

3 – What the Law Says (3 of 4)

The Ten Commandments

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Bible Text: Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:1-21
Preached on: Sunday, December 20, 2020

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to Exodus, the 20th chapter, and while you're turning there to Exodus 20, I hope that what I have had to teach you in our previous two lessons has laid a good foundation and context for our now reading the 10 Commandments and understanding them properly, understanding their importance. If a man will not store up in his heart the word of God, then he will not be able to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord. David tells us that if we would please God, we must make sure that what's stowed away in our hearts, that out of which we live and from which we see everything, must be his commandments. "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee." We've seen what happens when people put the word of God aside and store it in a shed somewhere maybe, remember, yeah, there was a law from God at one time, and society basically begins to show all the signs of hell all around us when we depart from the ways of the Lord. We've also seen that within the Christian church when people try to oppose the law of God, they really don't find good theological and biblical reason to do so. That's why last night's theme was, "I fought the law but the law won," and it always will because the law is nothing less than the expression of God's holy character and God will never be defeated; we'll never find a good reason or a rationalization for departing from his holy character.

So with these things in mind, let's now look at the 10 Commandments as we find them in Exodus 20 and I'll begin our reading at the first verse.

1 And God spake all these words, saying, 2 I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me. 4 Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them, for I Jehovah thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate me, 6 and showing lovingkindness unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments. 7 Thou shalt not take the name of Jehovah thy God in vain; for Jehovah will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. 8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath unto Jehovah thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that

is within thy gates: 11 for in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore Jehovah blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it. 12 Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee. 13 Thou shalt not kill. 14 Thou shalt not commit adultery. 15 Thou shalt not steal. 16 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. 17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

Thus far the reading of God's word.

I hope you can see from just this reading that the law of God was never given to his people to be an expression of how they might earn his favor and enter into his mercy and his grace. How do we know that? Look at verse 2 of the reading we have this morning, you'll see that the context. Before God says anything by way of thou shalt or thou shalt not, the very context of the 10 Commandments is a declaration of the grace of God. "I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." This God who is about to give you your lifestyle, this God who is about to lay down the standards of righteousness is the God who first has saved you. "I brought you out of the house of bondage. I've been the one who was merciful to you. When you cried out to me and had nothing to offer by way of goodness to secure my favor, out of the pure, simple, good pleasure of my heart, out of my lovingkindness, I saved you."

So you see, when we come to the 10 Commandments this morning, we need to come as people who know the grace of God, come as people who are interested in the commandments because God's been gracious to us. We need to be people who say, "God, since you have loved me in this way, show me how to love you back. Give me a lifestyle that would please you." God says, "I have saved you and so here's what you should do." And if we do these commandments, the obedience that we offer to God is an expression of our heartfelt appreciation. We do not obey to earn brownie points. We do not obey as a stairway to heaven. We obey because we appreciate the grace that God has shown us.

Keep your finger in Deuteronomy 20 but turn to Deuteronomy, the eighth chapter. Out of the many many passages of the Old Testament that I could use to illustrate this, I want to look at Deuteronomy 8:11-14 and 17 and 18. Deuteronomy 8:11, "Beware lest thou forget Jehovah thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his ordinances, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: lest, when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget Jehovah thy God, who brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Verse 17, "and lest thou say in thy heart, My power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember Jehovah thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth; that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as at this day."

Why do we keep the law of God? Because we remember that every blessing that is ours has come from his hand. And when we depart from his covenant, when we depart from the way of his statutes, the Bible calls that forgetting Jehovah your God. Now you probably think of forgetting as, you know, like I can't remember where I put the car keys. The Bible has a much richer concept of forgetting God. It isn't just that you don't know how to write God's name anymore. "Now who is that one, that power that's out there somewhere?" That's not forgetting God, forgetting God is knowing all the right answers about God but departing from walking in his ways because when you don't walk in his ways, you show that you don't really love him, you don't really appreciate what he has done for you. Disobedience, disobedience shows a heart that is arrogant and ungrateful and so Moses says, "Don't forget Jehovah your God. Keep his commandments."

So the 10 Commandments, as verse 2 of Exodus 20 shows us, come in the context of God's gracious word for his people. God has saved them and God wants their obedience as a lifestyle of love and gratitude to be given back to him. The 10 Commandments that we have read this morning have a very special importance in the Bible. They are, of all the laws that we find in the Bible, particularly set apart with this kind of special importance: God wrote the 10 Commandments with his own finger. Now every bit of this book, every bit of the Bible is God's word but the 10 Commandments are especially important because God himself wrote them with his own hand on the tablets. And the 10 Commandments written by God's own hand on those tablets were to be placed in the ark of the covenant. Now you all know where the ark of the covenant was kept. The ark of the covenant was, of course, God's throne, in essence. The mercy seat was the lid of the ark of the covenant and that was placed in the holiest place, the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and then in the temple.

So where God dwelt in his Shekinah glory, there he wanted the 10 Commandments to be kept, in the throne of God. He rules by that holy character that is revealed in these 10 Commandments and these 10 Commandments stood as a special summary of the entire covenant. Sometimes we read of the covenant referred to as the "10 words." Well, there's a lot more in the covenant than just those 10 stipulations that we call the 10 Commandments but they are the epitome of the covenant. That's how important they are and, in fact, they summarize our whole moral duty. They're not the only summary of our moral duty, in fact, Jesus reduced the 10 to two commandments, and if you look elsewhere in the Bible, we can find a summary in even one commandment, but the point is though there are various ways to summarize the law, this is a popular way in the Bible for all of righteousness to be laid out for us. When the rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked what he must do to be saved to enter into life and to be part of God's kingdom, Jesus recited the 10 Commandments.

