
10 UNDERSTANDING & OBEYING ^{THE}
COMMANDMENTS

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DISCUSSION SERIES**

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1.

THE COMMANDMENTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

I suppose a good place to start with a study of the 10 Commandments is to examine their relevance for us today. When discussing this topic the most obvious question for Christians is the following:

As a Christian in the 21st century, what value do the 10 Commandments have for me?

God gave the 10 Commandments to Moses approximately 3,400 years ago while the Jewish people were escaping Egyptian slavery and traveling to their promised land (now called Israel). They consisted of 10 succinct commands that are divided into two categories: the first four have to do with man's duty to God and the last six have to do with man's duty in treating other people.

They are listed in Exodus 20:1-17:

¹ Then God spoke all these words, saying,

² "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

³ You shall have no other gods before Me.

⁴ "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. ⁵ You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of

those who hate Me, ⁶ but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

⁷ "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.

⁸ "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. ¹¹ "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

¹² "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

¹³ "You shall not murder.

¹⁴ "You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ "You shall not steal.

¹⁶ "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

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."

We will go over each of these individually in the chapters to come, but for this chapter let's get back to the question of their relevancy to the modern Christian - What value do these commands have for me today?

The answer is in Romans 3:19-20:

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth

may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God;

²⁰ because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

The commandments are God's instrument to reveal sin and its consequences.

For the non-Christian, this is important because only when he is aware of his sins and their consequences does he begin to seek forgiveness - not before.

The true danger of the post-modern idea that there is no sin is that this causes one not to look for the solution to sin, which is Christ. For the Christian, the commandments are important because even though his sins are forgiven at baptism, he needs to know about sin and how to deal with it on a daily basis in order to grow in Christ. This growth process is called sanctification. The greatest confusion in the mind of a new Christian is the misunderstanding of the difference between salvation and sanctification.

Salvation is a onetime event where God, because of His grace, forgives us of all of our sins. This takes place when we express our faith in Jesus through repentance and baptism. At this point all of our sins are gone forever and we are saved from going to hell. We are never more saved than the day we are baptized; it is a one time, once for all-time event (Acts 2:38; Romans 8:1).

Sanctification, on the other hand, is the way God, through His Word and Spirit, matures us in Christ. At baptism we are saved or born again. These terms mean the same thing and describe the same event. Sanctification, however, describes the process where a Christian grows up to become like Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Knowing about sinfulness therefore is important for both of these. This is where the commandments come in. You have to be aware of sin and its consequence before you seek salvation.

The commandments describe clearly and pointedly the moral failure in our lives and warn us of the consequences.

Once saved, you need to be aware of sin and its effects in order to deal with it in your own life and minister to others who are struggling with it as well. The commandments and all the material in the Bible that refer to them help us diminish and eliminate the influence of sinfulness in our lives.

We are not earning our salvation when we struggle with sin each day. Jesus has already done this with His death on the cross (1 Corinthians 1:29-31). When we struggle with sin we are following in the steps of Jesus as faithful disciples who are being sanctified through this process.

Sanctification is important because in Christianity as in natural life, you grow or you die. It is not enough for a little baby to be born, that baby has to develop physically and emotionally or else it will die as a baby. It is the same with Christians, it is not enough that we are born again in the waters of baptism, we must grow up in Christ or else we will shrivel up, become sickly and die.

The 10 Commandments are God's tools to help conceive and deliver us as Christian babes - and then promote normal healthy growth to spiritual adulthood.

The 10 Commandments and You

When the commandments point out sin in our lives (what they are supposed to do) here are some helpful ways to respond positively:

1. Don't be afraid or upset

No one likes to have their faults pointed out, but remember this is God talking to you and He has a right to do this because He has no faults. Try to see this as an opportunity to eliminate something that is stopping your progress in Christ.

2. Be honest with God

If there is sin in your life, admit it to Him. This is always the first step in combating sin in your life. You cannot grow if you do not abandon sin, you cannot abandon sin if you do not acknowledge its existence first. If you are honest with God, He will not only forgive you (1 John 1:7-9), He will give you the strength you need to deal with this sin from now on.

3. Be patient

It takes a long time to win over certain sins in our lives. The commandments only point out sin, they do not solve the problems - Jesus does this and He does it in His own way and time. It does not all happen in one day. Jesus freely gives us salvation and promises to be with us each day as we grow up into Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Did you learn the 10 Commandments as a child / adult?
2. Did you ever take them "personally"?
3. Has any one of the 10 Commandments seemed particularly important or meaningful to you over the others?
4. Was there any sin you were especially relieved to be forgiven at baptism? Can you share?
5. What do you feel is the biggest obstacle stopping Christians from growing in Christ?
6. How do you react when God points out one of your sins?
7. Would you be willing to memorize the 10 Commandments?

