman Churches.

Martin Luther was friendly toward images of Jesus. Most of the other Protestant Reformers were not.

In fact, early Protestants, even the Pilgrims in America, kept their churches very plain to make sure they did not break the Second Commandment. There were no pictures of Jesus allowed by them in any way, shape, or form. This is why there are no crucifixes in Protestant Churches, only empty crosses. It's a tradition that has been held for a long time.

As mentioned earlier, not everyone agreed. Martin Luther was okay with images if they were not being worshipped. All of them agreed that the Roman usage of imagery was forbidden by the Second Commandment.

So, here is my take on the matter. And I pray it's correct.

God took on human flesh and dwelt among us, making what was only spirit flesh as well. At that point, people were able to see and touch Jesus. He made the unseen God known. Therefore, I don't see a problem with depictions of Jesus. Because we cannot know exactly what Jesus looked like, I am much more comfortable with non-lifelike

[17] Some more examples are Deuteronomy 12:4-18, 26-27; Exodus 25:23-29; Leviticus 24:1-4; Numbers 8:1-4

representations. I see no problem whatsoever with things like depictions in children's books.

We must be clear here though; we are not to worship these images. We are not even to use them as an aid to our worship.

I may be on the wrong side of this. I am certainly willing to hear and read arguments from the other side, but here I find myself in proximity to Martin Luther on images. Because I have read those arguments, I know they are well meaning. Still, the argument against images of Jesus in things like Storybook Bibles seems to fall flat, because worship seems to be the specific concern.

Why Is This Important?

This is important because God is Spirit and any representation of Him that is physical is a misrepresentation of Him. There is also no way for us to know what Jesus looked like. And even if we did, worshipping Jesus as only human misses a large part of who He is. In effect any representation of God would make Him lesser in our thoughts. Therefore, to worship using any image would be wrong.

The Punishment and Reason for It

God is a jealous God. Every worship of an image is an act of worship of a false god. It is a misrepresentation of who God is that is being worshipped.

Here is what I hope is a helpful example. Imagine I came home one day and told my wife that I loved her beautiful blond hair and brown eyes. What would her response be? Well, those of you that can picture her now would know that she wouldn't be happy, because that is not what she looks like.

God is not happy when we worship an idol or a misrepresentation of Him.

> *"You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."* (Exodus 20:4-6)

Worshipping idols is idolatrous. Worshipping an image of God is also idolatrous, even if we did not intend for it to be so.

This behavior is also dangerous because it affects generations of people that come after us. If a parent has an idolatrous view of God, it will be passed down to their children. The parents will not be the only ones who have an idolatrous view of God; the kids, grandkids, and others will as well. And, if a parent worships the One True God as He has directed, this is a faithfulness that passes from generation to generation as well.

Discuss

- How important does God believe the worship of Him to be?
- How particular is He that we get it right?
- Does this affect how we think about our worship?

How Then Are We to Think of God?

This does bring about a legitimate question for us to answer. If we are not to be thinking in pictures of God using images, what are we to do? God has revealed Himself to us in Scripture and that is how we are to think of Him.

God has revealed to us that He is holy, good, just, righteous, gracious, omnipotent, and omnipresent. That is how we are to think of God. We are to think of Him as He has told us He is.

Discuss

- If we are not to think of God primarily through images, how has God revealed Himself to us?
- What attributes of God can you name without doing a Google search? How do they shape your worship of God?
- How can Scripture help correct false or incomplete thoughts we may have about God?

Conclusion

We may have trod some new and strange ground for some of you, but it is important that we get this right.

We are not to worship images, therefore images depicting God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit should not be used in worship.

Have you sinned by making some sort of representation that you should not have? If so, repent and turn to Jesus for forgiveness of sins.

> *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:9)

And as we consider what pleases God, let us always remember that God is not to be worshipped with images. Remember who He is and what He has done for us.

The Third Commandment

One of my favorite moments in the Indiana Jones movies is when Henry Jones Sr. slaps "Junior" aka "Indiana Jones" across the face for breaking the Third Commandment. I laugh out loud when it happens, but Henry seems to understand something that is missing in our day. It is important that God's name be held sacred. We are not to use it in a profane, irreverent, or contemptuous way.

> "*You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain."* (Exodus 20:7)

So, there are two parts to this command. Do not use God's name in a profane, irreverent, or contemptuous way. And this means that we are to reverence and honor God's name. "Hallowed be Your name" (Matthew 6:9). This command is a protection of God's name.

1. Do not use God's name in a profane, irreverent, or contemptuous way.
2. Reverence and honor God's name.

Do Not use God's Name In A Profane, Irreverent, Or Contemptuous Way aka "Blasphemy"

The word that is here translated "vain" is the Hebrew word **שָׁוְא** (*šāv'),* it literally means "emptiness, nothingness, or vanity".[18] We are not to use God's name in a way that empties His name of its glory.

God is glorious and is always to be treated and spoken of in that way. The Hebrew way of speaking of glory is enlightening here. Hebrew is a very image oriented language and the way they used the word "glory" is a perfect illustration of this.

The Hebrew word, כָּבוֹד (kâbôwd), carries with it the idea of weightiness.[19] The word can literally mean "heavy". This illustrates how we should treat God's name. The

[18] https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h7723/esv/wlc/0-1/, accessed 7/30/2026.
[19] https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3519/kjv/wlc/0-1/, accessed 08/03/2026.

name of God should be treated with weightiness. And the opposite of this is to treat the name of the Lord as if it is insignificant and void of this weightiness.

For instance, attaching God's name to a curse word or using His name in a profane way empties God's name of its weightiness. To say God's name every time you are frustrated also empties God's name of its weightiness.

We are not allowed to speak of God in a way that is irreverent. God stands above all. He is our Creator and Lord. His name is to be revered, not used in the many profane ways that it is used today.

Discuss

- How does the idea of weightiness shape the way we should speak about God?
- What are some common ways people today use God's name casually, irreverently, or contemptuously without realizing the seriousness of it?

Swearing by God's Name

Swearing by gods other than the one true God is one way that the Israelites could break this command. To swear by another God while worshipping the One True God was to break this command (Exodus 23:13, Deuteronomy 6:13, Deuteronomy 10:20).

> *"You shall fear [only] the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name."* (Deuteronomy 6:13)

This does seem very odd when we consider it alongside Matthew 5:33-37. But the problem Jesus was addressing was not oaths but lying and deceiving and using oaths to help in the deception. John MacArthur is helpful here.

> "This should not be taken as a universal condemnation of oaths in all circumstances. God Himself confirmed a promise with an oath (Hebrews 6:13-18; cf. Acts 2:30). Christ Himself spoke under oath (Matthew 26:63-64). And the law prescribed oaths in certain circumstances (e.g. Numbers 5:19, 21; 30:2,3). What Christ is forbidding here is the flippant, profane, or careless use of oaths in everyday speech. In that culture, such oaths were often employed for deceptive purposes. To make the person being victimized believe the truth was being told, the Jews would swear by "heaven," "earth", "Jerusalem", or their own

> "heads" (Vv. 34-36), not by God, hoping to avoid divine judgment for their lie. But it all was in God's creation, so it drew Him in and produced guilt before Him, exactly as if the oath were made in His name. Jesus suggested that all our speech should be as if we were under an oath to tell the truth (V. 37)."[20]

So the lesson that Jesus is really giving in this text is to be honest. We are to let our "yes" be "yes" and our "no" be "no".

Is it okay to take an oath with your hand on the Bible in court? That's a question that many people ask upon reading Matthew 5.

When we consider what Jesus was discussing it becomes obvious that the practice is one that is not outlawed by His words in Matthew 5. Furthermore, swearing by God's name was to be done in the Pentateuch.

What was not okay was to swear by the name of another God or to swear by God's name and lie. Let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no" whether your hand is on the Bible or not.

Perjury

This also means that we are not to swear by God's name and then lie.

> *'You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD."* (Leviticus 19:12)

To swear by God's name and lie is to call God to witness to your lie. What a horrific thing to do!

And how flippantly do many people do this very thing today as they say "I swear to God"?

Perform the Vows You Make to God

I have heard people say things like, "If God would only give me……., I would….." And then they never end up doing what they vowed to perform.

[20] John MacArthur Study Bible, NASB, 2006. Pp. 1369-1370.

I have also heard vows that were given that were abandoned months or years later.

> *"When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the LORD your God will surely require it of you. "However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you. "You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God, what you have promised."* (Deuteronomy 23:21-23)

> *"Then Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the sons of Israel, saying, "This is the word which the LORD has commanded. "If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. "Also if a woman makes a vow to the LORD, and binds herself by an obligation in her father's house in her youth, and her father hears her vow and her obligation by which she has bound herself, and her father says nothing to her, then all her vows shall stand and every obligation by which she has bound herself shall stand. "But if her father should forbid her on the day he hears [of it,] none of her vows or her obligations by which she has bound herself shall stand; and the LORD will forgive her because her father had forbidden her. "However, if she should marry while under her vows or the rash statement of her lips by which she has bound herself, and her husband hears of it and says nothing to her on the day he hears [it,] then her vows shall stand and her obligations by which she has bound herself shall stand. "But if on the day her husband hears [of it,] he forbids her, then he shall annul her vow which she is under and the rash statement of her lips by which she has bound herself; and the LORD will forgive her. "But the vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, everything by which she has bound herself, shall stand against her. "However, if she vowed in her husband's house, or bound herself by an obligation with an oath, and her husband heard [it,] but said nothing to her [and] did not forbid her, then all her vows shall stand and every obligation by which she bound herself shall stand. "But if her husband indeed annuls them on the day he hears [them,] then whatever proceeds out of her lips concerning her vows or concerning the obligation of herself shall not stand; her husband has annulled them, and the LORD will forgive her. "Every vow and every binding oath to humble herself, her husband may confirm it or her husband may annul it. "But if her husband indeed says nothing to her from day to day, then he confirms all her vows or all her obligations which are on her; he has confirmed them, because he said nothing to her on the day he heard them. "But if he indeed annuls them after he has heard them, then*

> *he shall bear her guilt." These are the statutes which the LORD commanded Moses, [as] between a man and his wife, [and as] between a father and his daughter, [while she is] in her youth in her father's house."* (Numbers 30:1-16)

If we say that we are going to do something for the Lord then we should fulfill that vow. If you made a rash vow then we need to repent and ask God to forgive us for that.

This is a promise made to the Lord that was falsified. That's a big deal. It's not something to just sweep under the rug, but people treat it as if it is. It's even a joke you've probably seen in a sitcom.