And again, not losing sight of Exodus 20, turn with me to Romans, the 13th chapter, as the Apostle Paul explains to us what it is to love our neighbor. Romans 13:8, "Owe no man anything, save to love one another: for he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law. For this," Paul says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." And so you see how Paul

incorporates the 10 Commandments as the summary of our duty of love. Love summarizes it all and love is explained in the 10 Commandments, and beyond the 10 Commandments all the rest of God's stipulations help explain those summary commandments.

So the 10 Commandments are very important, they express the grace of God, our obedience show gratitude for the grace of God, and these 10 Commandments are a summary of our whole duty before God. That's my first point, my second is: how should you read the 10 Commandments? Well, I already read them, right? Now what I mean is how should you understand them? How should you see them? How should you take and digest and work out these 10 Commandments? And I'm going to give, oh, half a dozen guidelines here and the guidelines may be the most important thing that you can pick up today because when we get done with camp, you can go back and keep reading the 10 Commandments but if you don't read them in the way that I'm going to explain right now, you'll lose much of their richness and much of their significance for your life.

First of all, each of the commandments should be understood as a general principle. Each commandment is a general principle that deals with a particular area of life. But it's general. It doesn't lay out all the details and all the elaboration. And so we have a commandment that says, "Thou shalt not kill," and that is a summary about our duty to regard human life as made in the image of God and to live in a healthy way, in a loving and a positive way with our neighbors. "Thou shalt not kill," but not all the details are given there, right? Are we supposed to kill in war? Is it all right to execute people, you know, capital punishment? These issues are not brought up in the 10 Commandments because they're only intended as a short summary, but each one of the laws gives a general principle for living. The details, the elaboration, the qualifications, and even the exceptions come later. They are given in the rest of the law.

So the point I want to make here is that you shouldn't take the 10 Commandments in isolation from the rest of the Bible. You see liberal scholars do that sort of thing when they'll oppose, let's say, capital punishment and they'll say, "How can anybody who reads the Bible believe in capital punishment? It says thou shalt not kill." Well, I mean, that's a really ignorant thing to say because the same God who said thou shalt not kill said you are to kill people who do the following sorts of things. And so obviously the general statement made over here, "Thou shalt not kill," is intended to be explained and qualified by the rest of the details God has given. So don't ever think we can take the 10 Commandments and throw the rest of the law out. That would be as foolish as saying we can take the two commandments about love and throw the 10 Commandments away. Well, Paul didn't do that. We just saw that in Romans 13, Paul says, "Here's what it is to love your neighbor," and then he cites the 10 Commandments. So they are a general principle but there are more details, more elaboration, other exceptions that are given throughout the law.

Secondly when you read the 10 Commandments, understand that they forbid even the least degree of unrighteousness. Sinners have such wily ways, don't they, such great creativity when it comes to making excuses for our falling short of the holiness and the

righteousness of God, and one of the things that we do is we tend to think, "Well, there are certain kinds of expressions of unrighteousness that are really bad but then there are little sins that aren't so bad." You know, there are gross lies that people tell when they perjure themselves in court, but then there's little white lies too, right? Isn't that a great expression right out of the mouth of the devil, white lies, innocent lies. There are no innocent lies. The least degree of unrighteousness is forbidden when God says, "Thou shalt not do this."

In Matthew 12:36 Jesus expresses that point for us when he says that on the day of judgment God will call into account every idle word that we have spoken. I have to be careful because that text itself could consume us for a couple of hours of preaching. Are you aware of that, that every word you have spoken, not just the big important words, not just the words when you said, "Okay, I swear to God now I'm telling the truth," but every single thing you have ever said will be called into account? God will so judge your mouth and the way you used your lips that nothing you've ever uttered even in the greatest degree of sport, will be set aside from consideration. Jesus said, "Remember the day of judgment will bring every idle word into account." I just use that to illustrate that when the 10 Commandments forbids something, they forbid the least degree of it as well.

Thirdly, the 10 Commandments require perfection in all areas of life. When something is commanded or when something is forbidden, God is referring to all of our works, our words, our thoughts, our gestures, our motives, and indeed our very character. The 10 Commandments are not to be read in such a way that as long as I don't outwardly commit adultery, then I've kept the law. Is that right? You remember how Jesus explained in the Sermon on the Mount that when God requires something about not killing, not committing adultery, that God goes to the very heart and he expects our very thoughts so that if I lust after a woman, I've already committed adultery in God's sight.

The Bible says I'm not to kill. Well, as far as I know, I have never taken another person's life. But I've thought about it, not glad to admit that, but I've gotten angry enough on occasion when I'd say it. Do you know what Jesus said? That if I even think to curse my brother saying, "Raca, you blockhead," that I have a negative attitude toward him. Now listen, even that negative attitude stands contrary to his life therefore and Jesus says I'm guilty of killing him in the eyes of God.

Well, when we read the 10 Commandments, we'd better understand their thoroughness. God will hold us accountable for every gesture, every thought, every motive, every word as well as our outward conduct. And so the 10 Commandments, as I say, require perfection in all areas of our life and from that we draw the conclusion that all of the actions of the same kind which are forbidden in the 10 Commandments are forbidden along with them.

