

How to Interpret the Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments

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We have started a critical series on the 10 Commandments and as I have said, we need some introductory help to get ready to receive them as we go through them individually. Today I invite you to turn to the book of Deuteronomy 5 as we open. Deuteronomy 5. There's a reason why we're turning here. Predominantly, we will be looking at Exodus 20 as we study the text of the 10 Commandments in the coming weeks and months, but I want you to have a sense and an awareness that the 10 Commandments are repeated virtually verbatim in Deuteronomy 5 as Moses is preaching some 40 years after they were first given to him in Exodus on Mount Sinai. In Deuteronomy, Moses is delivering a parting sermon to the people of Israel before the Lord will take him home to glory. He's rehearsing what happened in the deliverance from Egypt, and now he is repeating to them the 10 Commandments that were given in Deuteronomy 5.

We'll begin in verse 6 for the sake of time. Deuteronomy 5:6 says,

6 'I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 7 You shall have no other gods before Me. 8 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. 9 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, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 10 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. 11 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. 12 Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. 13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 14 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 or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. 15 You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day. 16 Honor your

father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you. 17 You shall not murder. 18 You shall not commit adultery. 19 You shall not steal. 20 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 21 You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field or his male servant or his female servant, his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Now as we approach the 10 Commandments, we've done a couple of things already over the past two weeks. In our first message in this series, we did a summary overview and we looked at all 10 Commandments very quickly and just to begin to acquaint ourselves with them. Last week, we saw the historical context in which God gave the 10 Commandments. We saw that he spoke these commandments to the people of Israel with fearsome glory. It was a stunning display of divine power with which these were delivered and it provoked fear in the hearts of those who heard and who witnessed that occasion. We saw that the significance of that is that the authority and the power and the holiness of God is intrinsic to this revelation of the 10 Commandments, and therefore we are to take them seriously, and that they are to have an impact upon us. This is no superficial teaching. None of the word of God is but with the 10 Commandments, there is a special attestation of God in the way that he delivered them, in the way that he preserved them, in the ark of the covenant being kept in the most holy of places during Old Testament times, we realize that these commandments are set apart in a way that call for our particular attention.

Now what we want to do today is something that might seem a little bit esoteric, a little bit unusual, but this is actually very profoundly important and we'll come back to what we talk about today in multiple times in the coming months. We're going to consider how it is that we interpret the 10 Commandments, how it is that we understand the 10 Commandments, and this is far more important than you might suspect for us to receive them properly. We need to know how to interpret them, what principles it is that are going to guide our understanding because we are inclined to consider them superficially. To the extent that you even read the 10 Commandments in the past, you can read them in a couple of minutes and move on to other things in Scripture, I suppose. There is also the reality that we're going to address today and correct today to merely look at them in an external sense. So for example in the second table of the law when it says, "You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal." We just look at those in the bare terms of the negative prohibition, do a quick mental checklist and think, "Okay, I'm all right. I haven't done those things with my hands or with my body and therefore all must be right with my soul," not recognizing that just those three commandments utterly expose how sinful we are.

So the thing that we need to address, the thing that we need to overcome is a sense of reading the 10 Commandments and thinking that they affirm us in our own righteousness. They do not. They do not affirm us in our own righteousness. They convict us of sin. It is like holding a mirror up after, let's just say for those of you that like to do off-road things,

think that you are out friding in a four-wheeler or a motorcycle or something in a muddy place and you've had a great time and you go and you look in the mirror and you realize there is dirt all over your face that you weren't previously aware of. The mirror exposes what the prior activity has done to you. Well, the 10 Commandments are like a mirror that hold up to your soul and show and expose the sinfulness of who you are in a way that you might not have otherwise expected. And so we need to understand that, and the analogy of the mirror does something else for us that we'll talk about in future weeks in more detail. The law cannot save you, the law can merely expose that which exposes your need for a Savior. A mirror cannot cleanse your face when it has ingrained dirt on it, and in like manner the law cannot cleanse your soul but it has a preparatory function for you to understand how greatly you need a Savior, how greatly you need to be cleansed, how much you need the Lord Jesus Christ. And I will say this toward the end of the message as well, but those who take a superficial view of the moral law as it is expressed in the 10 Commandments will necessarily have also a superficial view of the Lord Jesus Christ as well because the coming of Christ, the redemptive work of Christ was to deal with the justice of God, the wrath of God for our violations of his moral law, and if you think the moral law is not very significant, if you treat it superficially, if you don't take time considering it, then you're going to miss the entire heart of the reason that Jesus came in order to save you.