The application to this is simple. Are there any things that you have vowed to God that you should not have? Or are there things that you need to be doing right now or changes you need to make to fulfill vows you've made to God?

Discuss

- Why might it be better not to make a vow than to make one carelessly?

Do Not Curse the Name of the Lord

I believe this to be more in line with what we typically think of when we discuss taking the Lord's name in vain. It is what happened in Indiana Jones that I mentioned in the introduction. It is speaking of God's name in any way that is profane, irreverent, or contemptuous.

There is a story from the Book of Leviticus that helps make sense of this. There was a fight in the camp, and a man "blasphemed the Name and cursed" (Leviticus 24:11). There are not a lot of details as to what was said, but we can deduce some information from the story.

> *"Now the son of an Israelite woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the sons of Israel; and the Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel struggled with each other in the camp. The son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name and cursed. So they brought him to Moses. (Now his mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan.) They put him in custody so that the command of the LORD might be made clear to them. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Bring the one who has cursed outside the camp, and let all who heard him lay*

> *their hands on his head; then let all the congregation stone him. "You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'If anyone curses his God, then he will bear his sin. 'Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death."* (Leviticus 24:10-16)
>
> *"You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'If anyone curses his God, then he will bear his sin. 'Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death."* (Leviticus 24:15-16)

The "name" was God's personal name (Yahweh). Somehow this man used the name in a manner void of its honor and was put to death. He had broken the commandment to not take the name of the Lord in vain.

Some examples of this are:

- Using the name of God, or any person of the Trinity, attached to a curse word.
- Using God's name or the name of any person of the Trinity in idle talk or in an irreverent way. An example of this would be calling Jesus your "homeboy".

Our tongues can break out into horrible curses in a moment. Taming the tongue is a difficult task. Let us be careful not to profane the name of the Lord.

Taking the Name of a Christian then Living a Life that Dishonors God's Name

A person who names the name of Christ and then lives a life that is filled with sin is dishonoring God's name by the life they live. We see this idea in Ezekiel 36:22-27, especially in the first few verses of that text.

> *"'Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. "I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD," declares the Lord GOD, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. "For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.*

> *"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances."* (Ezekiel 36:22-27)

What had the people done? They were called God's people but were living in a way that dishonored God's name wherever they went.

The same thing happens today.

What would we say about a person who delights in sin and at the same time gladly calls himself or herself a Christian, one of God's people?

What would you think of the alcoholic that relishes their sin yet says they are a Christian? We've all heard of people that get drunk on Saturday and go to church on Sunday. What does God think of that? Are they not taking God's name in vain?

Discuss

- Why would calling yourself a Christian and then living a life dishonoring to the Lord be breaking the Third Commandment?

Do Not Apply to God's Word Something God Did Not Say or Mean

The simple idea here is that we should not attribute to God anything that He did not say in His Word. If He did not say it, then do not say that He said it.

How do we come to a position where we attribute our own ideas as being something that God said? It happens through a high view of our own self and a low view of God. It happens when people have a low view of God's Word. When God's Word is not treated as God's Word but instead is treated as a word from people about God this sort of thing happens.

What is a person doing when they say that God said something that He did not? Are they not lying about what God said?

What is the person doing that stands behind the pulpit and says, "Thus saith the Lord", then defends deviant behavior?

That rainbow flag wearing preacher is doing more than be wrong. They are attributing something to God that He did not say. They are breaking the third commandment.

When the Jehovah's Witness changes John 1:1 to make it seem as if Jesus is not God, what have they done? Have they not broken the third commandment?

Similar to this is the person that says, "God told me to_____" when it is not really something God told them.

On multiple occasions I have talked with men who said something to the effect of, "God wants me to divorce my wife and be with this other woman." On both occasions, he was promptly told this was not the case. The reality is that he was lying about what God wanted.

Discuss

- What dangers arise when people claim "God said" something that Scripture does not teach?

Reverence and Honor God's Name

The command seeks to cause us to honor God's name by commanding us not to dishonor it. So, this means the positive behavior that this command seeks to induce is that of reverence and honor to God's name. And this seems to be the sentiment that Jesus taught in the Lord's Prayer when we are to pray, "Hallowed be Your Name".

Our thoughts of God should be of deep admiration and honor. This is difficult in our day. There is very little reverence given to anyone or anything it seems, but it should not be so for us. We should be people who honor God's name. We should be people who desire for God's name to be "hallowed". This command should move us to honor the name of God, and this includes all three persons of the Trinity. We should be filled with honor and reverence at the name of God.

The Penalty

The last part of this command is chilling, "for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain".

There is a steep penalty for taking the name of the LORD in vain. God has promised to avenge this sin.

Conclusion

Now, as we have been accustomed to doing, I am going to end by looking at the three uses of the Law and seeing how we can apply what we just discussed through that lens.

Mirror: We see the pimples on our face as we gaze into the mirror of God's Law. We see things we should repent of and seek forgiveness in. This drives us to Christ as we consider past vows broken and other times we've used God's name in vain.

You've probably broken this command and it is worthy of death, but there is forgiveness of sins in Christ. Don't despair. Flee to Him.

> *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (1John 1:9)

Civil: Though it's hard to see how our society would pass a law against profaning the One True God's name, I do believe that we should be people who honor God's name in the public square. I also think that a society that blasphemes as much as this one does is in for trouble at some point down the line.

I will also add that there is a tremendous number of people in our country claiming that God said things that He didn't say. Those people are storing up wrath for themselves.

As a guide, we can see that it pleases God to use His name in a reverent and honoring way.

The Fourth Commandment

Everyone should be convinced in their own mind how they should honor this command. Many faithful and intelligent Christians debate how to keep this command.

> *"'Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; [in it] you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. 'For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy."* (Exodus 20:9-11)

It is simply not clear how Christians are to treat this command today.

A lot of the problem comes down to this: the Sabbath day is the last day of the week. That day is Saturday. In the New Testament, we see that we are to worship on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, which is Sunday.

In the 300s, Augustine taught that the Sabbath had been abrogated because of the words of Paul found in Colossians 2. They are important to this discussion, so we will read them here.

> *"Therefore no one is to 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)

This is also the opinion of people like John MacArthur in our day.

> "Significantly, the command for the Sabbath is not repeated in the New Testament, whereas the other 9 are. In fact, it is nullified (Colossians 2:16-17). Belonging especially to Israel under the Mosaic economy, the Sabbath could not apply to the believer of the church age, for he is living in a new economy."[21]

Others throughout history have understood the Sabbath to have been changed to the Lord's Day or the Christian Sabbath. And so, the resurrection of Christ changed the day of rest to the first day of the week rather than the last day of the week. That is the

[21] John MacArthur, "John MacArthur Study Bible NASB" from the comments on Exodus 20:8.

position of the Puritans, who in reality are our forebears and those who first made it to America, which explains why businesses were not open on Sundays. They believed that work, recreation, and commerce were to be avoided on the Lord's Day.

This was also the opinion of early Baptists in America.

> "As it is the law of nature that in general a proportion of time, by God's appointment, should be set apart for the worship of God, so he has given in His Word a positive, moral and perpetual commandment, binding upon all men, in all ages to this effect. He has particularly appointed one day in seven for a sabbath to be kept holy for Him. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ this was the last day of the week, and from the resurrection of Christ it was changed to the first day of the week and called the Lord's Day. This is to be continued until the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath, the observation of the last day of the week having been abolished."[22]
>
> "The Sabbath is kept holy to the Lord by those who, after the necessary preparation of their hearts and prior arranging of their common *[ordinary or domestic]* affairs, observe all day a holy rest from their own works, words and thoughts about their worldly employment and recreations, and give themselves over to the public and private acts of worship for the whole time, and to carrying out duties of necessity and mercy."[23]
>
> *The London Baptist Confession of Faith Chapter 22 Paragraph 8, The Scripture references are Isaiah 58:13, Nehemiah 13:15-22, Matthew 12:1-13*

But even among those who held to Sabbath observance, there was controversy. John Knox was the foremost leader of the Scottish Reformation and famously said, "Lord, give me Scotland or I die!" Apparently, he went to visit John Calvin in Geneva. Since Calvin had greatly influenced the Puritans, Knox was shocked to find Calvin bowling in the yard on a Sunday afternoon. John Knox, who lived in Scotland, believed that recreation was wrong for the Sabbath. Apparently, John Calvin did not. And the student was shocked at the teacher.

[22] London Baptist Confession 1689 22:7
[23] London Baptist Confession 1689 22:8

And Martin Luther had a different view than those listed above. It was basically that the fourth commandment was for the Jews and not for us. But we need to set aside a day, and people already worship on Sunday, so Sunday is the day to do it.

> "Now, in the Old Testament, God separated the seventh day, and appointed it for rest, and commanded that it should be regarded as holy above all others. As regards this external observance, this commandment was given to the Jews alone, that they should abstain from toilsome work, and rest, so that both man and beast might recuperate, and not be weakened by unremitting labor….This commandment, therefore, according to the gross sense, does not concern us Christians; for it is altogether an external matter, like other ordinances of the Old Testament, which were attached to particular customs, persons, times, and places, and now have been made free through Christ."[24]
>
> "Therefore this is the simple meaning of the commandment: since holidays are observed anyhow, such observance should be devoted to hearing God's Word, so that the special function of this day should be the ministry of the Word for the young and the mass of poor people, yet that the resting be not so strictly interpreted as to forbid any other incidental work that cannot be avoided….But what is meant by keeping it holy? Nothing else than to be occupied in holy words, works, and life. For the day needs no sanctification for itself; for in itself it has been created holy [from the beginning of the creation it was sanctified by its Creator]. But God desires it to be holy to you. Therefore it becomes holy or unholy on your account, according as you are occupied on the same with things that are holy or unholy. How, then does such sanctification take place? Not in this manner, that [with folded hands] we sit behind the stove and do no rough [external] work, or deck ourselves with a wreath and put on our best clothes, but (as has been said) that we occupy ourselves with God's Word, and exercise ourselves therein."[25]

I will freely admit that I have had many struggles understanding this commandment and its application to today. That is why I am giving you so much information. For a

[24] Martin Luther, "Luther's Larger Catechism"
[25] Martin Luther, "Luther's Larger Catechism"

time, I led my family to keep the Lord's Day rather strictly because I was convinced it was in force today.

Why would I discuss all of this?

First, I want you to have all sides of this discussion. I want you to have all the information so that you can make an informed decision. We will all stand before the Lord one day and give an account for our lives. It is important.