So in the seventh commandment God says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." That is a commandment that's a general principle of sexual purity, but all actions of the same kind which are sexually impure are thereby condemned by that commandment as well because when we go out to the rest of the law to see how it explains and elaborates on our sexual

conduct, we see that it forbids incest, we see that it forbids homosexuality, we see that it forbids bestiality, it forbids masturbation, it forbids lustful thoughts. Everything that is sexually impure is typified in the commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." All actions of the same kind are condemned with it along with all the causes of such action, all the occasions of such action, and all the means to such actions.

So God doesn't simply condemn outward adultery or outward homosexuality, he also condemns all the causes that would lead us to engage in such behavior and all the occasions for it. In Matthew 5:29-30, Jesus says that if you have a hand that offends, it would be better for you to cut it off and enter into life maimed than to enter into Gehenna, hellfire, with both your hands intact. Now what does that mean? Some people, of course, would ridicule it as being a literal call for maiming our bodies. What Jesus means when he says pluck out the eye that offends you, cut off the hand that offends you, is that you need to get rid of every occasion for sin, all right? So you know that there are certain things that you look at that make you lust, Jesus says cut them out of your life. If you would keep the commandment not to commit adultery, you must get rid of all occasions of adulterous thoughts, all occasions for adulterous behavior, all the means thereto.

So when I'm doing pastoral counseling and I have somebody who is confessing a sin and asking for help to stop sinning in that way, let me take a homosexual as an example. A homosexual comes to me and says, "I'm a believer in the Lord Jesus. I hate this sin but I keep falling into it." I say, "Do you really hate it? Do you really love the Lord Jesus?" "I do." And I say, "Here's my telephone. I want you to call all those fellows that are the occasion of your sin and tell them, 'I'm a Christian and I don't want to see you anymore.'" That's the tough road of discipleship but that's what Jesus says, cut off the hand, pluck out the eye, do not keep any occasion for what brings you down in breaking these commandments.

Fourthly, when we read the 10 Commandments, we need to understand that where a duty is commanded by God, the contrary sin is forbidden. So where God says you are to do the following, the following positive thing, that also means you are to avoid the opposite of it, you are forbidden to do its opposite. And likewise when God forbids you to do a certain thing, he is, at the same time, commanding you to do the opposite of that. A very good example of this principle is found in Ephesians 4:28. Paul says, "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need." Paul's dealing with somebody who has broken the eighth commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," and he says when a man repents of the sin of stealing, it's not enough that he stops stealing. That may be a principle that some of you need to take into account when you think about your own repentance. When we repent of sins, God doesn't want us simply to stop engaging in that sin, he expects us to go the opposite direction and start expressing the positive virtue that's the opposite of that sin. So the one who stole, Paul says let him now work with his hands so that he'll have enough money to give to people who are in need. Let him learn to be generous. Rather than a person who takes from others, he must be a person who gives to others.

So all of God's commandments must be read that way. When God forbids something, he's also requiring the opposite virtue. When he forbids something, did I say that wrong? When he forbids something, he wants the positive virtue, when he commands the positive virtue, he's forbidding the opposite bias or crime. So when we read the 10 Commandments, we need to take that into account.

Fifthly, as you pay attention to the details of the law, and you must pay attention to the details of the law, you must not miss the basic point of each law. It will do you no good to become an expert in the details if you miss the main point. Matthew 23:23, Jesus says, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith: but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone." You see, that's the verse that you need to go to when you get people who are on different sides of this issue, should we specialize in the details or should we be looking at the general principle? Jesus says you have to do both. And when the Pharisees became very expert on the law of the tithe so that even their small garden vegetables, they learned how to tithe on them, Jesus said but in so doing, the reason God's unhappy with you is because you've forgotten the weightier matters of the law. What is the fundamental point? You should have learned about justice and mercy and faith. You probably know people, I do, sometimes I see them in the mirror, we know people who can get caught up in specializing on the details and we miss the whole point of the law. The whole point of the law is to show justice and a merciful heart and fidelity. The Pharisees were not merciful people. They were not fair-minded and just people. They were not loving and faithful people. But, boy, they knew the details of the law.

So Jesus said, "You've forgotten the weightier matters," but then you might expect Jesus to say, "Get away from those details." He says, "This you ought to have done. You ought to have done those little picky details. That was right. But without leaving the other undone." So you must pay attention to details but always keep your focus, mercy, justice, faith. God's showing me how to be that kind of person in these details.

Sixthly, the obedience we give to the 10 Commandments must be sincere obedience. The Bible's way of putting that is, it must be from the heart. God is not pleased with the outward act of your hands, that you do things externally and publicly but you haven't done it because in your heart you really want to. Now, of course, that raises a question and you say, "Pastor, when I don't want to do this commandment, should I just go ahead and sin then?" No, but you'd better ask God's forgiveness that your outward obedience isn't matched with an inward heart of conformity to that principle of righteousness. The answer is not to go ahead and sin, the answer is to recognize your inward sin and repent of it. But if we would keep the law, we must keep it from the heart. Let me give you some verses that teaches that.

Deuteronomy 5:29, "Oh that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" Notice God calls out, "I wish they had a heart for obedience, not just

outward obedience but I wish from the heart they would obey me, that they'd do it sincerely."