So with that little bit of introduction, I'll just give you this little, just make a summary statement here. This law is profound in its meaning and in its search and capacity of our souls. It is profound and if we haven't seen that, if we haven't somehow been struck by the significance of the law, then we've never really understood it in the first instance. The law is profound and John Calvin says this in his "Institutes of the Christian Religion," and I quote, "The moral law shows God's righteousness, that is, the righteousness alone that is acceptable to God. It warns, informs, convicts, and condemns every man of his own unrighteousness. Man, blinded and drunk with self-love, must be compelled to know and to confess his own feebleness and impurity." I'll be quoting Calvin throughout this series.

You see, our sad condition is not just that we are sinners but that we view the 10 Commandments as something less than what they are, and God's own word warns us against that lethal mistake. In Psalm 119, the writer says, "Your commandment is exceedingly broad." The meaning and the implications of God's law is very broad, it's very high, it's very deep, and so we need to understand how to interpret the 10 Commandments so that we can draw from them the spiritual instruction that God intends them to have.

What is their significance? How do they apply to you and to your heart? What do they say about you and about me? What are they revealing to us about what is real in our hearts? Even the Apostle Paul said that, "I wouldn't have known about sin except the law warned me and told me that, 'You shall not covet.'" And he found that as he contemplated that commandment, that his heart was full of all kinds of coveting that convinced him of how great his own need for Christ was. Well, if that's true of the apostle, what possible hope do we have of escaping the searching implications of the 10 Commandments and finding out how great our need for the Lord Jesus Christ is? So that's what we want to lay

out here today to give us an approach on how to approach the 10 Commandments so that we will learn them and receive them in the way that God intended.

Now commentators will list as many as 10 rules to interpret the 10 Commandments. From a preaching standpoint, that's a really attractive model. You know, 10 Commandments, 10 rules to interpret them. The parallelism of that is just really wonderful and awesome. But today, we're going to content ourselves with six, not because there's any special number, any special significance to the number of six, it's just for the sake of ease and to try to get through things today and then we'll deal with other matters as we go through them one by one in coming months.

Here is the first and, in some ways, the most important overarching principle of how to interpret the 10 Commandments and how we need to understand them, and it is this. It's going to be so brief in how we treat this and yet this is the foundation of it all. Point 1 this morning, and if you're taking notes and I encourage you to do so, write this down: the whole Bible is the context of the 10 Commandments. The whole Bible is the context of the 10 Commandments. We understand what God intended by the 10 Commandments by searching the Bible in its totality. Remember that all of Scripture is given to us by inspiration of God. All of Scripture comes to us by the mind and the moving power of the Holy Spirit upon the human writers so that there is a divine unity in everything between the covers in the 66 books of your English Bible, there is an intentional divine unity to the revelation even though we can discern different aspects of the human nature of the writers through which it came. Ultimately the Spirit of God was directing the writers of Scripture to write down exactly what God intended so that what we have in our hands is the very word of God. What that means for us is that there is a divine unity to the revelation of Scripture and the best interpreter of Scripture is the Scripture itself. We rely on the rest of Scripture to help us get our understanding of the 10 Commandments right. So that is going to be very very important. We not only look at the four corners of Exodus 20:1 to 17, or Deuteronomy 5:6 to 21, we not only look at that, we see how the rest of the Bible teaches us to understand what is contained in the four corners of those texts. And if you think about it, it could be no other way. All of the insight that is available to us in the rest of the Scripture is astonishing.