I believe that the ceremonial aspects of Sabbath keeping have passed away and that one day should be devoted to the Lord. I tend to agree with Luther, and to some extent Augustine and MacArthur on the matter. We are simply not told why, but Christians did begin worshiping on Sunday and it was called "The Lord's Day" (Revelation 1:10). And we do know that Christ is the fulfillment and giver of the rest that the Sabbath only pictured. We enter into this rest, the true rest of Christ by faith.

But I do believe that there are three things that we learn from the commandment that are to be applied today.

1. We are to rest in Christ.
2. We are to go to church.
3. We are to work.

We Are to Rest in Christ

The first and most important thing that we should see in this commandment is that we are commanded to rest. And this rest is not just to forget everything and sit on the couch. It is to rest in the faithful care of the Lord.

> *"'Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease [from labor] so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves."* (Exodus 23:12)

> *"'For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings."* (Leviticus 23:3)

These times of Sabbath were a resting in the Lord. They were a time to not be doing work and resting in the trust that God was taking care of you and everything else in the world. It was resting in Him.

Don't just quickly breeze past this.

A family that relied upon their farming to provide for their family would have something to do every day. A day of not sowing or not reaping is a day of not producing what is necessary for your family to survive on. And you are supposed to not work for one day as a Sabbath to the Lord.

The word "sabbath" is a special word, "שַׁבָּת" (*šabāṯ),* so we would just interpret it as "sabbath". It is, however, a form of the word "שָׁבַת" (*šāḇaṯ),* which means "cease". And that is what the command calls upon God's people to do. They are to "desist" or "cease" their labor for one day.[26]

As Christians, we are to cease from our striving and rest in the Lord. That is the posture of a Christian. We are no longer striving to earn favor with God; we have it in Christ.

As Jesus Himself said,

> *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."*
> (Matthew 11:28)

The Book of Hebrews was a sermon written to Hebrew people that were considering leaving Christianity to return to Judaism. The point of the Book of Hebrews is that Jesus is better than the Judaism they had left behind. Now, whatever position that you land on concerning Sabbath keeping in our day, this is plain. We are commanded to rest in the Lord. Look at Hebrews 4:1-16.

> *"Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh [day:] "AND GOD*

[26] https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h7676/nasb95/wlc/0-1/, accessed 08/11/2026.

RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS"; and again in this [passage,] "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST." Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS." For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through [following] the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as [we are, yet] without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:1-16)

We rebelled against God and earned His just wrath. Try as we might, we could never earn God's favor. God made a way for us. God the Son took on human flesh and dwelt among us. He lived a perfect life and died on the cross to pay the punishment for our sins and rose from the grave for our justification. Now we can enter into God's rest.

As Christians, we are to be at rest in the love and grace of God that has been given to us in Jesus Christ. By faith, not works, we have entered that rest. And there we are to remain.

As discussed in the introduction, I have struggled with this commandment. There have been times when I have been convinced that I should keep the Lord's Day and others I have not. There have been times when I did not work, other than preaching or teaching on the Lord's Day. When I left church, I would not eat at a restaurant to cause others to work.

Have you thought about it? Do you have any thoughts on the matter? We want to honor God with our obedience, so it is important.

As a student in Dr. Schreiner's New Testament class, this question had been rolling around in my mind. When I got the opportunity to ask I said,

"The 1689 London Baptist Confession, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Heidelberg Catechism all hold that Sunday is the Lord's Day and that it is to be kept as the New Testament Sabbath. Do you think this is the correct view for New Testament believers?"

His answer was "no."

The reason was interesting and one that I had never considered. After citing Colossians 2:16-17 and a few other texts he said there was a historical reason as well.

> *"Therefore no one is to 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)

He said that Jewish believers were given Saturday off and there was no way, in the ancient world, that they would have survived taking two days off every week.

This answer fits nicely into what we know about the history of the Church. Christians had protections in Rome as long as they were considered a sect of Judaism. And as a sect of Judaism, they had Saturday off from work. Intense persecution arose when they were no longer considered a sect of Judaism, which occurred during the reign of Trajan in the late 90s and early 100s. From that point forward, Christians were seen as different from the Jews and were not allowed these protections. This also kicked off intense Roman persecution of Christians.

This led me to some further inquiry. I began to look at what the Didache said about the Lord's Day. How did the early church decide to keep this command?

The Didache was written in the late 1st Century, possibly the early 2nd Century. So it was written close to the time of the New Testament. This is a letter written to help churches function as they ought when the church was in its infancy.

> "On the Lord's Day [those] of the Lord come together, break bread and hold Eucharist, after confessing your transgressions that your offering may be pure;

> But let none who has a quarrel with his fellow join in your meeting until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice be not defiled.
>
> For this is that which was spoken by the Lord, 'In every place and time offer me a pure sacrifice, for I am a great King," saith the Lord, "and my name is wonderful among the heathen."'[27] (Didache, Section 14)

Here is where we should land with this. The command we are given is to rest in Christ. We rest from trying to achieve salvation on our own. We rest from trying to earn God's favor. We rest from all of that in Christ. It is Christ alone who earns our favor with God. And it is in Christ that I am to rest. Do you find it difficult to rest in Christ?

But I also find the Sabbath to help me understand myself. I need patterns of rest and work in my life. We have all gone through times in which this work-rest pattern is completely out of whack. It causes difficulties because that is not the way things are supposed to be. We were meant to have this routine of work and rest built into our lives.

Discuss

- How should Colossians 2:16-17 shape the way Christians think about Sabbath observance?
- What does it mean practically to "rest in Christ" rather than strive to earn God's favor?
- How does Hebrews 4 deepen your understanding of the Sabbath and the rest Christ gives His people?
- Where do you most often find it difficult to rest in Christ: guilt, busyness, fear, pride, self-reliance, or something else?
- What happens when you reject the work-rest cycle?

We Are To Go To Church

The Sabbath was to be a "complete rest, a holy convocation" (Leviticus 23:3). A convocation is an assembly or a calling of people together. This day of rest was not

[27] Didache, section 14

only a time of worship to the Lord; it was also a time for God's people to gather together.

> *"For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings."* (Leviticus 23:3)

The thing that almost no one quarrels about is that this commandment calls believers to worship the Lord with other believers. In the New Testament we see people coming together "on the Lord's Day". (Revelation 1:10; 1 Corinthians 16:2) And we find that this coming together was commanded.

> *"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging [one another;] and all the more as you see the day drawing near."* (Hebrews 10:23-25)

Now, do you think that going to church is important? This seems to me to be a modern-day application of this command.

We're not talking about being on vacation and not coming to this church. We're talking about the priority it has in your life. Christians have understood throughout the ages that there are legitimate reasons to miss church: illness, death, an ox in the ditch, police work, fire service, hospital work, and similar duties. But here is what I want to drive home.

Is attending church important to you? It should be.

Discuss

- Why is gathering with the church an important application of this commandment?
- What are some common things today that compete with regular church attendance, and how should believers think through those priorities?
- How should Christians distinguish between legitimate reasons to miss church and patterns that reveal misplaced priorities?

We Are to Work

The command begins with, "*Six days you are to do your work*". We don't often think about that.

Our country is filled with abundance. Because of that, it is oftentimes difficult to make people see the importance of labor. Work takes many forms and is important, for our lives are to be productive.

Remember, work predated the fall. It is not evil. Work was part of the created order that God called "good". And here in the Ten Commandments, we are commanded to work.

We live in a society that is centered around a five-day work week. Some people work six days, but five days is the norm. Personally, I think this is good because it allows people to work five days and then, on day six, do the work they need to get done at home. This allows for productivity at work and at home, along with a day of rest.

Whatever your work schedule, be productive!

If you have the ability, then you should be busy with something. I've often heard people say they get busier when they retire, and I think that's probably a good thing. We should be productive as long as we can be productive.

So, how are you at working?

Discuss

- Why is work part of God's good design rather than merely a result of the fall?
- In what ways can a person be productive in different seasons of life, including retirement, school, homemaking, or physical limitation?
- What is one specific step you could take this week to better honor the Lord in rest, worship, or work?

Conclusion

As you look into the mirror of God's command, what do you see? Have you been faithful to worship the Lord on the Lord's Day? Have you neglected gathering together with the saints?

If you have, then you should repent and turn to Christ. Flee to Christ for forgiveness.

Go to Jesus. He is faithful to forgive.

> *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:9)

When we consider the civil use of this law, it is interesting to say that there were laws in place to uphold this commandment. Was America better off when most of the country set aside a day to honor the Lord? Would it be good to return to this?

We see from this command that it pleases the Lord that we worship Him and gather with other believers on Sunday.

The Fifth Commandment

Everything to do with the family seems to be devalued in our day. Grandparents are devalued. Parents are devalued. A lot of parents don't stay together. Children struggle through all of this because they were meant to have a family and to value their family.

Is it any wonder that there is a lack of respect for authority in our day?

Is it any wonder that children grow up unable to function in society?

What Does It Mean to Honor Our Parents?

In Scripture the word honor is used when we pay due reverence to or prize God or those who are in authority. And the word "honor" also carries the idea of being obedient to or submitting to authority.

We are to obey our parents and revere them. That is what the command to honor our parents entails and we see both of them throughout the Scriptures.

Notice that this is how Paul interprets the command in Ephesians 6.

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

Children are to be obedient to their parents. This is the way of discussing this command most often found in Scripture.

Later in life this would mean taking care of or figuring out how to have your parents taken care of. Solomon and Paul seem to at least hint at this being part of the command to honor our father and mother in both the Old and New Testaments.

> *"Listen to your father who begot you, And do not despise your mother when she is old."* (Proverbs 23:22)

What does it mean to "despise your mother when she is old"?

It means ignoring her need for help in her old age. Your father and mother devoted their youth to you, and when they are old, you are to care for them.

This is made even clearer by the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy.

> *"Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must 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."* (1 Timothy 5:3-4)

Churches were to care for widows who were in need, but children and grandchildren were to do so first. It was part of their duty in honoring their parents.

There needs to be some level of care given to our parents. They gave us life and we are to make sure that they are taken care of. That does not mean that you must put your parents into a mansion, but it does mean that we need to make sure they are cared for. That may be in your home, but it may not. The non-negotiable is that we must provide care for our parents.

The other part of this is that we are to have a reverence for our mother and father.

> *"Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father, and you shall keep My sabbaths; I am the LORD your God."* (Leviticus 19:3)

Remember, this command is about both obeying and reverencing our parents.