Deuteronomy 6:5 and 6, "and thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be," where? "Upon thy heart." God says, "I want you to have my law written on your inward parts. I want you to do it out of a sincere motive of love," because each and every one of us would have to confess if we were honest that we know what it is to do outwardly what the Bible says even though we're not interested in it. Sometimes you go to church like that. I mean, well, you should be ashamed but, I mean, you don't have to be hesitant to admit that everybody has that problem. Sometimes we do the right thing for the wrong reason. Sometimes we do the right thing because we don't want people to think poorly of us. Isn't that amazing? We should be worrying about what God thinks of us. We should be loving him so much for his salvation that we want to do these things but sometimes we do them and our heart is not in it. You cannot read the 10 Commandments and obey them in that way.

Then finally as a principle of interpretation for the 10 Commandments, you need to realize that the law is not obeyed apart from faith. If you try to keep the law of God without faith in his saving mercy, you are not keeping the law at all. I'm going to look at two texts to bring that point out for you. Romans, the ninth chapter at the 30th verse and then I'll be reading into chapter 10 which we looked at last night as well.

Romans 9:30, "What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, who followed not after righteousness, attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith: but Israel, following after a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law." Then Paul says, "Why is that? What explains this? How can the Gentiles have arrived at the righteousness of faith and Israel following the law of righteousness did not?" And here's his answer, "Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by works." Because Israel sought the righteousness of the law but not with a heart of faith, it became, in fact, a kind of works. In fact, Paul won't even say that it's available to do it by works, he says, "as it were by works," as though hypothetically and certainly not truly by works. And when you don't approach the law of righteousness by faith but instead by works, then you don't keep the law of righteousness. You cannot keep the law of God without faith. God is not pleased with your efforts apart from faith and that is a message that is driven home over and over and over and over again in the Old Testament and that's why Paul goes on to say that when Israel made this mistake, "They stumbled at the stone of stumbling; even as it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence: And he that believeth on him shall not be put to shame." Israel did not care for the Messiah because Israel read the law as a law of works. They did not approach the law out of a heart of faith because if they had approached the law of God out of a heart of faith, they would have welcomed the Messiah but instead they stumbled at this stone of stumbling. This very one that God has set in as the foundation of our salvation and our faith, Israel stumbled over the Messiah.

"Brethren, my heart's desire and my supplication to God is for them, that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For being ignorant of God's righteousness," and what's the evidence that they were ignorant of it? "And seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ was the aim of the law for righteousness." If you read the 10 Commandments and they do not excite in you a heart of faith in your Savior, you're not reading them right and you are on the road to becoming a Pharisee.

The law cannot be kept without faith and faith is not genuine if you don't keep the law. That's such a simple message. When will we in the Christian church get it straight? Year by year, age by age, era by era in church history, you have those who teach a legalistic Christianity that says you've got to do all these do's and don'ts to be right with God and faith has been forgotten. And at the same time, you have those who say, "No, it's faith that you have to have and God doesn't care about the way you live." James says, "Listen, faith without works is worthless, it's dead, and nobody will be saved by it." This should be a very simple message. I know that it's controversial, I get in trouble around the world when I rightly preach these things, but I do think it's in the Bible, isn't it? If you don't follow the law out of a heart of faith, you'll reject the Messiah, you don't really please God. On the other hand, if you believe in the Messiah and say you love him and don't do his commandments, Jesus will say, "I don't know you."

And so you've got to keep these things together. When you read the 10 Commandments, remember that each one of them is a general principle, that there are elaborations and details and qualifications that are given elsewhere in the Bible. Remember that the least degree of whatever kind of unrighteousness that is being dealt with is forbidden in those commandments. Remember that these commandments require perfection in all areas of our lives, our words, our works, our thoughts, our gestures, our motives, our character, so that all the sins of the same kind are forbidden under that one heading, and all the causes for such sin, all the occasions of such sin, all the means to such sin are forbidden as well. Remember that when God gives us a duty, the corresponding sin is forbidden. And when God forbids a certain sin, the corresponding duty is required of us.

When you look at these details, don't miss the basic point: justice, mercy and faith. God's showing you how to work those out in your life. Make sure when you obey them, obey these commandments from your heart sincerely or they won't be pleasing to God. And finally, you cannot obey them if you don't start with a heart of faith. My obedience to the 10 Commandments to whatever degree it's realized in my life, and I wish it were greater, but my obedience to the 10 Commandments begins at the threshold of asking Jesus Christ to save me from my sin and to be my only hope of righteousness before God and then I ask him, "By your Spirit, work in me this lifestyle that shows that I love you. Work in me that righteousness that reflects your own holy character."

Let's take a few moments before we end our worship this morning by asking then: what kind of lives would we live if we were truly saved, truly loved the Lord and lived up to his commandments? God begins in the first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." And with that all of you are condemned. Not by me, I'm condemned too. But

God has just condemned you because this commandment deals with the very principle by which you live and God says the principle is this: there is no other authority in your life but man and every other authority and every other concern and every other standard that you may have must be subordinate to me. No other gods before me.

I have to confess that when I was a child, I didn't read this commandment properly and that's because in English this expression "before me" had a particular meaning out of my schoolyard days. You know when you line up to go into the classroom? You talk about being before the other person, you know, he's in line before me, and so I thought God was saying make sure that I'm the number one out of all the other authorities that are there. I have to be first in line. But that isn't what God is saying, is it? In Hebrew, "before me" means "before my face." God says you're not to have any other gods in my sight. Do you know what that means? You're not to have any other gods, nothing else that draws you away.