Just going chronologically here, the prophets, speaking from Isaiah through Malachi, the prophets and before that in the historical books of the Old Testament, the prophets applied the 10 Commandments to Israel in the Old Testament. You can see how God's spokesmen, his servants, the prophets, understood the 10 Commandments by the way that they applied them to Israel, and that gives us insight into what the meaning of the 10 Commandments are. Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount and in other places, expounded on the spiritual significance of the 10 Commandments and we'll look at some of his teaching later in today's message. But the prophets interpreted and applied the 10 Commandments to Israel in the Old Testament. Jesus, to his contemporary audience, took the law and said, "This is what it means. This is the spiritual significance of it." And then the apostles, as we will also see, the 12 apostles applied the 10 Commandments to the church in the New Testament.

So throughout the Bible, we have different people speaking for God, speaking in an inerrant way and applying the 10 Commandments and what they mean to the hearers of their age, now recorded for us in the Scripture for us to understand and apply in our age. So we can't just quickly run through a quick reading of the 10 Commandments and think we understand what they mean. We need to search the Scriptures to find out how the rest of the Bible tells us to understand and apply them. That will guard us from superficiality, it will guard us from legality and thinking that we can obey them in order to obtain our own salvation, and it will guard us from dismissing them as if they were something that was not relevant to the church today. What I just said there I'll address and support in a month or two, but that is a very significant matter to understand, is that the moral law revealed and expressed in the 10 Commandments, they have significance for us today even in the church and we will address that in coming times.

So point 1: the Bible is the context of the 10 Commandments and we need to search the Scriptures to understand what they mean. Now point 2: the goal of the law is love. The goal of the law is love. Now we might ask the question, you know, there's 10 Commandments and they're spoken about in different ways throughout all of the course of Scripture through the prophets, through Jesus, through the apostles, and we might ask this question: is there a unifying principle by which we could interpret the 10 Commandments that is revealed for us in Scripture? Is there something that joins these individual commands together in a way that helps us understand them? Well, first of all, we would say most certainly because all 10 of the commandments, by the word of God. They all come from God himself so there is a divine unity there. There is a divine unity in the authority of the commandments because all of the authority of God is behind all of the 10 Commandments. But beyond that, there is also this unifying principle of love vertically and horizontally that the 10 Commandments are designed to teach us and this, again in the coming weeks, I believe that this is just going to be profoundly helpful and instructive for us and do much to clarify our view of what we aim our lives at in our pursuit of sanctification as Christians.

Mark 12 and I invite you to turn to Mark 12. Mark 12:28 says this, I'll give you a moment to catch up there because I do want you to stay with me and I do want you to see these things in the text for yourselves. In addition to hearing the word, it reinforces it when you see the word with your own eyes in your own Bible. Mark 12:28, "One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that [Jesus] had answered them well, asked Him, 'What commandment is the foremost of all?' Jesus answered, 'The foremost is, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'" Quoting from Deuteronomy 6 immediately after the speaking of the 10 Commandments that we read at the beginning of the message, Moses gave that statement that Jesus quotes here in Mark 12. He goes on and says in verse 31, "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." So what Jesus has done is he has given us a divine principle by which to understand the intent of the 10 Commandments. Here is what the 10 Commandments are designed to produce in you, or here is what the 10 Commandments require of you, maybe better stated. Here is what the 10 Commandments require of you. The law can be

summarized in two summary statements. 1. Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength. And secondly, love your neighbor as yourself. He says, "The purpose of the law is to guide you and to direct you toward loving God and loving man."

And that principle, that summary principle of those two points, love the Lord your God, love your neighbor, that corresponds to the two tables of the law. The first four commandments deal with our love for God and how it is that we are to love God and how he commands us to love him. In light of how holy God is, in light of how he has revealed himself, how is it that we are to respond? The first four commandments instruct us in what that is to look like. We are not free simply to make up our own thing and just go by whatever the sentiments and emotions of our heart is in order to love God as he has revealed that he wants himself to be loved. We are to study and understand the way the first four commandments instruct us in loving him and ultimately in resting in Christ, as we'll see when we study the fourth commandment. The last six commandments starting with, "Honor your father and mother," ending with, "Do not covet your neighbor's wife," those last six commandments require love for our neighbor, Jesus says.