2.

GOD FIRST AND ONLY

THE 1ST COMMANDMENT

In the first chapter we said that the purpose of the 10 Commandments was to expose sin and its consequences (Romans 3:19-20). Their relevance to us as Christians is that they guide us in the process of eliminating sin from our lives and this process is called *sanctification*. And so, non-Christians need the commandments to convince them of sin so they may find Christ; and Christians need the commandments to guide them towards spiritual maturity. In this chapter we begin the actual study of the commandments themselves.

¹ Then God spoke all these words, saying,

² "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

³ "You shall have no other gods before Me.

- Exodus 20:1-3

The Jews are in the desert after having left Egypt and God calls both Moses and his brother Aaron to come up the mountain to hear what God had prepared for them.

vs. 1 - Note that the Bible takes care to say that God Himself is speaking. These commands are not man's invention or ideas. They are a report of what God has spoken directly to man.

vs. 2 - God first declares who He is and the power that He has, and where it has been demonstrated. He reveals His name, Jehovah the self-existent, eternal one. The Jews had so much

respect for God's name that they did not pronounce it. The Jews were moved to believe who God said He was --The Lord (Jehovah/self existent and eternal/Thy God Elohim the Supreme God) because of what God did to the Egyptians.

- Turn a river to blood.
- Destroy every first born in the land on a given night.
- Separate the sea.

The power He demonstrated gave Him credibility, His credibility gave Him the authority to establish and make laws as well as demand that they be kept or face punishment. This is the sequence:

Power → Credibility → Authority → Sovereignty

vs. 3 - Based on this premise, the first command demands that people have only Him as God. He does not want to be first among many but rather the only one worshiped as God. The Jews had many different gods and this command is a demand to abandon all other gods and worship and obey only the God who gives these commandments; only the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Why this is a commandment

What is the reason for this commandment, why would worshipping other gods be harmful?

1. Worshipping other gods offends God.

To recognize something or someone else as the source of life and the world is offensive to the one who gives life. It also robs a person of the opportunity to build a relationship with God, the true God.

2. Worshipping other gods is dangerous.

When people worship something other than God, they are in effect, relying on something that has no power to save them or help them. Sincere and zealous worship of an idol or an idea of god that is false can never replace worship of the true God.

Because He is good, God sustains and blesses such people for a time on this earth, but eventually they lose the greater blessing of heaven.

If you do not worship the true God on earth, you will not worship Him in heaven either.

How do people today break this commandment?

1. Non-Christians

Those who do not worship God through His Son Jesus Christ break the 1st commandment.

⁹For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- Philippians 2:9-10

The way to glorify the Father is through the Son. Note that Jesus has been given the Name of God therefore anyone who doesn't worship Christ as God has broken the 1st commandment. Some honor Christ, but not as God like the Muslims for instance.

2. Christians - Those who are devoted to or controlled by someone/something else other than Christ break the 1st commandment. For example:

- Matthew 27:1-10 - Judas loved money more than he loved the cross and Jesus.
- Acts 5:1-11 - Ananias and Sapphira loved the approval of others and prestige more than they loved the service to Christ.
- Colossians 4:14 and II Timothy 4:9-10 - Demas loved the activity and pleasures offered by this world more than he loved the body of Jesus which is the church.

Each one of these began well as Christians but like the parable of the seed teaches, things got in the way of following Christ. Sometimes it is the fear of persecution or lack of faith that causes the fall - like Judas. Sometimes it is our own pride that will not allow us to humble ourselves and submit to Christ and His teachings that lead us away from Him - like Ananias and Sapphira. Most of the time it is the allure of the world - its pleasurable activities, the drawing power of sin or the never ending demands it makes on our time that slowly draw us away from following Jesus.

The reason we encourage brothers and sisters to make the church and service to it such a high priority is because God has made Jesus the head of the body, which is the church. Much of our interaction with Christ is exercised and experienced through our relationship with the church. If we are faithful and serving the body, then we are faithful and serving the head of the body which is Christ - who is God - the only and true God to be worshiped and served.

How do we avoid breaking the 1st Commandment?

1. For a non-believer it is the belief and obedience to the gospel of Christ that brings one into the first stage of compliance. This is why we confess our faith when baptized. We are saying that we believe that Jesus is not only God but that He is the only true God and that there are no others. Our worship of God begins with our faith in Christ.