You say, "Well, I don't have any other gods." Yes, you do, it's just that your gods may not be of wood and stone and you may not bow down to them in your front room at home, but when your family comes before following God, you've made your family a god. I bet we all could share very painful stories about having families that have compromised God's word and we have felt we had to silently go along with them lest we disrupt things, you know? "Boy, it's sure going to be awkward to get together at Thanksgiving if we condemn this divorce over here." I have that in my own family so I really sympathize with those who have that problem, but your family is not more important than God. One day Jesus said to a person who wanted to show respect for his father, "Let me bury my father, then I'll come and follow you," and Jesus said, "Let the dead bury the dead. You're not worthy of me." Boy, that sounds like a harsh word from Jesus. He was just telling him the first commandment, he said, "There is no other god before me." My personal feeling is if the man had said, "Jesus, you're the most important thing. I want to follow you." Jesus would have said, "Then go bury your father and come back." But the man himself took it upon himself to put family honor above following Jesus. God doesn't permit that sort of thing.

Do you think money is more important to you than God? Oh, don't take the easy illustration, you know, imagine somebody coming to you and saying, "If you'll renounce Jesus, I'll give you a million dollars. Will you do it?" We'd all say, "Oh, no, of course not." But for less than a million dollars Christians compromise their Christian faith almost every day in the workplace. Lest we not have the favor of our boss, we'll not do things the way we know we should. We'll be willing to compromise as salesmen telling lies on the phone, whatever it may be.

Well, I'm not going to be able to do what I'd really love to do and expound each of the commandments at great length for you, but beginning with the first one, just keep this short thing in mind: God says if there's anything in his sight in your life that keeps you from following him with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind, then we're not worthy of him. "You shall have no other gods in my sight." That's the principle of your life. I'm all out sold out for Jesus, and so anything that gets in the way of my love for Jesus I'm

going to get rid of, okay? Does that mean that you're willing to – now this is hard after your Saturday night activity last night – but is it possible that sometimes on Saturday night you stay out so late, you get yourself so tired that you just can't get up and go to church in the morning? Do you love Jesus enough to say, "I'm going to cut that out. I'm going to pluck out the eye and cut off the hand, and that occasion for my sin and my unfaithfulness I'm going to take care of in my life." Well, if you're not willing to do so, then you're breaking the first commandment because there's some other god that you have and you have coddled yourself and rationalized these are not gods, they're just compromises, they're just conflicts, they're just things that are hard to work out. Balderdash! They're gods. They mean enough to you that you'll walk contrary to your own God. The first commandment says nothing has authority in your life but God and all other authorities, your family, your boss, the policeman, all other authorities are obeyed subject to God.

The second commandment says you shall make no graven image when it comes to worshiping God. Many people misunderstand the second commandment as forbidding idolatry. No, idolatry has already been forbidden, the first commandment got rid of the idea of other gods and so do you know what the second commandment is talking about? Worshiping the living and true God. And I realize that what I'm about to say is going to stun you so wake up and get prepared for this. God is not pleased with your worship of him if it's not according to his direction. Good intentions are not good enough when it comes to worshiping God. I couldn't tell you the number of Christian churches that worship God according to man's imagination. They come up with ways of worshiping that we think are so clever. I did not ask about this so that I wouldn't compromise, if you do this in your church, I'm not going to ask for your forgiveness, I'm hoping you'll ask God's forgiveness but I've known churches that will do things like at Easter time, well, they'll have a cross up front that has nails in the cross and people are supposed to bring forward little pockets of silver coins and hang them there to confess that they betrayed Jesus. And people have gone through this little ritual because it's so meaningful and so forth and I say it's so sinful. How could it be sinful? I told you, you wouldn't like this. You're saying it may be a little hokey but these people mean well. We're doing this out of good intentions. Their heart is in the right place. God says your heart is not in the right place if you add to my worship. You are not to by your own imagination, can I draw the connection, graven image, imagination. God says, "I don't want you to worship me by your imagination. You don't know what I'm like. You don't know what I care for. You don't know what pleases me and you have no right to devise your own pathway to me in worship. You worship me according to my direction. You do what I ask you to do and you don't add to it and you don't subtract from it."

The second commandment says we must approach God in God's way and not our own. "Well, but I don't like to think of God in that way." You're breaking the second commandment. It's not up to you to decide how you think about God. God doesn't care a twit about your imaginations. God is God. As I often say in another study, God is not a Mr. Potato Head. A lot of people think, "Well, I can take all these features and put them in the potato and make the Mr. Potato Head that I like." You can't make God after your own image. That's why he says, "Don't make an image of me."

And God says, "You shall not take the name of Jehovah thy God in vain for Jehovah will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain." In the most obvious way in which I break this commandment and all of you have broken this commandment is when we've taken God's name upon ourselves and then lived in a way that has brought disgrace upon him. You may have thought, first and foremost, that taking God's name in vain is a matter of what you say. It does include that. When we use God's name flippantly, unthoughtfully, when we use God's name without warrant or authority, for instance if I say, "God damn that." God didn't give me the authority to damn things. He does the damning and by the way, when he gets started he can start with me.

So when I use his name in vain verbally, that's a terrible thing but this is a bigger commandment than just the use of your words. I've taken God's name upon myself. I call myself, what? A Christian. I say that I belong to the people of God, that he is my God, I am his child. I've taken his name on my lips, I've applied his name to my own life, and then when I live in disobedience to God and when I show an angry disposition, impatience with people, when I don't show integrity, those little white lies, when people see that I don't show love to my neighbor though I'm a follower of Jesus, I'm breaking this commandment. I've taken God's name in vain. I've said, "I'm a follower of Jesus," but people can't see Jesus in me, not when I live like that or do things of that nature.