So this is really formative. I can't overemphasize how important this is for directing us in the way that we receive and understand the 10 Commandments, that they are teaching us not merely negative prohibitions about what we are not to do. It's easy to think in those terms because they are primarily given to us as negative prohibitions. But rather what you and I need to understand is that the law is instructing us in our positive duties toward God and toward our fellow man in the way that we are to respond to his revelation. So in that primary focus, that defining focus is the principle of love, loving God through fearing him rightly understood and loving our neighbor as it is rightly understood. And in part that's why the Apostle John in his letters could say, "I'm giving you an old commandment even as I'm giving you a new commandment, it's all wrapped around this principle of love." We studied that in 1 John in 2012 and also in 2020. So the goal of the law, what it is teaching us is to teach us how to love God and to love our neighbor.

Again, John Calvin says this. "In the first table," the first four commandments, "In the first table, God instructs us in piety and the proper duties of religion by which we are to worship His majesty. The second table prescribes how in accordance with the fear of His name, we ought to conduct ourselves in human society." Now that unifying principle of love, loving God, loving our neighbors, gives us a great sense of direction and it narrows our search for trying to get to the central meaning and the central intent of God in giving us the 10 Commandments. Somehow as we're studying them together, somehow we're looking for that which gives us direction on how to express our love, our devotion, our obedience to God, it's instructing us in that, and also it is instructing us in our relationships with one another and how we conduct ourselves in human society.

Now Scripture makes this point repeatedly. Let me just take you to a couple of other passages. Turn in your Bible to Romans 13. This unifying principle of love and in these New Testament texts that we're looking at, they focus preeminently on the second table. Look at Romans 13:8 as the Apostle Paul instructs the church for all time. He says, "Owe

nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" You see how he ties love as being the fulfillment of the law, love being that which the law requires, and so somehow in a way that we'll explore down the road, somehow when God commands you not to commit adultery, not to murder, not to steal, not to covet, and everything else that he says in the second table of the law, he is instructing you on what it looks like to love your neighbor so that the man, the woman, who commits adultery, the man or woman who is a thief, the man or woman who is a liar and a gossip, and the man or woman who carries about a covetous heart, which I just covered all of us in one way or another, those are indications that we do not love our neighbor as God commands us to do because the one who loves his neighbor would never sin in adultery, would never murder, would never steal, would never covet. And so all of these things we can see and understand. The 10 Commandments are individual applications of the greater principle of how we are to love one another.

In Galatians 5:14, you don't need to turn there, the Apostle Paul says, "the whole Law is fulfilled in one word," that is, one saying, "in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" So somehow in ways that we'll look at in the future, somehow the law is instructing us in the manner by which we are to love God and to love our neighbor, and that unifying principle will guide us.

So the context of the 10 Commandments is the whole Bible, the goal of the law is to instruct us in loving God and loving our neighbor, and we're starting to get, we're starting to build a framework by which we can approach these commandments and have a sense of confidence that we're understanding them in the proper way. Thirdly, as we continue on: the realm of the law is the heart. The realm of the law is the heart, and again this directly confronts our superficial approach to thinking about the law of God. This directly confronts and exposes the superficial boasting and self-righteousness that so many men take upon themselves, congratulating themselves on being good enough to go to heaven, being better than their fellow man, all while totally missing the point of the law which would give the lie to all of their self-conceit. You see, a proper understanding of the 10 Commandments searches your inner man in a way that nothing else can do.

And for this, let's just go back to the 10 Commandments themselves. Let's go back to Exodus 20, having achieved our purpose of showing the parallel in Deuteronomy 5, and in Exodus 20:17, it's important to see that this principle of the inner man is embedded right in the moral law itself right from the very beginning. Exodus 20:17, "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." So it takes it out of the purely agricultural agrarian realm and places it in a realm that applies throughout all of time to all of men.