As parents, we should consider whether we are allowing our children to be too lax toward us. Are we requiring them to honor us as they ought?

Children, are you honoring your parents as you ought? Do you treat them with respect and honor?

This was serious business. When it was applied to the laws of the land, it meant that striking or cursing your mother or father was a capital offense.

> *"He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. 'He who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death. 'He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death."* (Exodus 21:15-17)

Consider this. In the eyes of the law, hitting your parents was on par with stealing someone from another land and enslaving them.

This is no small matter. We are to honor our father and mother.

Discuss

- Why is it important to understand "honor" as both obedience and reverence?
- Have you seen people that obey but do not revere their parents?
- In what ways can adult children honor their parents when their parents become older or need care?

Honor Extends Beyond Father and Mother

This honor was also to extend outside of the family to those who are older.

> *"You shall rise up before the grayheaded and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the LORD."* (Leviticus 19:32)

This is a stark reminder that we live in a godless age. The elderly are not honored in our day. This becomes more obvious by the minute. Rising up to honor the gray-headed is, according to this passage, what one who honors God does.

In the church culture in which I grew up, this was not discussed at all. In fact, separating youth from adults created the opposite effect. The gray-headed were seen as an impediment to the spiritual growth of students.

If you see a gray-headed man or woman in your church who has been faithful to the Lord over the course of many years, that person is to be honored. If they raised their children in the Lord and devoted their life to their spouse, that person is to be honored.

Discuss

- What are some ways churches today can better honor faithful older believers?

Respect for Authority

It has also been understood throughout the ages that honoring your father and mother is how you learn to honor other authorities. A child learns to respect authority by being taught to respect their mother and father. Obedience is not natural; it is taught. We are so selfish due to the Fall that we must be taught these things.

As parents, we must understand that our children learn obedience by first learning to be obedient to their parents. We can't expect our disobedient children to somehow become adults that obey the authorities in their lives if they don't first obey us.

If you are still living under your parents' supervision, then you should understand that you are learning obedience. You are learning respect for authority. Learn the lesson well, for you will always have authorities over you. Supervisors, bosses, police, mayors, governors, and presidents will be authorities that you must respect. What you learn today will be something you will have to do tomorrow as well.

Discuss

- Do parents think in these terms today?
- Why is it important to teach this at home?

Rewards and Punishment

This commandment is very important and appears in many different books of the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments. Let's look at the original reward given for keeping this command and what that means for us as New Testament believers.

> *"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you."* (Exodus 20:12)

The reward given in the command is "that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you." Now, when I think about my place in the world and in history, it's pretty easy to understand that I am not living in the land that was given to Moses and the Israelites after the Exodus from Egypt. However, that does not mean that the reward means nothing to me.

Paul, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, interpreted this text to mean long life on the Earth as the reward for believers. This is more expansive than what was given in the original commandment. When Paul quoted it to a bunch of Gentiles in Ephesus, it became obvious that he was not talking about the country given after the Exodus from Egypt. He was talking about the whole world.

The ESV muddies the waters a little bit here when they attempt to read into the text the Hebrew wording and not the actual quotation from Paul, but in the original

language it is obvious that "on the earth" is the correct interpretation of Ephesians 6:3. That is why the other translations say that and not "in the land" as the ESV does.

> 3 That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.
>
> *Ephesians 6:3 KJV*
>
> 3 If you honor your father and mother, "things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth."
>
> *Ephesians 6:3 NLT*
>
> 3 SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.
>
> *Ephesians 6:3 NASB95*
>
> 3 "so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."
>
> *Ephesians 6:3 NIV*

Why the ESV chose to read the Old Testament into the text, I do not understand, but I hope that I've given you enough information to see what I am talking about.

> "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."
>
> *Ephesians 6:3 ESV*

The point in all of that is to show that Paul saw the reward as still being in effect today, even though we do not live in the Promised Land. I believe this to be a part of Paul's eschatology, but that is another discussion altogether.

The punishment, as one would expect with the reward being long life, is a shortened life and a disgraceful death. Solomon gives a very powerful picture of this in the Book of Proverbs.

> *"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)

This has implications for both parents and children today.

Children, do you want to prosper in our society? Then you should honor your father and mother. You should treat the authorities in your life with respect and honor.

Parents, do you want your children to prosper in our society? Then you should be honorable, teach them to respect your authority, and teach them to respect the authority of others.

Discuss

- How does the Fifth Commandment challenge modern assumptions about family, parental authority, and children's independence?
- What practical changes might a family make if they wanted to take the command to honor father and mother more seriously?

Complicated Matters

By God's design, this relationship matters greatly. Parents have more influence over how their children are as adults than anyone else in this world. And so, there are times when the poor life decisions of parents have a terrible impact upon their children.

This commandment can become difficult to navigate because of that.

How does a child honor an abusive parent?

How does an adult child honor a parent that abandoned them?

There is no perfect Sunday School answer to questions like these. Every relationship is going to be different.

I can certainly say that we should honor the people who stepped into those roles and helped us over the years. Especially within a church setting, men or women often stepped up to provide the things that the missing parent would have provided. Honor those people.

Broadly speaking, honor parents as much as possible, but that might mean doing it from a distance. Don't speak ill of them to others unless necessary, thereby uncovering their shame. (Genesis 9:22) However, getting counsel or counseling would be an acceptable time to discuss the behaviors of your parents.

Don't put your family in danger. Don't put yourself in danger.

Pray that the Lord will help you to walk in this difficult situation. Give them the honor due to them, but do it wisely. You will likely need to talk with a wise and trusted person to figure out how to walk this difficult path, because it is difficult.

Discuss

- What makes honoring parents complicated in situations involving abuse, abandonment, or serious family brokenness?
- How can someone honor a difficult or harmful parent wisely without putting themselves or their family in danger?
- Who are people outside your biological family who have filled a parental or mentoring role, and how might they be honored?

Conclusion

Again, let's start with the mirror of the Law. This allows us to see where we fail and the purpose of looking into the mirror of our own sinfulness is to drive us to Christ.

Are you honoring your parents?

Are you figuring out how to provide for them and care for them?

And another question is, how are you with authority overall?

If you see failures in your life, then you should turn from them and turn to the Savior. Only Christ can cleanse from sin, and so we turn to Him for forgiveness of sin.

The civil use is one that is interesting. If our society were more careful about honoring our parents, then it is my assumption that many of the messes we are in would not be around. In fact, we oftentimes send our kids to institutions that actively undermine the relationship between parents and children. When a school says that a child can make big decisions without the parents' approval and actually helps to carry out that task, it is sinful and wicked. Teaching children about things without the consent of parents is sinful and wicked.

Parental rights are also in serious jeopardy with this potential law, she continued. If the Act passes in the Senate, it will filter down to what is taught in public school classrooms, and parents won't be able to object to content because it will be seen as a discrimination issue.

Similarly, parents' rights to make healthcare decisions for their children would erode with the Act, according to Hartzler, referencing a 2018 case where a judge removed custody from the parents because they objected to their 17-year-old child being prescribed experimental cross-sex hormones.

> "If this passes nationwide, we could see parents facing a similar situation all over the country," she said.

When our country creates laws that oppose the family like this one does, it is our responsibility to stand up and object to the matter.

We also see what pleases God in this command. It pleases God for us to honor our father and mother. We also know that it pleases God when we submit to rightful authorities in our lives. And, as parents, we understand that it pleases God when we teach our children to honor us and other authorities in their lives.

The Sixth Commandment

This would seem to be the most easily understood of the Ten Commandments. "Do not murder" is something that everyone seems to know intuitively and would seem to need very little explanation. As we look at the rest of the Pentateuch, we find that this prohibition against murder is much more expansive than what first comes to mind.

I want to begin by thinking through what the prohibition against murder is upholding. What is the positive thing that this prohibition is protecting?

The prohibition is protecting life.

Creation

To understand this commandment well, we have to think through the creation of human beings at the beginning of the Book of Genesis. Then we can jump into the command given later in the Pentateuch to see its tremendous importance.

> *"Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."* (Genesis 1:26-27)

People are created in God's image. This means that great dignity is assigned to every human life. No person is exempt from this. People from every age, race, color, and ability are created in God's image.

Being created in the Image of God means we are created to reflect God's glory to the world. Like the moon reflects the light of the sun, so people are to reflect the light of God to the world. Like the moon, we are a far lesser light, but also like the moon, we do reflect some of God to the world.

A good example of this is creativity. God is creative, and people reflect God's creativity to the world. God is so creative that He brought the entirety of creation into existence. People are creative as well. And this can be seen everywhere that people live. But our creativity is far less than God's, which is obvious everywhere we look.

Another example would be justice. God is completely just. People are also just and have an inborn sense of that given to us by the Creator. When we see injustice occur,

we long for things to be made right. And we create justice systems to bring justice upon the Earth.

Now, the examples could go on forever, but I hope that the point is clear. We reflect the characteristics of God to the world, even though we don't shine as brightly as He does. And because we are created in the image of God, we have incredible dignity.

Early on, life was protected by the death penalty.

> *"Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man."* (Gen 9:6)

God made man in His image. People are the special creation of God and human life is to be protected.

Discuss

- "Do not murder" is not merely a prohibition against taking life, but a command that positively protects life. How does this broaden your understanding of the Sixth Commandment?
- What does it mean for every person to be created in the image of God, and how should that shape the way Christians think about human dignity?

Protect Life

This prohibition was put in place to protect life. And as we look around the rest of the Pentateuch, we see life being protected. We also see the command to help those in need, which would be the opposite of murder.

> *"If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying [helpless] under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release [it] with him."* (Exodus 23:5)

Even if the person hated you, the Law requires you to help them by rescuing their donkey. This would be a way to help them with their livelihoods and sustain their own lives.

> *"'Thus you shall do with his donkey, and you shall do the same with his garment, and you shall do likewise with anything lost by your countryman, which he has lost, and you have found. You are not allowed to neglect [them.] 'You shall not see your*

> *countryman's donkey or his ox fallen down on the way, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly help him to raise [them] up."* (Deuteronomy 22:3-4)

Again, God commanded the people of Israel to help their countrymen.

Another thing that was forbidden was cruelty. A person who is cruel to another person in the way mentioned here does not value the life of the person he is showing cruelty to. But a person who is created in the image of God is owed a certain amount of reverence and dignity no matter their position or ability.