So do you see how big the commandment is? God says, "My name is on you so you honor my name." Paul tells us that God's name was blasphemed among the Gentiles because of the behavior of Israel. People have occasion to blaspheme God's name, to speak of him lightly and disrespectfully because we have taken his name and done the same thing with our lives. Beginning to have a feel for what these commandments are all about? Isn't it a shame that people call this legalism. It's not legalism, this is a question of life and righteousness, justice, mercy and faith in God.

Is he the one and only authority, nothing else comes in the way? Do we approach him as he wants us to approach him rather than according to our vain imaginations? Do we take his name in vain calling ourselves by his name but then living disrespectfully, bringing reproach upon him because of our own behavior? Is his name lightly on our lips? When we speak of God, do we speak of him with utter respect, love and dignity?

The fourth commandment isn't even in some people's Bibles. What is the fourth commandment? To remember the sabbath day to keep it holy. I think maybe the first word is the key there because most Christians have just forgotten but God said, "If you belong to me, a portion of your time has already been marked out as mine."

Now who can complain? If you approach the commandments with a heart of faith in gratitude for God's grace and God says, "Everything that you have belongs to me, including your time," who of us would ever say, "Oh no, God, that's not fair. We need to negotiate about this." Well, there is no negotiation with the Almighty. God is Lord of the covenant and God says, "If you belong to me, then you're going to typify that because one day in seven you're going to set apart from your daily work, your daily activities, and

that's going to be my day. Actually all the days are my day but this day in a special way will typify that that's your heart attitude, that all your time is mine. So one day in seven, the day that I choose and put my name upon, that will be a day set apart, that will be a holy day."

Now in the old covenant when God's people were anticipating the work of redemption, when they were yet looking ahead to the work of Christ, that day was the seventh day of the Hebrew week, Saturday. In the old covenant, however, and we don't have time to elaborate on this today, but in the old covenant God also taught Israel a principle of what was called the eighth day sabbath, and some of their feasts which anticipated the resurrection of Christ in the day of Pentecost were eighth day sabbaths which was God's way of already laying in for his people, "The day is coming when you'll no longer worship me at the end of the week but because I've brought the new creation it will be at the beginning of the week." That's why the gospel of Matthew tells us that when the women went to the tomb of Jesus on the day of resurrection, Matthew calls it the first of the sabbaths. The sabbath has changed in the new covenant to the first day of the week. So that's an interesting topic we could get into. We don't have time to do much with it today, but the point is we who follow the Lord Jesus Christ must recognize that this day is his day, the first day of the week, and it's to be set apart from our normal labors.

It's to be a day of worship and rest in him. Rest includes physical rest. You know, many times I hear people complain about how hard the workweek is, "You know, I just need to get more rest." Well, guess what? God has ordered you to take care of yourself and to rest one day out of seven. And I hear people complain all the time about, "I just don't have time to read my Bible. I don't have time to pray." And I think that's probably bogus, I don't really buy that, but I almost always say, "Well, isn't that great then? God's given you one day that's set apart from the rest where you can pray and read the Bible to your heart's content." And the lack of genuineness, the lack of sincerity is almost always seen in that they don't read the Bible and pray on Sunday either. Jesus said when he was challenged about the sabbath, that the sabbath was made for man, that means for man's good. When you won't honor the sabbath, you're saying to God, "I know better than you do what I need. You think I need a day of rest and worship set apart, I know better."

Jesus said the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath and therefore the Son of man, that's Jesus himself, therefore the Son of man is Lord of the sabbath. If you don't believe that there's an obligation to rest in the Lord and to rest your bodies on the sabbath, basically you're saying, "Jesus, you're not Lord over this day when it comes to me." But if Jesus is not Lord over that day, guess what? He's not Lord at all in your life. God owns all your time. You've been bought with a price, God says, "However, I want you to show that by only taking one out of seven and putting it aside, the day of resurrection, the day of new creation, the day when the kingdom of God was realized. I want that day to be typified among my people as a day of rest."

The first four commandments are usually thought of as commandments that talk about our relationship to God, the last six commandments our relationship with our fellow men. We're to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind. No other gods before

him. We don't come to him by vain imagination. We submit to his word. We don't take his name upon our lips in vain or upon our lives. We honor him one day in seven as his own.

The next six commandments show how we love our neighbor as ourselves, our duty to our fellow men, however, we have to remember lest this seem artificial distinction, that if I don't follow these six commandments, I'm not loving God. Not just failing to love my neighbor if I break those commandments, I'm failing to love God. You remember how the New Testament teaches how could a man say that he hates his neighbor and yet he loves God? It's just impossible. And so if you break the last six commandments, not showing love for your neighbor, what you're also showing is that you don't love God.

So what are these commandments? Very briefly, honor your father and your mother that you days may be long in the land which Jehovah your God gives you. God says the key to life and long life and blessing is knowing how to respect authority. I'll tell you, at the end of the 20th century in American culture, this is the commandment we need to learn because the commandment, it turns out, doesn't simply pertain to our biological or maybe our adoptive parents, it's not just our family heads, but in the Bible leaders of the nation are styled fathers and mothers, teachers are considered fathers to their students. This expression "father" or "father and mother" is a broad one in the Bible for all who have legitimate authority in our lives. And we don't respect authority. We have bumper stickers that say, "Defy authority." You've seen them. Isn't that amazing? Basically that's asking for death. God says if you would have long life, respect authority. We defy authority, God says, then death will be your way instead.