And do you see, my friends, the significance of what it says in terms of what we're talking about here? In our day, let's approach it this way, in our day and age, people can

think whatever they want as long as they behave externally. If people are behaving externally, there's not much concern in society and in most realms of the church even, in terms of what's going on in a person's heart, what's going on in your mind and the things that you're thinking about and desiring and wanting in your heart. Well, when we come to the 10 Commandments, all of a sudden we are exposed to a frightening reality that says that God is commanding not only what we do but who we are on the inside. God is commanding you to be a particular person in your heart, in the way that you are inside. This just explodes in significance on our minds and thinking. You know, we think about the 10 Commandments and we want to go to, you know, we want to go to those outer things, reduce them to mere prohibitions. "Adultery, theft, I've got those covered." You're like the rich young ruler, you go and you say, "I've kept all of those things from my youth," and Scripture says, "No, you don't get it. You don't get it at all." The law governs the inner man.

The 10 Commandments themselves explicitly govern the motions of your heart, what you think about, what you desire, who you are and what you love inside regardless of what others see externally. This aspect of the law brings us naked, as it were, before a holy God and we realize that there is nothing hidden from him, and that is very convicting. All of our selfishness is laid bare and open before him. All of our lust, open, laid bare before him. All of our grudges and resentment and self-centeredness, all laid open and bare before him even if there was nothing externally by which a court of human law could convict us of any crime. The Apostle Paul said in Romans 7:14, he said, "the Law is spiritual." The law applies to the inner man. We cannot miss that point and Jesus made this plain.

Turn to Matthew 5 here. Jesus made this very very plain and in some ways, I'll probably regret not doing a whole message on just this point, that's how important it is. But Jesus in Matthew 5 does this, he explains that the law which forbids murder also forbids hatred. The law that forbids murder also forbids hatred. It is spiritual in its application. Matthew 5:21, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'" And when we think about murder, we're thinking about the slaying and taking of a human life, physically taking someone's life away from them without legal justification. But Jesus says, "But I say to you," meaning there's something more that you need to consider here about the nature of that commandment. So he says in verse 22, "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." Knock me over with a feather.

How great is the significance of that? Jesus just said in interpreting and applying the 10 Commandments to us, says that if you angrily denounce someone as a fool, you're guilty enough to go to hell. You say, "But I never killed anyone." That misses the point entirely. That kind of anger, that kind of slander is the murder of the soul. It's the soul committing murder even if the hands do not take the physical life. You see, the law is spiritual and the command against murder commits you and prohibits you from having even that thought in your heart. Now which one of us can say, "I'm innocent of that"? Which one of

us has never in anger denounced someone or harbored resentful angry feelings about life or circumstances, has ever spoken in a harsh way to another man? Which one of us is innocent of that? Which one of us has never even done that in our hearts? I won't ask for hands because there shouldn't be any hands going up.

But he goes further, Jesus does, he goes on to explain and he's illustrating things here, this isn't exhaustive, he's simply illustrating the way that the 10 Commandments apply to the heart of man so that he goes on in verse 27 and he explains that the law that forbids adultery also forbids lust in the heart. Verse 27, "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." And ladies, he's not simply talking to men here, is he? It's not like this only applies to half of humanity, what he's saying here. The fantasies and romance novels that take you into a realm of these iniquitous relationships and the mental realm of that, it's all sinful, it's all a violation of the command, "You shall not commit adultery." What we're seeing but men having said that, which one of us, which one of us has been innocent from birth until now of never having cast a wayward look into places where it should not have gone? Which one of us is innocent of that? Well, you see and understand that the law is not only commanding what you do with your body but what you do with your heart, and if you have done these things with your heart, you are guilty before God in the same way that a physical adulterer is guilty himself.

And part of the significance of it, part of the reason, part of what we will understand in weeks to come, is that the commandments are kind of a capstone of the outcome of things that are going on in your heart, so that a man who commits murder, and in all of the awful family violence that we see dominating us in acts that are done on the street and so forth, those things start in the heart with a disposition of hatred toward the one that is ultimately struck with the weapon. The act of physical adultery is the culmination of things that began in the heart so that the law is commanding not only the finality of the sin and the physical expression of the sin, the law is forbidding the initial motions, the initial desires that ultimately lead to it, and we start to understand that the law is spiritual and somewhere in our minds there should be developing this thought, friends, we're in a lot of trouble here. This is not good. If the law means that and I'm like this, then there's a problem here that causes me to wake up and take things seriously.