> *"You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the LORD."* (Leviticus 19:14)

Life is to be honored and upheld. This means that this command forbids all manner of cruelty. In a day when cruelty seems to be on the rise, a clear understanding of what it means to be created in the image of God and to uphold life should be emphasized.

Discuss

- How do the commands to help an enemy's donkey or restore a neighbor's property show that protecting life includes more than avoiding violence?
- Leviticus 19:14 forbids cruelty toward the deaf and blind. What are some modern examples of cruelty or disregard for human dignity that Christians should resist?

Is It Murder Or Is It Not Murder?

Murder is always the taking of life, but the taking of life is not always murder. And that definitely is the case in the Pentateuch. So, we will look at different cases and see what is defined as murder and what is not.

Accidental Death

Accidental death was different than murder according to the Law. So, accidentally killing someone was not considered murder.

> *"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)

The place that God appointed for people to flee is outlined in Numbers 35:9-34 and Deuteronomy 19:1-21. In these places the person who accidentally killed another person would find protection from those who were attempting to take revenge upon them. However, it was different for the person that willfully attacked and killed someone. That person was to die.

And this has application for us today. Intention matters when discussing a murder charge. That is also why there are different degrees of murder found in our law system. Intention matters.

Discuss

- Why does intention matter when judging guilt, both biblically and in modern law?
- How does the discussion of cities of refuge help us think about justice, mercy, and protection from revenge?

A Child in the Womb

A person who killed a child in the womb was considered a murderer according to the Law. A person who caused the death of a child in the womb was said to have broken this commandment.

> *"If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges [decide.] "But if there is [any further] injury, then you shall appoint [as a penalty] life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise."* (Exodus 21:22-25)

The application that most of you thought through during this discussion was abortion. And well it should be. Abortion is the taking of a life in the womb by a willing mother and doctor.

If we are applying the Bible's definition of "Do not murder" then abortion is a breaking of this commandment.

And as we discussed last week with the command to honor our fathers and mothers, when the government makes laws that break this command, they are to be defied. And this is written into our very belief statement as a church. Our church by-laws say that we believe the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. Here is the statement on the Christian and the Social Order taken from our statement of faith.

> "All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. To promote these ends, Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth."[28]

The statement of faith says that we are obligated to uphold life in many ways. We stand against cruelty, real racism, sexual immorality, and other things that seek to destroy life. But one of the biggest battlegrounds in our day remains abortion. And we as a church have said in our belief statement that we stand against abortion. Let us oppose it at the ballot box. Let us oppose it with our mouths. Abortion was the leading cause of death in the world last year. We stand in opposition to this horror that took the lives of an estimated 1,129,900 babies in 2025 in the United States.[29]

[28] The Baptist Faith and Message 2000, XV, "The Christian and the Social Order"

[29] https://www.abort73.com/abortion_facts/us_abortion_statistics/, accessed 08/06/2026.

Discuss

- Exodus 21:22-25 is about the unborn. What does this tell us about abortion?
- The lesson says Christians should "speak on behalf of the unborn" and "contend for the sanctity of all human life." What practical actions might that involve?

Willful Neglect That Leads To Death

Now, there is another area in the Pentateuch that helps us understand what is and what is not murder. It is the idea of willful neglect. If a person neglected to do things that would keep people safe and protect life, then they have broken this command.

> *"If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall go unpunished. If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death. If a ransom is demanded of him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is demanded of him. Whether it gores a son or a daughter, it shall be done to him according to the same rule. If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall give his [or her] master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned."* (Exodus 21:28-32)

When I read this application of the command to not murder I can't help but think about all the news stories that we read of people's dogs mauling another person. The owner would be found at fault for murder because he didn't do what he should have known to do to keep others around him safe. His disregard for the propensity of his animal to do harm means that he acted with disregard towards the life of others.

Another instance of this is found concerning the construction of property.

> *"When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, so that you will not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone falls from it."* (Deuteronomy 22:8)

At this time, the roof was treated much like porches today. People would spend time up on the roof of their home. So what is this about?

This is about protecting human life. We must not neglect our duty to protect the lives of others. And we can see how this applies today. Dogs that bite and swimming pools

without some protection around them are examples of this Law. And I'm sure given enough time we could come up with many more.

Discuss

- How does the example of the dangerous ox show that neglect can become morally serious when it endangers others?
- What are some present-day responsibilities people have to protect others from foreseeable harm?

Capital Punishment

Many people today consider capital punishment to be murder. Biblically, this would be an instance of killing someone that is not considered murder. As was already mentioned earlier, Genesis 9:6 stated that the death penalty was the right response to murder. And we see the same idea taught throughout the rest of the Pentateuch.

Or, if I may put it another way. God forbade murder but commands the killing of a human being in some instances for the sake of justice. Therefore, God Himself does not believe that capital punishment is murder.

> *"If a man is caught kidnapping any of his countrymen of the sons of Israel, and he deals with him violently or sells him, then that thief shall die; so you shall purge the evil from among you."* (Deuteronomy 24:7)

The death penalty is here commanded for what has been called "manstealing" in the past. It was capturing people to enslave them.

One thing is obvious from this. The command not to murder was considered incompatible with capital punishment. Therefore, capital punishment is not murder.

> *"If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance."* (Deuteronomy 21:22-23)

> *"Fathers shall not be put to death for [their] sons, nor shall sons be put to death for [their] fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin."* (Deuteronomy 24:16)

These are instructions for the death penalty. If this were considered murder, then God would not have commanded this killing to be done. The person killing the other human was not committing murder.

The argument against the death penalty today has many facets. But the main argument that I see is that putting someone to death is murder, and that certainly is not the case from a Scriptural standpoint. There are a lot of things that come from the anti-capital punishment crowd that I agree with.

The death penalty should be applied with equity across the board. Rich people should not be able to avoid it because they have more money to hire lawyers who keep them alive or connections who keep them out of trouble. The death penalty is not murder. It is a way to eliminate evil from among us. (Deuteronomy 24:7)

Discuss

- Capital punishment is not murder because Scripture distinguishes between unlawful killing and lawful killing. What questions or tensions does this raise for you?
- The lesson says the death penalty should be applied with equity. Why is impartial justice important when discussing punishment?

The Question Of War

Christians have a long history of discussing whether or not killing someone in war qualifies as murder. It is an important question and at times very complicated. Entire Christian denominations are known as Christian Pacifists. And this has some history here in America. Quakers refused to fight in the Revolutionary War.

God gave the Ten Commandments and applied them throughout the Pentateuch. But He also gave instructions for war (Deuteronomy 20:10-18). This seems to settle the debate. If God gives instructions for war, then it is not possible that war is a violation of the command not to murder.

This means that the soldier who goes to battle for his country is not committing murder.

This does not, however, mean that leaders who place soldiers into those positions are guilt-free. There is a long discussion concerning whether a war is a just and righteous

cause. Augustine's "Just War Theory" is still the standard Christians use today when thinking about war.

That is beyond the scope of this discussion. The main point here is that the soldier is not considered liable for murder, but Christians have not understood kings and political leaders to be judged in the same manner.

Discuss

- What is the difference between killing in war and murder? What additional questions does the issue of just war raise?
- Who will be held accountable for unjust wars?

Self-Protection

Within the Pentateuch, we find the right to protect our own lives and the lives of loved ones. This makes perfect sense because the commandment itself exists to protect life.

> *"If the thief is caught while breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account. '[But] if the sun has risen on him, there will be bloodguiltiness on his account. He shall surely make restitution; if he owns nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. 'If what he stole is actually found alive in his possession, whether an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double."* (Exodus 22:2-4)

If someone comes into your house in the dark, then there is no way to know whether this person is there to harm you or not. The self-protection that led to this person's death is not punished because it was an act of self-defense.

This scenario is interesting because it clearly shows that life must be protected. Killing an intruder is the last resort. But if this is what it takes to protect your life, then you can do it. And I would argue it is something that you should do, if possible, to protect your family.

Discuss

- How does the right of self-protection fit with the broader claim that the commandment exists to protect life?

Hatred as Murder

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus stated that,

> *"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)

God told the people of Israel not to hate their brothers and sisters long before the Sermon on the Mount.

> *"'You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD."* (Leviticus 19:17-18)

This passage in Leviticus gets to the heart of the matter. Hatred is the desire that a person would not be around anymore. It is murder of the heart. And here in Leviticus, that hatred is not supposed to be something that we harbor in our lives.

Discuss

- Jesus connects anger and contempt with murder in the heart. How does this move the commandment from outward behavior to inward desire?
- Leviticus 19:17-18 commands people not to hate or bear grudges, but to love their neighbor. What makes hatred spiritually dangerous?

Conclusion

As a mirror, this Law helps us to see two things. Do I value life as I ought? And do I have hatred in my life? A mirror helps us to see the flaws in our lives. It helps us to see the pimples on our face and what is wrong with our own lives. It helps us see why we need the forgiveness found only in Jesus Christ.

In the Civil use of the Law we see how it was applied over a wide variety of scenarios. The gist of this is that we should be people who uphold life and fight against anything that degrades and takes away life. We work for laws that protect individuals. And we

fight against laws that promote murder. In our day, that would mean that we would work to stand against abortion as well as any other law that degrades human life.

The civil use is of great importance here. If the law does not protect life, we will see increased behavior that harms life in our society.

As a guide, we see the Law showing us what we need to do to live a life that is pleasing to God. And here we see that we are to be a people who honor and uphold life and stand against a culture that increasingly promotes death.

The Seventh Commandment

Ours is an age of intense confusion about all things sexual. And it seems that everywhere we turn, there is someone or something attempting to pull us in the same direction of confusion. But it is not so in Scripture. This commandment not to commit adultery is much more comprehensive than we might first read it to be. This is helpful, for our society has lost its way concerning sexuality. And a lot of damage is being done because of it.

All manner of sexual purity seems to be included in the commandment not to commit adultery. This is because the model for all marriage and sexual relationships is found in the marriage of Adam and Eve. Anything outside one man, one woman, for life, ends up being a breaking of the Seventh Commandment.

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

This means that the positive aspect of this commandment is what we find in Hebrews 13:4.

> *"Marriage [is to be held] in honor among all, and the [marriage] bed [is to be] undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge."* (Hebrews 13:4)

This is also why divorce gets such particular treatment in passages like Deuteronomy 22:13-21, 24:1-4.

So, let's look at some passages of Scripture and see what is encompassed in this commandment. Then we will discuss what this means for us today.

Adultery Is Forbidden

Adultery occurs when a married person has sex outside of marriage. Most of the time, when we think of this command, this is the sin that comes to mind. The reason is simple: that is the plain reading of the command.