The tough questions come up, I can't deal with them all, but people will ask, "What if those in authority over me ask me to sin?" Well, who is that we're honoring when we honor our father and mother, when we honor our teacher, when we honor the policeman, the civil magistrate, whoever it may be, our boss? You're honoring God. If you read the New Testament, that comes out exclusively. Paul says that slaves are to obey their masters not with an eye to what men will say but with an eye to the Lord Jesus that they serve. So if ultimately we are obeying out of respect for God's ultimate authority, when people defy God's ultimately authority we cannot submit to them. So if the civil magistrate comes to me and says, "Stop preaching the gospel," what am I going to say if I'm faithful? I must obey God rather than men.

But apart from those exceptions where the authority is requiring us to sin, we're supposed to show respect for the authority. That's a real hard thing for Dr. Bahnsen because to be honest with you, my political opinion of the man that's President of the United States right now is about as low as it goes. I do not have a high regard for this man's ethics. I don't have a high regard for him. He doesn't even follow his own principles which I disagree with to begin with. His whole life is, I think, shameful to hold up before not just young people but anybody in this nation and yet the Bible says I still, although I prophetically condemn the man and his behavior, I have to have respect for his office. That's hard. It's much easier for me to tell Bill Clinton jokes. There was a day when Paul was illegally hit on his mouth when he was being tried. Someone said that he should be

struck and he was, and Paul condemned the person who said that and he said, "You whited wall," then when he found out it was the high priest who had given the illegal command, Paul said, "I should not have spoken against the leader of God's people." Yow. Paul had the right to defend justice in court but he should not have called him a whited wall and shown disrespect for his office. Honor your father and your mother. Are you people who are subject to authority?

"Thou shalt not kill." You say, "Oh good, we get to the easy ones now. I've never murdered anybody." Oh yeah, earlier I told you that this goes to the thoughts and intents of the heart as well. Have you ever thought a vicious thing about another...have you ever thought a bitter resentful retaliatory thought about another person? Have you ever said, "I hope they get theirs"? Or maybe you're more creative and you actually know what they should get and you thought it out and you said, "God, I really wish this would happen to this person. Bring them down." You're killing them just like I'm killing you right now, aren't I? This hurts.

We aren't people who affirm life. We may have opposed abortion but we don't affirm life because we live contrary to the lives of other people. Did you know that racism is a form of murder? Do you know why? Because Jesus says that when I'm unreconciled with somebody, I've broken the sixth commandment. The Bible says you're not to kill. Jesus says, "But I tell you that if you are angry with your brother and won't seek reconciliation, that you've broken that commandment." So when you have negative, bitter, angry thoughts toward people of another race, maybe of another gender, maybe who go to another university than you, you may think I'm kidding, I went to USC, maybe you don't have this in Arizona but I've heard people from USC talk about people at UCLA like they'd run over them with a tank if they could. Not just kidding because of the football game coming up but just loathing of these people. When you loath a fellow human being because of the school he goes to or the color of his skin, his economic class or what he likes to eat for dinner, whatever it is, Jesus says you're killing him because God put you here to love your fellow man, to be a help to them. We break this commandment when we don't do what's in the interest of our own good health and well-being, when we don't promote the health and well-being of others.

"Thou shalt not commit adultery." God has given you sexual interests, desires, concerns, and God says don't use them improperly, and the list of ways in which we can violate this commandment goes on and on and on. Lust is obvious. Sexual perversion. I've already mentioned masturbation. All those things which fall short of that marital fidelity that God has given is the way to enjoy sex, is a violation of his holy commandment and therefore a violation of his own holy character.

"Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness. Thou shalt not covet what is thy neighbor's." Do you ever sit back and say, "Boy, I sure wish I had this"? Boy, you all set me up for coveting this weekend by putting me in a mansion where I walk around going, "Wow." Now I must say not self-righteously at all but I praise God's grace, I did not walk around coveting saying, "Why does he have this instead of me?" I'm glad that he has it and I'm glad that he's generous and shares with other people what he has. But you see,

many times we don't have that kind of regulation on our desires and we get envious of what other people have and the reputations they have, or who they're married to, or whatever it may be. The Bible says when you are not content with what God has given you, then you're not living a life of faith, are you? Do you really trust God when you're not satisfied with what he gives you and you say, "God, I need more. Why does that person have that? I want that." When we don't respect other people's property, when we don't respect financial integrity, for instance, at work making sure that we give eight good hours of labor, and that the work we do, we do as unto the Lord Jesus Christ. So whether we are honored by our employer or not, we keep doing it. In fact, this is a key to godliness in so many areas of our lives. Do you do the right thing when no one will even know that you did it? Do you do the right thing when there's no one there to catch you for failing to do so? Do you do what is right because it is right?

"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." The principle here is righteousness in the way that we speak. James tells us if we could learn to control our mouths, if we can control our tongues, we could control our entire bodies. This is the most difficult commandment of all to keep, that we regulate the way we speak. That's why Jesus had to warn us every idle word will be brought into judgment. In the theological tradition from which I come, our doctrinal standard is the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, and in the Westminster Larger Catechism there is an elaboration of the 10 Commandments, the duties that are required, the sins that are forbidden in each of the commandments. I hope I'm not vainly hoping that some of you might like to pick that up and use it for your own devotions because you'll get much more detail than I've been able to give you in this short lesson on the 10 Commandments where all of the different kinds of sins that are related to the first commandment, the second, the third and so forth are laid out in the Catechism. But I do want to illustrate using the ninth commandment just how extensive the law of God is by having you consider whether you've lived up to the duties and whether you've refrained from what is prohibited when it comes to the use of your mouth.