Turn to Matthew 15 and we see that God's law operates in the realm of the heart. It's the heart, the heart, the heart. It's like the word of God comes and it shouts, "It's the heart!" And then there is a resounding echo to drive it deeper into our being, "It's the heart, the heart, the heart, the heart."

Matthew 15:18. Jesus said, "the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man." And you see Jesus giving these summary statements just in a single word referring to different aspects of the 10 Commandments and he says why there are murders and adulteries and thefts and slanders? It's coming out of the heart. And so the

law judges and condemns the heart of men, judges and condemns every one of us at the level of the heart, at the very core of who you are. That's the problem.

Let's think about this theologically for just a moment and we'll realize that it could be no other way. This is absolutely unavoidable. God is a spirit, John 4:24, and God is an invisible spirit, and as an invisible spirit, he knows the invisible thoughts and intentions of the heart. The God who created you, my friend, the God who made you in the body, is the same God who established the inner man as a component of humanity, and he who regulates and knows the body also knows the inner man and we are laid bare before him with what we do with our hands, what we say with our lips, and what we think with our minds, and what we desire in our hearts, and it's all to be holy, without blame, and none of us meet that standard. You see, because God is a spirit and he knows the thoughts and intentions of our heart, it is fitting and it is obvious that therefore his law, the 10 Commandments, cover the realm of his entire knowledge. The fact that you hide it from men does not vindicate you before God. That only adds to, the hypocrisy of that only adds to and multiplies our guilt.

So the law speaks to the heart. That is the realm in which the law applies. The Puritan Thomas Watson said this, he says, "The law of God forbids not only the act of sin but the desire and inclination." Just as a brief sideline that needs to be said in our modern culture and to many within the church, the approach that tries to compromise with the prevalent sin and acceptance of the sin of homosexuality in our society that says that as long as you don't commit the physical act or you don't actually fall into lust, the orientation itself is not sinful, beloved, do not embrace that. Don't go there. That is wrong because if the act is wrong and the lust is wrong, the orientation that produces it is wrong before God also. It's all condemned. Those of us that are not inclined in that way, the orientation to be a lustful person is not vindicated by the fact that you don't act upon it. Scripture deals at the fundamental level of the heart and to try to excuse in the name of an orientation because it's consistent with the spirit of our age, to try to do that is to eviscerate, is to cut out the very point that the law is making and what Jesus expresses in multiple places in the New Testament. We can't go there. The law forbids not only the act of sin but the desire and inclination itself.

So we come to our fourth point this morning. We've seen that the Bible is the context of the 10 Commandments, the goal of the law is love, the realm of the law is the heart, and kind of following on the third point comes our fourth point: the law intends more than is expressly spoken. Point number 4: the law intends more than is expressly spoken. We've already seen this in what Jesus said. You know, you've heard that you shall not murder, well, let me talk to you about hate. You've heard the law speak about adultery, let me speak to you about lust. The law covers more than just what the bare words in an individual verse express. And keeping consistent with our principles of interpretation, Scripture interprets the "more" for us. Scripture helps us understand where else the law goes so that, I'm going to cover this really briefly here, for example, in Exodus 20:12, we read the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and mother." Well, Jesus applies that command in Matthew 15 to tell his hearers that that commandment means that you are to provide for your parents in their old age, and that that is included within the realm of that

commandment. In dealing with the principles of fathers and mothers, Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 5, to honor the older church members and to interact with them as fathers, the older women as mothers, so that Scripture tells us and helps us to see that this principle of honoring our parents is actually a principle about honoring authority in a way that applies beyond the immediate blood relationship with the people who gave physical life to you. There's a principle that applies within the church, within society. The law, it tends more than it is expressly spoken and we'll see this as we study the individual commandments as they come. I'm just laying out basic things right now, trying to both help you see the breadth of these things without causing you to drown in the process.