> *"You shall not have intercourse with your neighbor's wife, to be defiled with her."* (Leviticus 18:20)

> *"If [there is] a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death."* (Leviticus 20:10)
>
> *"If a man is found lying with a married woman, then both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel."* (Deuteronomy 22:22)

Well, that seems pretty straightforward, doesn't it?

But does it?

Even here, our culture seems to be on the attack. I have read studies that say marriage should only be a part of life commitment. Some have suggested a 10-year contract. And the argument for it is basically that people are animals and can't be caged for more than 20 years, which, I think, everyone can see is an incredibly silly argument. But you can see our society's attack on marriage at this point.

But know this: marriage is a serious covenant. It is a lifelong covenant. It is nothing that people are to be fooling around with.

As the people of God, we must not be swayed by our society's lack of understanding and sinfulness. We must stand against the culture and hold fast to the definition of marriage.

One Man + One Woman for Life

And we should not be moved away from that idea.

Discuss

- What is the purpose of the seventh commandment?
- Why would the command include more than marital unfaithfulness?

Fornication is Forbidden

When we begin to examine the case laws that are found in the Pentateuch concerning this commandment we find a lot of commands against fornication. Fornication is sex while not married.

> *"If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her [to be] his wife. "If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the dowry for virgins."* (Exodus 22:16-17)
>
> *"If there is a girl who is a virgin engaged to a man, and [another] man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death; the girl, because she did not cry out in the city, and the man, because he has violated his neighbor's wife. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you."*—Deuteronomy 22:23-24 NASB

This sin has gained wide acceptance in our day. Every new census reveals that more couples are choosing to live together than ever before. The number of people who will never get married is on the rise and will likely continue to do so for a while.

Fornication has always been something the Church has had to consider, but now it is becoming very common.

In fact, the number of divorces in America is going down because fornication is going up. Fewer people are honoring marriage because they are doing things that should only be done within the bounds of marriage.

Discuss

- How is the acceptance of fornication an attack on the institution of marriage?
- What sorts of things can we expect to see in a society that chooses not to get married?

Rape is a Horrible Crime, Worthy of Death and Rape Victims are to be Treated as Victims

> *"But if in the field the man finds the girl who is engaged, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lies with her shall die. "But you shall do nothing to the girl; there is no sin in the girl worthy of death, for just as a man rises against his neighbor and murders him, so is this case. "When he found her in the field, the engaged girl cried out, but there was no one to save her."*—(Deuteronomy 22:25-27)

Despite what many people claim, rape was taken seriously in the Old Testament era. In fact, the penalty for rape then was harsher than the penalty for rape today. And,

much like what we say today, the rape victim was to be treated as a victim and not as a perpetrator.

This does help us think through how we are to treat a rapist and a rape victim biblically. Rape is a horrific crime akin to murder and should be treated as such. A rapist should be treated similarly to a murderer with regard to justice.

This also informs us how we should treat the rape victim. The rape victim is the victim of a horrific crime and should be treated as such. We don't shame victims of rape; we help them through this horror.

Discuss

- What does it look like for churches to show compassion and support for those victimized by sexual abusers?

Homosexual Acts, Bestiality, Incestuous Relationships, and Prostitution are Similarly Sinful

Homosexuality in our day is thought to be on par with heterosexuality, but that is not at all how it is treated in Scripture. Homosexuality is grouped with bestiality, incest, and prostitution. It is not treated as an option for the Christian. It is called an abomination numerous times, along with these other perversions.

> *"'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. 'Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. 'For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants. 'But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, [neither] the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you (for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these abominations, and the land has become defiled); so that the land will not spew you out, should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you. 'For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do [so] shall be cut off from among their people. 'Thus you are to keep My charge, that you do not practice any of the abominable*

> *customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the LORD your God.'"* (Leviticus 18:22-30)
>
> *"If [there is] a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them. If [there is] a man who marries a woman and her mother, it is immorality; both he and they shall be burned with fire, so that there will be no immorality in your midst. If [there is] a man who lies with an animal, he shall surely be put to death; you shall also kill the animal. If [there is] a woman who approaches any animal to mate with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them."* (Leviticus 20:13-16)

Our society tells us that we should not think this way about homosexuality, but this is how it is viewed in Scripture. The New Testament teaches the same thing (1 Corinthians 6:9–10, 1 Timothy 1:10, Romans 1:26–27).

Remember, this commandment is here to uphold and honor marriage. Marriage is between one man and one woman for life. That is the Scriptural view of marriage. Anything else is a perversion and a mirage. There is no such thing as same-sex marriage. It is only a mirage.

As a Christian, I have to decide that I am going to uphold God's view of marriage in the world. I must decide to stand against the culture. This does not mean that I am to be mean and angry at every homosexual person I meet, but it does mean that I am to work to uphold the meaning of marriage and its sanctity in this lost world.

Discuss

- How is this different than the way homosexuality is marketed to us today?
- What does grouping homosexuality with these perversions tell us about God's view of homosexuality?

Prostitution Was a Crime

Many in our society want to make prostitution legal. This was not the case in Israel. It was breaking the commandment to not commit adultery.

> *"'Do not profane your daughter by making her a harlot, so that the land will not fall to harlotry and the land become full of lewdness."* (Leviticus 19:29)
>
> *"None of the daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any of the sons of Israel be a cult prostitute."* (Deuteronomy 23:17)

In Leviticus 19:29 the result of daughters being made harlots would be that the land would be "full of lewdness".

What do we see in those cities in America where prostitution is tolerated? Is it not that those places are filled with lewdness?

Aren't those very places, the places where many marriage beds are destroyed by adultery?

Divorce

Specific instructions were given throughout the Pentateuch that allowed for divorce (Deuteronomy 22:13-21, 24:1-4). This does not mean that divorce was promoted or approved. Jesus tells us that the allowances for divorce were given due to the hardness of heart of the people.

> *"When Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan; and large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there. [Some] Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, 'Is it lawful [for a man] to divorce his wife for any reason at all?' And He answered and said, 'Have you not read that He who created [them] from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? 'So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.' They said to Him, 'Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND [her] AWAY?' He said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. 'And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.'"* (Matthew 19:1-9)

In Matthew 19, Jesus stated that the only legitimate reason for divorce is immorality. The seventh commandment upholds the sanctity of marriage. Easy divorce has done much harm to the institution of marriage in our day. And apparently the same was the case in Jesus's day.

There is, however, one other reason given for divorce in the New Testament. That reason is abandonment by an unbeliever.

> *"And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such [cases,] but God has called us to peace."* (1 Corinthians 7:13-15)

That list is not long. Husbands and wives should not separate for "irreconcilable differences". Marriage means more than that. It is the joining of one man and one woman for life.

It is my opinion that abuse, true abuse, is part of the category of "abandonment". A wife that is endangered by the violence of her husband must flee to safety. And if this is the case, her husband has abandoned her by abdicating his responsibilities to her.

Discuss

- How short is this list of reasons to divorce compared to the reasons people divorce today?
- What has that done to families?
- What has that done to future marriages?
- How does holding the high view of marriage found in the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Scriptures shape our marriages? How does it teach us to deal with problems in our marriage?

Conclusion

Now, how are we to think of this and apply it to our lives?

I believe that thinking about this using the three uses of the Law will be quite helpful here.

As a mirror this helps us to spot sins in our own lives. We can see our own shortcomings and flee to Jesus for forgiveness.

The Civil use of the Law helps us to see what a God-honoring society would look like, or what laws we should be striving to see in place. I know that it is unpopular to say but many of the laws on the books today do great harm to the sanctity of marriage. Ronald Reagan did a lot of damage when he was governor of California and enacted "no fault divorce". This caused what seemed to be a tidal wave of destruction among many people. And now the mirage of homosexual marriage has been enshrined into law across the country. As Christians we should stand against these laws and teach a better way through our own healthy, vibrant marriages.

And, as a guide, we see that this teaches us about the kind of sex that honors God. It is sex within the bounds of marriage.

The Eighth Commandment

One day in Fort Smith I was buying one item at a Walmart. The cashier asked, "do you want me to bag this." And I jokingly answered, "No, as long as no one is going to think I'm stealing it as I walk out the door." He was a manager of that store and said, "You joke, but we are probably going to be shutting down the Walmart Neighborhood Market across town because so many people walk out with merchandise that they are getting really close to losing money." As the command not to steal is broken, the affects can be seen far and wide. It's even the reason some communities don't have a grocery store. Events like these reveal to us that keeping this commandment is necessary for us to function as a society.

Now we come to the command not to steal. It is another one of those simple, one sentence commands. It simply says,

> *"You shall not steal."* (Exodus 20:15)

This commandment means that individuals have the right to private property and that property is to be protected. People are also responsible as individuals to be kind.

Discuss

- Why do you think theft can become so common that people begin to treat it as normal?
- How does the command, "You shall not steal," assume that people have a real right to private property?

Be Kind With Your Property

The individual has always had a responsibility to be kind. Many of the books of the Prophets in the Old Testament discuss this at great length. Not only were the people of Israel punished for their mistreatment of the poor, but so were Israel's neighbors. And the whole idea behind that is that people within a civilization had a responsibility to be kind with their property.

> *"When you enter your neighbor's vineyard, then you may eat grapes until you are fully satisfied, but you shall not put any in your basket. When you enter your*

> *neighbor's standing grain, then you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not wield a sickle in your neighbor's standing grain."* (Deuteronomy 23:24-25)

It was understood that when someone visited your home, they were to be able to eat their fill. You were to be kind with what you had, but they were not allowed to just take things from you. That is why they could eat their fill, but they could not take more than that. And that is also why they were not allowed to harvest grain with a sickle but were able to pluck ears of grain with their hand. It was a way of saying that a person should be kind with what they have while also saying that they had the right to own their own property.

> *"'When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field nor gather the gleaning of your harvest; you are to leave them for the needy and the alien. I am the LORD your God.'"* (Leviticus 23:22)

> *"When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to 'get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 'When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. 'When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing."* (Deuteronomy 24:19-22)

These two passages are about the kindness that the people of Israel were to have for their neighbor. They were not to take everything that their land could produce for themselves. Though they had a right to what the land produced because it was their property, they were commanded to be kind with what they had. Portions of their produce were to be left for the person in need.

A good illustration of this in action is found in the Book of Ruth.