How much does the Bible say about this? I think this is going to surprise you. If you've not yet been convicted of your sin, well, I guess if you haven't been convicted of your sin so far, you're either asleep or your heart is hard because I've said plenty to show you your need of a Savior. But if you haven't listen to this.

Q. 143. Which is the ninth commandment?

A. The ninth commandment is, Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

Q. 144. What are the duties required in the ninth commandment?

A. The duties required in the ninth commandment are, the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our neighbor, as well as our own; appearing and standing for the truth; and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things whatsoever; a charitable esteem of our neighbors; loving, desiring, and

rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for and covering of their infirmities; freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocency; a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them; discouraging talebearers, flatterers, and slanderers; love and care of our own good name, and defending it when need requireth; keeping of lawful promises; studying and practicing of whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report.

How would any of us dare to appear before God and say, "Go ahead and judge me, I'm clean"? Just the sins of your mouth show how unworthy you are of his presence.

Q. 145. What are the sins forbidden in the ninth commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the ninth commandment are, all prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbors, as well as our own, especially in public judicature; giving false evidence, suborning false witnesses, wittingly appearing and pleading for an evil cause, outfacing and overbearing the truth; passing unjust sentence, calling evil good, and good evil; rewarding the wicked according to the work of the righteous, and the righteous according to the work of the wicked; forgery, concealing the truth, undue silence in a just cause, and holding our peace when iniquity calleth for either a reproof from ourselves, or complaint to others; speaking the truth unseasonably, or maliciously to a wrong end, or perverting it to a wrong meaning, or in doubtful or equivocal expressions, to the prejudice of the truth or justice; speaking untruth, lying, slandering, backbiting, detracting, talebearing, whispering, scoffing, reviling, rash, harsh, and partial censuring; misconstructing intentions, words, and actions; flattering, vainglorious boasting, thinking or speaking too highly or too meanly of ourselves or others; denying the gifts and graces of God; aggravating smaller faults; hiding, excusing, or extenuating of sins, when called to a free confession; unnecessary discovering of infirmities; raising false rumors, receiving and countenancing evil reports, and stopping our ears against just defense; evil suspicion; envying or grieving at the deserved credit of any; endeavoring or desiring to impair it, rejoicing in their disgrace and infamy; scornful contempt, fond admiration; breach of lawful promises; neglecting such things as are of good report, and practicing, or not avoiding ourselves, or not hindering what we can in others, such things as procure an ill name.

That's just one commandment.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "Lest your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." Do you know what was shocking in Jesus' day when he said that? We hear the word Pharisee and because we've read the Bible, we react negatively. We think of the Pharisees as wicked religious hypocrites and they were, but in Jesus' day the Pharisees were topnotch when it came to law observance. They knew how to tithe their garden vegetables. They paid

meticulous attention to the law. They were deemed by all men very righteous. They said their prayers out on the corners and so forth. They seemed to be the religious leaders and Jesus said, "You've got to do a whole lot better than that if you want to enter the kingdom of heaven."

So I'm going to ask you as I conclude this camp, does your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, at least the kind of reputation they had? Have you kept the law meticulously? I've just read to you a meticulous elaboration of what you should do with your mouth and not do, have you lived up to that? It's a rhetorical question. I'm not going to wait for anybody to stand up and say, "Yeah, I think I have." You'd be a fool if you said so.

So Solomon said, "Lord, if you should mark iniquities who could stand?" Your righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees if you were to enter the kingdom of heaven and so what hope do you have except that of the Lord Jesus Christ, that his righteousness might be imputed to you? I'll tell you something so wondrous about this one who is our Savior: he stood before men one day and he said, "Which one of you convicts me of sin?" Jesus said, "Which one of you can take any commandment and show that I've broken it, that I've not lived up to the duty that's required there?" I don't know anybody who would dare to say that. In fact, if it isn't true, if Jesus was not, in fact, a perfect law-keeper, he was a lunatic, wasn't he? To talk that way, such megalomania, that Jesus could say it and he could carry it off because amazingly this lifestyle that we've been talking about in the law was realized on earth. There was one who once walked on this earth who loved perfectly, who was completely just, completely faithful, without ever an improper word, without failing to say what needed to be said, a person who never engaged in sexual sin or compromise, who never violated other people's property, who never took God's name on his lips in vain, who never fell short of thinking of God in the right way and making him the supreme principal in his life.

Do you see how the law points to and magnifies the beauty and the glory and the righteousness of Jesus himself? I hope that you love him and I hope that you trust him. I hope that the sin that you know so much better because we've talked about the law this weekend, you take to Jesus and say, "Jesus, you're my only hope in life and death. I cannot pay the price, would you pay it for me?" The Bible assures us that God made him sin for us, the one who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. God has exchanged records. Your sin was laid on Jesus and his righteousness has now become yours. In a sense, what I'm pleading with you this weekend to see is that if God has accredited the righteousness of Christ to you, how could we do anything less but love that law that Jesus kept and aim to become righteous even as he himself is? By the power of his Spirit and with his grace, let's make that our goal.