Fifthly: the law has negative and positive implications. The law has negative and positive implications. This is amazing and it could be no other way, and this opens up a realm of understanding that is remarkable. When God's law, when God's moral law forbids an evil, it requires also a corresponding good, and if it requires a good, it forbids the corresponding evil. So that if it says, "Honor your father and mother," that means that there are positive duties associated with that, and in a negative way it also restrains you from cursing your parents or being disobedient to them, you know, as a young child. You get the idea. Positive statement in the law but a corresponding evil also forbidden. And in the same way, the logic of this is clear but it takes maybe a few moments to get your mind around it, in the same way, I'm going to illustrate this for you, if the law forbids you from doing something, it's also requiring you to do a positive good so that, here's an illustration taken straight from Scripture, so that Exodus 20:7, the first table of the law says, "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain." Don't use the name of God in a careless manner. Don't swear falsely. Be aware that the name of God requires reverence and don't use it in a flippant superficial way. Okay, that's clear enough but do you realize that that also means that there is a positive correspondence to that in the way that you do use it? Don't use it in vain means that you use it in a God-honoring way so that as Jesus opens his teaching on prayer in Matthew 6, the first thing that he instructs us to do in prayer is this, "Father, hallowed be Your name." So it's not just that I refrain from using his name in a flippant way, I understand that the name of God is that by which I address him and I seek the glory of his name in prayer and with the totality of my life. Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God, do all to the glory of his name. You sanctify his name with positive conduct, positive inclinations of your heart, positive words, not simply refraining from saying nothing.

Let's think about it this way. "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain." You say, "Well, okay, then I'm not going to say anything." What is that? "I won't use his name at all." Well, isn't it obvious, it is to me, isn't it obvious that that would be a violation of the command? Think about it this way, those of you that are married or want to be married. Can you imagine having a spouse and you say, "I'm never going to say a bad word to my spouse." Okay, and that's fine. "But at the same time, I'm not going to say anything good either." Would you think that that was a loving healthy relationship that you simply refrain from speaking things that were destructive while saying nothing that was good and loving and encouraging and affirming? The negative and the positive go together. It's two sides of one coin. The same thing with the law of God. So we understand this negative and positive implication.

There's another aspect of it that Scripture also teaches us. In Exodus 20:15 it says, "You shall not steal." You just think, "Okay, I'll just refrain from taking something that doesn't belong to me and I'm good," right? Uh-uh. It doesn't work that way. Turn to the book of Ephesians 4. And if you can hang in with me here, we're almost done. Ephesians 4:28, keeping in mind the commandment, "You shall not steal." Look at what the inspired writer, the Apostle Paul says about the significance of that commandment as he applies it to the church. He says in verse 28, "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather," positive implication, "he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need." The law against theft means that a person doesn't live off the generosity of others when he's an able-bodied person. An able-bodied person has a positive duty on himself to support himself, to work for his living, to secure living not only for himself but that he might have an overflow that he's able to share with others, all of that being held in seed form in the original commandment. By commanding us not to steal, it is instructing us to provide for ourselves so that we aren't taking from others when we have the ability to do so in our own being. A positive implication written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit about a negative prohibition, do you see it? I'm just giving you illustrations. This is woven throughout each one of the 10.

So we step back, we're getting introduced, this is just an introduction today. We're just getting introduced to the fact what the psalmist said in Psalm 119. "Your law, Your commandment, O God, it must be exceedingly broad. These things can't be avoided. These things from Scripture can't be denied. They're right there on the surface. Your law is exceedingly broad."

Finally, point 6: the law is an integrated whole. The law is an integrated whole. The spirit of the commandments is woven together like a seamless garment. You can't tear one out without breaking everything. Look at James, the book of James after the book of Hebrews. In James 2 beginning in verse 8, it says, "If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not commit murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law." So it doesn't do to take a superficial view of select commandments and say, "I haven't committed adultery and I haven't murdered anybody, therefore I've fulfilled what God requires." I used to think that way in my non-Christian days. What an awful way to think. What a silly superficial way to think and that's what I did, not understanding that what Scripture says is this: every sin is a violation of the authority of God. Every sin is an assault and a rebellion against his holiness regardless of which one you actually break.