> *"And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, 'Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor.' And she said to her, 'Go, my daughter.' So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech."* (Ruth 2:2-3)

Ruth was gleaning from the edges of these fields, which was set apart for those in need. It makes sense that she would stumble upon someone's field if she was working the edges of a few different properties. She went after the reapers and picked up what was left behind, which is part of what was commanded in God's Word concerning kindness with property.

Kindness That Prioritizes Work

The Bible teaches that we are to be kind to the poor. It also teaches that we should give to those in need. But it also teaches, through passages such as these, that a hand-up is to be sought when it is possible rather than a hand-out.

There are times when that is not possible. And because we live in a society that is all based on money this can be difficult to do at times, but it does seem that this system was advocating for helping those in need. They still had to work for it when possible. As we saw above, food they needed was left for collection. This was food that they needed, and it was left behind for their collecting. They still had to go and do the collecting. They still had to work for their survival.

In a society that increasingly demeans the value of work this idea will be seen as more and more unpopular. It is, however, something that we should keep in mind. Sometimes people lose their jobs and what they need most in the moment is an immediate influx of cash. We also live in a fallen world where some people have been rendered unable to work. Everywhere possible, people in need do need to be working for what they get.

> *"For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either."* (2 Thessalonians 3:10)

We have a right to property, and we are supposed to be kind with our property. That is certain, but we are also supposed to be kind with that property.

Discuss

- What is the difference between using your property generously and allowing others to take what does not belong to them?
- The passages about gleaning show kindness to the poor while still requiring work when possible. How should that shape the way Christians think about helping people in need today?

- What are some situations where a hand-out may be necessary, and what are some situations where a hand-up may be better?

Do Not Steal Or Defraud

We easily understand the fact that pocketing something out of a store without paying for it is not the only way to be a thief. And the Bible expresses that idea as well. There are different deceptions that are covered under this command found in the Pentateuch.

> *"You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. 'You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD. 'You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob [him.] The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning."* (Leviticus 19:11-13)

There are a few different instances listed here. It all really has to do with dealing truthfully with people in business transactions. Theft is being discussed alongside lying and he makes a point of saying that an employee should be paid promptly. Simply put, if you say that you are going to pay someone, then you should pay them when you say that you are going to pay them.

I worked as a farmhand for a guy once that was unreliable with his pay. He spent most of his afternoons and evenings drunk in his air-conditioned tractor, which is probably part of the reason he didn't always have the money to pay me promptly.

He would often run over the electric fences and his cattle and horses would get out of their proper places, which would leave me spending hours putting them back in their pens the next day. Because he didn't get out of bed until 10am or so, I usually did this before he got out of bed. When he arose from slumber he would say something to the effect of, "You don't do much for the first few hours of the day." And I would respond with something to the effect of, "Did you see that pile of cow manure right in front of your house? Do you still see the cows there? Where is the cow that left the manure in your front yard now? How do you suppose it got there?"

After a bit of back and forth I would get paid. Sometimes it was half now and half later because he didn't have the money, but eventually I got paid. He tried to get out of paying me after I'd done everything he asked on the farm. That is not how things should be.

I have had multiple friends that worked in restaurants where the owner of the place would give them hot checks knowing there was no money in the bank. They would be promised full payment in the future, only to work a month without being paid for it.

It is dishonest and it is theft not to pay someone for what they are owed when they are owed it. This would apply to an employee, but it would also apply to someone you hire to do a job at your home. We are also to be honest in our business dealings.

> *"'You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measurement of weight, or capacity. 'You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin; I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt."* (Leviticus 19:35-36)

Just balances are scales that measure as they are supposed to measure. In our terminology a person buying a pound of flour was to get a pound of flour upon purchase, not 7/8 of a pound. To sell a pound of flour to someone and only give them 7/8 of a pound is stealing.

We see this very thing happening on occasion at supermarkets today. It is now advised by many that we weigh meat purchased at a supermarket on the produce scales to ensure that you're getting what you pay for.

I would also argue that many of the tricks to put less volume in the packaging but make the packaging look the same are deceitful practices used to make the consumer pay the same thing for less.

Here is another text that is very similar.

> *"You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a large and a small. "You shall not have in your house differing measures, a large and a small. "You shall have a full and just weight; you shall have a full and just measure, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you. "For everyone who does these things, everyone who acts unjustly is an abomination to the LORD your God."* (Deuteronomy 25:13-16)

This can be applied to all sorts of things. People are to get what they pay for. This command has been broken when a person does not get what they pay for.

I remember a gas station in Harrison that got into legal trouble because they were watering down their gasoline. You've likely seen or heard of deception like this. It is stealing and against God's Law.

And here is another deceptive form of theft that was done in ancient times.

> *"You shall not move your neighbor's boundary mark, which the ancestors have set, in your inheritance which you will inherit in the land that the LORD your God gives you to possess."* (Deuteronomy 19:14)

One could move the property line without the other party knowing it has been done. Anyone who has been involved in land surveying has likely heard of this sort of thing happening today. I have heard crazy stories about court cases involving matters such as these. Again, it is deceptive and it is stealing.

Discuss

- Why is withholding wages, delaying payment, or paying someone dishonestly a form of stealing?
- What are modern examples of dishonest weights and measures, misleading packaging, or giving people less than they paid for?
- How can deception in business, employment, or contracts break the eighth commandment even when nothing is physically taken?

A Note of Differentiation Between Our Time And Ancient Times

I would like to end with a sort of rabbit trail. The punishment for theft was much different than it is in our day. The criminal was to make restitution for the stolen items when he was caught. That was given to the victim.

> *"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, 'When a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind, acting unfaithfully against the LORD, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess his sins which he has committed, and he shall make restitution in full for his wrong and add to it one-fifth of it, and give [it] to him whom he has wronged."* (Numbers 5:5-7)

They didn't pay a fine to the government; restitution was made for the wrong committed. In other words, the victim was made whole. They got back what was taken from them and then some.

> *"If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep. "If the thief is caught while breaking in and is*

struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account. '[But] if the sun has risen on him, there will be bloodguiltiness on his account. He shall surely make restitution; if he owns nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. 'If what he stole is actually found alive in his possession, whether an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double. 'If a man lets a field or vineyard be grazed [bare] and lets his animal loose so that it grazes in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard. 'If a fire breaks out and spreads to thorn bushes, so that stacked grain or the standing grain or the field [itself] is consumed, he who started the fire shall surely make restitution. 'If a man gives his neighbor money or goods to keep [for him] and it is stolen from the man's house, if the thief is caught, he shall pay double. 'If the thief is not caught, then the owner of the house shall appear before the judges, [to] determine whether he laid his hands on his neighbor's property. 'For every breach of trust, [whether it is] for ox, for donkey, for sheep, for clothing, [or] for any lost thing about which one says, 'This is it,' the case of both parties shall come before the judges; he whom the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor. 'If a man gives his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep [for him,] and it dies or is hurt or is driven away while no one is looking, an oath before the LORD shall be made by the two of them that he has not laid hands on his neighbor's property; and its owner shall accept [it,] and he shall not make restitution. 'But if it is actually stolen from him, he shall make restitution to its owner. 'If it is all torn to pieces, let him bring it as evidence; he shall not make restitution for what has been torn to pieces." (Exodus 22:1-13)

Today a person must jump through legal hoops to possibly be made whole. A judge might also order that the offender make restitution, but maybe not. Civil lawsuits might render wholeness and then some, but anyone that has dealt with courts in our day knows that this might not happen.

This was a different process. I would argue that, in many ways, it is better to prioritize making the victim whole.

Conclusion

As a mirror this reveals to us ways in which we have sinned and need to repent of if we are still practicing. Theft doesn't have to be pocketing someone else's stuff. There are numerous ways to break the commandment and if we have then we need to turn

from that sin, make restitution as best we can, and seek forgiveness from them and from God. That forgiveness is only found in Christ.

As far as the Civil use of this commandment goes, we should seek to uphold property rights and laws against theft in our country. And we should seek to elect people who will uphold the Law. We should seek to have people in office who will protect our right to hold property and protect our property with the force of the law.

And in this we see what pleases God. We see that it pleases God to work to use our property kindly. And it also pleases God that we do not steal from others.

The Ninth Commandment

Our day and culture are not characterized by truthfulness. They just are not. You cannot trust people or devices to tell the truth in our time.

It is hard to even imagine, in our current situation, being able to figure out the simplest things that may or may not have happened. News organizations cannot be trusted to deliver the news in a way that presents the facts of the matter. Their lies may not be open untruths, but each one chooses what to say and what not to say, thereby veiling the truth in a deceptive manner. Anyone who was around to hear the phrase "mostly peaceful protest" while buildings burned in the background understands this all too well.

The widespread breaking of the ninth commandment has had tremendous consequences in our day.

If you've bought a home, how tall was the paperwork stack?

How many of you had to go through a credit check to rent an apartment or a house?

Why?

It's because people lie and deceive. And because of that, people must put safeguards in place for protection.

This commandment is not overly complicated. Its application is straightforward.

Discuss

- Where do you see this most clearly in everyday life?

Live in Truth

Exodus 23:1-3 uses the shotgun approach to truth telling and the command not to lie. The wide smattering of targets that is hit in those two verses tell us one thing, do not lie.

> *"You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. 'You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify*

> *in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert [justice;] nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute."* (Exodus 23:1-3)

There shall be no false reports. There are to be no instances where you testify against someone because you don't like them. There shall be no false testimonies given in a dispute. And you are not to turn aside from the truth to help a poor person.

What is this?

You are to be truthful.

The obvious positive aspect of these commands is that we are to be truthful in all that we do and say.

The Exception

Imagine you are in Germany during the late 1930s and early 1940s. The Nazis are rounding up Jewish people and taking them to concentration camps.

Are the people who lied to the Gestapo breaking the Ninth Commandment?

It's not enough to instinctively say "yes" or "no." Our "yes" or "no" needs to be formed by God's Word.

The answer to this question is that they were not breaking the Ninth Commandment. But why?

There are times when untruths do not break the command not to lie. We see this in Exodus 1:20–21 and Hebrews 11:31. Lying does not break the commandment if it is for the protection of others. We see this in two stories from Scripture quite plainly: the Hebrew midwives and Rahab the harlot.

Pharaoh wanted to kill the Hebrew boys, so he spoke with Shiphrah and Puah. Pharaoh told them to command the midwives to kill the Hebrew boys. They feared God and chose not to do this.

> *"Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other was named Puah; and he said, "When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see [them] upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live." But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the*

> *boys live. So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife can get to them." So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them."* (Exodus 1:15-21)

The midwives told a lie to Pharaoh. What was the lie?

Those Hebrew women are so vigorous that they just have their babies before we can get there.

What was God's view of the midwives' act? "He established households for them." In other words, God approved and rewarded them for their deeds.

The second instance is of Rahab's deception. When Hebrew spies came to Jericho they had to hide to not be caught. Rahab hid them at her home and then lied about their whereabouts. What is God's assessment of Rahab?

> *"By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace."* (Hebrews 11:31)

When you are protecting those in need, lying is the right thing to do.

Discuss

- Some untruths do not violate the ninth commandment when they protect others. How do the examples of the Hebrew midwives and Rahab help explain that distinction?
- What safeguards should Christians use to make sure they are not twisting this exception to justify selfish or sinful dishonesty?

It is Wicked to Lie in Court

The people were to avoid falsely charging people with crimes. The command is to keep far from doing such a thing.

> *"'Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty."* (Exodus 23:7)

> *"'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. 'You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him."* (Leviticus19:16-17)

A life can be ruined by a false charge. Some false charges can lead to a person being executed for crimes they did not commit. Some false charges can lead to undeserved prison time or fines. And some false charges force people into a different line of work.

Making false claims against someone is a horrible evil. And we should never even consider doing such a thing.

Discuss

- Why is false testimony in court treated as such a serious evil in Scripture?
- How can a false accusation damage a person's life even if the accusation is later proven untrue?

Slander

One day a rumor was being passed around church. A lot of people heard it, but only one person called to see if the rumor was true. No one else cared that the rumor was false, but only one person cared enough to check. When the truth came out, it was one person that had started the rumor, and it did cause harm as it went forth.

Anyone that's lived a few years on this earth knows what that's like. They can relate to the harm that happens when a person spreads falsehoods about them.

> *"'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. 'You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him."* (Leviticus 19:16-17)

Spreading falsehoods about another person doesn't just put a falsehood out into the world. It does real harm to another person. Reputations are hard to build and harder to repair.

One of Strong's definitions for the word we translate as "slander" is "scandal monger".[30] That seems to fit what the slanderer does. They create scandals where there is no real scandal. And, as we see in the passage cited above, it is an act of hatred towards another human being.

Discuss

- How does this challenge the way people often excuse gossip or rumor-spreading?
- What should a Christian do when they hear a rumor that may not be true?

Social Media

Let's talk about our use of social media.

Things would be much easier if we thought of the Internet as a real place. For some reason, when there is no person in front of us, we can act as if we are not really doing anything. But that is not the case. Things that happen on the internet really do happen. So we must be careful online.

As I mentioned above, news organizations can spread a lot of lies. And I have noticed that they often spread these lies on social media. Then many people participate in these lies by sharing them online.

Christians have a responsibility to tell the truth and represent the truth. So this kind of behavior should be repented of when it happens.

Humans are not accustomed to having this much information in front of them, so it is more likely that this kind of thing will happen.

And this does not just happen with national news stories. It happens in discussions about other believers in Christian groups all over the Internet. It should not be part of the Christian life.

Discuss

- How does thinking of the internet as an "actual place" change the way we speak and share information online?

[30] https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h7400/nasb95/wlc/0-1/, accessed 08/07/2026.

- What responsibilities do Christians have before sharing news stories, accusations, or controversial claims on social media?

Concluding Thoughts

Christians are supposed to be people of the truth. We preach the truth. We declare the truth loudly. We defend the truth. And we need to be people who stay far away from lies.

When we think through this as a mirror, or as a way of seeing our flaws, it is very possible that we see many times in our lives and ways in which we have sinned. But this should not be so. We should be people of the truth; therefore, we see all the ways that we have failed and flee to Christ for forgiveness.

As we look at the Civil Law, we understand that we could never enforce truthfulness and honesty. But we should strive for truthfulness and honesty to reign. We should encourage those lawsuits that bring penalties upon those who lie. We should embrace those things that encourage honesty and vote for honest politicians. Just because politicians lie all the time does not mean we have to settle for lying politicians. Hold them accountable to what they say at the ballot box.

This also tells us that being an honest person is what pleases the Lord. So we should be people who deal honestly with others.

The Tenth Commandment

The reality of the Tenth Commandment is that it is broken before the other commandments are broken. This commandment locates the breaking of the other commandments in the heart.

> *"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."* (Exodus 20:17)

Covetousness is the sinful desire for something or someone you do not have. It is not wrong to want things. However, it is wrong to have a disordered desire for them. According to this passage, it includes almost everything. It could mean desiring a new boat, a different car, an adulterous affair, or anything else. This is wrong. It is the most obvious way we break this commandment.

Coveting is a dissatisfaction with what God has provided for us. As Thomas Watson, the great Puritan writer, said, covetousness is a lack of faith.

> "The root of covetousness is distrust of God's providence. Faith believes that God will provide, that He who feeds the birds will feed His children, that He who clothes the lilies will clothe His lambs; and thus, faith overcomes the world. Faith is the cure for covetousness and discontent."[31]

Our covetous hearts will alight upon thing after thing until, by faith, we are satisfied in what God has given us. Watson went on to note this when he said, "the things of this world can no more ease a troubled spirit than a gold hat can cure a headache!"[32]

So, at the beginning I would like for us to see that covetousness is a lack of faith or lack of trust in those things that God has provided us with. It is not the things of this world that we should covet, it is the things of God.

The cure for coveting is not to yell "stop coveting" at yourself. The cure for coveting is to be satisfied with what God has given us.

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[31] Thomas Watson, "The Ten Commandments"
[32] Thomas Watson, "The Ten Commandments"

Discuss

- How does the Tenth Commandment show that sin begins in the heart before it appears in outward actions?
- Why is covetousness described as dissatisfaction with what God has provided? In what ways can this be because of a lack of faith?

Where Sin Begins

Sin doesn't begin when you first carry out your plan of rebellion. It begins at the level of desire.

Jesus knew this passage of Scripture. And while everyone else was applying the commandments in a very physical way, Jesus was informing everyone that we have a heart problem. That wasn't a new thing. It was in the Tenth Commandment all along.

> *"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)

Notice that Jesus states that you can commit murder at heart. And this is something we discussed a few weeks ago in the commandment to not murder.

We are whole people. We don't just sin. We have desires. We lust after things that would be evil to do and then we do them. We murder at heart, that is hate, far more often than committing actual murders. And we commit adultery at heart, far more often than we commit adultery.

> *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* (Matthew 5:27-28)

The point here is that we have a desire to sin before we sin. And our wicked desires are a sin as well.

Discuss

- What are some common things people are tempted to covet today, and why are those desires so powerful?

- How do Jesus' words in Matthew 5 help us understand the connection between sinful desires and sinful actions?
- Why is it important to repent not only of sinful actions but also of sinful desires before they bear fruit?

Pornography

Pornography is prevalent in our day. Looking at pornography breaks both the commandment not to commit adultery and this one. As was discussed in that lesson, the command is given to protect the honor of marriage. And so, pornography could be discussed there.

Either way, it needs to be discussed.

Pornography is so prevalent that it is a multibillion-dollar industry.[33] It is estimated that around 4% of the internet is pornography and if you think about that for just a moment, it will shock you.[34] Sadly, surveys show that over half of professing Christians watch pornography.[35] This should not be so.

What is viewing pornography?

> *"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* (Matthew 5:27-28)

Viewing pornography is lusting after a person on a screen. And by doing so, Jesus said it is committing adultery with her in the heart.

What is covetousness? It is a sinful desire for what we do not have. Remember the command,

> *"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."* (Exodus 20:17)

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[33] https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/, accessed 08/07/2026.
[34] https://www.statista.com/chart/16959/share-of-the-internet-that-is-porn/#:~:text=Two%20studies%2C%20one%20by%20computational,according%20to%20Ogas%20and%20Gaddam.&text=This%20chart%20shows%20scientific%20estimates,of%20porn%20on%20the%20internet, accessed 08/07/2026.
[35] https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/#top, accessed 08/07/2026.

Desiring another person's wife was part of the command not to covet. This would include lusting after any woman that is not your wife. It is adultery of the heart. If you're not married, it is fornication of the heart.

Discuss

- How does pornography reveal both lust and covetousness?
- Why is lust called adultery of the heart?
- What damage does it do to marriages today?

The Cure for Covetousness

The cure for covetousness is not a harsh ascetism, though self-denial is certainly part of it. We are to understand that God's gifts are greater. Look at Psalm 16.

> *"You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever."* (Psalm 16:11)

God never calls us to desire less. He calls us to desire the right things and find our pleasure in Him and the gifts that He gives.

Consider pornography for just a moment. Where is a man supposed to find his satisfaction?

Solomon tells us exactly where he is to find satisfaction and it's not in seeking another woman.

> *"Drink water from your own cistern And fresh water from your own well. Should your springs be dispersed abroad, Streams of water in the streets? Let them be yours alone And not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth. [As] a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love. For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress And embrace the bosom of a foreigner?"* (Proverbs 5:15-20)

What is Solomon saying to his sons in the Book of Proverbs?

Don't desire to find satisfaction in someone else. Be exhilarated with your wife, the woman that God gave to you.

When we desire the things of this world, what are we to do?

> *"[Make sure that] your character is 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)

We are to be content with what we have. And on top of that, we are to be satisfied by knowing that God will never leave us or forsake us.

It is not that all our desires are supposed to be tamped down into nothing. It's that we are supposed to desire that which is truly good and wonderful. We are to find our satisfaction in the good gifts that God has given us now as we await the glories of Heaven that will one day be ours.

Discuss

- How does Proverbs 5 present marriage as a good gift from God and a proper place for delight and satisfaction?
- What does Hebrews 13:5 teach about contentment, and how does God's promise never to leave or forsake His people help fight covetousness?
- What practical steps can a Christian take to cultivate satisfaction in God and gratitude for His gifts?

Conclusion

As a mirror this helps us to see just how dark and ugly our hearts are. Nothing shows me the darkness of my own heart and need for a Savior quite like looking at the intentions of my heart. This drives me to Christ where I find cleansing and forgiveness.

The Civil Use of this is not very applicable. I just don't see people being able to be punished for their wicked desires. However, we should understand that we live in a very covetous society. Desire sells products and so we see a lot of stirring up of cravings every time we watch a commercial. Know that is happening and watching a commercial will be easier.

And as I examine this commandment I see that my thoughts matter to God. So, I repent when I sin, even when it is only a seed that has not become fruit.