So what Scripture teaches us is that we must view the law as a unity and just like a big window in a department store, if you throw one rock through the pane of glass, you've shattered the whole thing. The whole thing is broken and can't be put back together again.

Just one rock breaking the whole pane, just one sin breaking the entirety of the law of God.

Even these six principles are a lot to take in, aren't they? Aren't you glad I went with six and not 10? Let's think through the implications of what this means for us and what this means about the Lord Jesus Christ as we close.

Philip Ryken in his book titled "Written in Stone," said this, he said, "The 10 Commandments are much more impossible to obey than most people have ever imagined." I would put it this way: a superficial view of the law undeniably, inevitably, directly leads to a superficial view of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you think the law is not that big of a deal, it's not going to be that big of a deal that Christ died to forgive you of your transgressions of the law.

Let's look at it from another perspective. How can you measure the greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ? What is another perspective that grants us an elevated esteem of who he is? It's this, is that he never once sinned against a law as exceedingly broad as that. He kept this moral law of God, he kept the 10 Commandments without a single transgression. He didn't sin against it once. Scripture makes that plain that he was without sin. Against this law that we have looked through, the law inside and out, this law positive and negative, this law requiring perfect love to God and to men, oh, the searching capacity of it all that devastates us, Christ kept perfectly without sin. And more than that, Jesus Christ in fulfilling all that the law requires, paid the penalty that it inflicts for the sins of others, those that believe in him. Christ fulfilled the law in satisfying all of the punishment that the law of God requires for its transgressions so he kept it perfectly in positive righteousness, and then not having committed any sin of his own that required penalty, on behalf of his people he paid the price, the penalty of what the law requires when he shed his blood on the cross. Astonishing. You and I, we do not have the righteousness that God requires and his law makes that plain and undeniable to us. We don't have that righteousness but Jesus Christ does.

Ryken goes on to say, "The 10 Commandments cover everything. They rule us inside as well as outside. They are positive as well as negative. The more clearly we understand what God's law requires, the more clearly we understand that we need the grace that God has provided for us in Jesus Christ. Christ died for our sins against God and our sins against humanity. Christ died for our idolatry, profanity, and adultery. Christ died for our lying, stealing and murder. Christ died for our sins both inside and out. The more we understand the implications of God's law, the more grateful we are for the grace of God in the atoning death of Jesus Christ."

My friends, Jesus Christ alone is the way, the truth and the life. Jesus Christ alone has perfectly kept this searching demanding law. Jesus Christ alone can satisfy what God requires from you in his law. And this righteousness that Christ has that you lack is received not by works but by humble repentant faith. I ask you whether you freely acknowledge in your heart before God and before men that you are a transgressor of this law of God? Do you confess that? Is that central to your self-identification, "I am a

transgressor of the law of God"? It starts there. Do you recognize that Christ alone is the one who meets what this law requires? And have you come to Christ in humble faith in order to receive his righteousness as a gift to satisfy what God requires from you? The law instructs us in all these things. May God help us to understand it as we proceed in the weeks to come.

Let's pray together.

O Father, Your law is exceedingly broad. We pray that You might graciously use it to convict sinners of their need of Christ. We pray that You might help us recognize the surpassing supremacy of Christ, the One who fulfilled this law not only in His own sake but for us, on our behalf. He did what we could not do and did not do and never would have done. O Lord Jesus, we honor You today for Your perfect righteousness. We honor You for imputing that righteousness to us when we receive You by faith. We honor You for fulfilling the penalty that the law requires and we see more clearly than ever that without You, we would have been miserably lost throughout all of eternity. So help us all at whatever state and stage of spiritual need that we are in, O God, we ask You to help us see how the law convicts us, points us to Christ where we find our spiritual rest. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.