2. For Christians our compliance to this commandment grows and increases as we submit to the Lordship of Christ in every area of our lives. When Christ grows in His sovereignty over my financial and business decisions as well as my family matters and worship life, I am more deeply worshiping the only true God.

⁴⁴ And Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in Me, does not believe in Me but in Him who sent Me. ⁴⁵ He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me. ⁴⁶ I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness. ⁴⁷ If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not

judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. ⁴⁸ He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. ⁴⁹ For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."
- John 12:44-50

We can know how to make Christ Lord of every aspect of our lives because His word guides us and will judge us as well.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When addressing God in prayer or praise, what "name" (Lord, Father, God, etc.) do you use most frequently? Why?
2. What is the greatest difference you see between the God of the Old Testament and of the New Testament?
3. Do Muslims or Hindus, for example, derive any benefit from their worship of their concept of God? What would it be?
4. When did you realize that Jesus was actually God? What or who did you think He was before?
5. Have you ever "fallen away" from Christ, and if so, why and what brought you back?
6. What area of your life tends to rebel against Christ's Lordship? How do you bring it into submission?

3.

IDOL AND LIKENESS

THE 2ND COMMANDMENT

We are studying the 10 Commandments with the objective of truly understanding and more perfectly obeying them as a way of growing in sanctification as Christians. Disobedience to the commandments put Jesus on the cross. Understanding this is not only what brings sinners to the cross but keeps Christians at the cross. In this chapter we will be looking at the second commandment.

⁴ “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. ⁵ You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, ⁶ but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

- Exodus 20:4-6

Note that there is the prohibition and the consequences. This commandment addresses the "mode" of worship not the "object" of worship.

vs. 4 - Note that the command does not just say kneel, or pray to, but actually "make" such things. An "idol" is a manmade object that represents what man thinks or imagines God is like. A "likeness" is an object in nature that represents God.

vs. 5 - You shall not create or make these things for the following purposes:

- Worship purposes - to offer devotion, prayer, trust or love to these objects and what you think they represent. The worship or reverence of Mary or the saints as represented by pictures or statues is a form of idolatry.
- Serving purposes - to serve as priest or disciple in temples or shrines for example.

A lot of people say that they do not worship the statue, they worship what the statue represents, but the 2nd commandment says that we must not ever use a statue or image in worshipping God.

The consequences - Exodus 20:5-6

God will punish those who break this command. It's a promise; you cannot do this with impunity. And if you teach your children these things, they also will be punished and the punishment will occur in every generation that this sin is practiced without exception. Those, however, who obey the command, will set into motion a faith that can be blessed and multiplied. The idea here is that the effects of disobedience last only a few generations until these people are cut off altogether, but obedience guarantees life for a people - even to 1,000 generations.

How do people break this commandment?

A. Old Testament

We have many examples of pagans (Baal worship) as well as Jews (golden calf) creating objects to worship or offering worship to nature (Egyptians → Sun).

B. New Testament

Non-Christians – The same type of Old Testament idolatry exists today in Eastern religions: Hindus burn fires before little statues. Muslims touch a sacred stone at Mecca. The statue of the Buddha is revered. Even in the West we have examples of this: Mormons consider their temples sacred. Roman Catholics still use imagery in worship and devotion. Some environmentalists consider the earth sacred and serve it as one serves God. The practice of occultism, witchcraft, sorcery and divination are all forms of idolatry because they seek and serve a spiritual power that is not from God.

Christians - Aside from being subject to these things, Christians can also be caught up in idolatry in the following ways:

A. Resistance to God's Will/Word

For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,
He has also rejected you from being king.
- I Samuel 15:23

Saul disobeyed Samuel's instructions regarding the destruction of the Amalekites. When he was corrected by Samuel he continued to justify his behavior. Resisting the Spirit or the direct Word of God is a form of idolatry because it establishes our will, our thoughts and our image of self as supreme over us. We end up serving our own will above God's will.

B. Greed

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body

as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire,
and greed, which amounts to idolatry.
- Colossians 3:5

Paul warns that greed (the insatiable desire for more) is a form of idolatry. Greed moves us to set up the satisfaction of our desire as our "god." We focus our energy and love on the people, things and possessions we desire. We lavish our love and attention on them when we get them. Greed keeps us in a never-ending cycle of yearning, earning and yearning again.

This world is full of temptations to idolatry because it offers many alternatives to God's Word as the basis for living. We are constantly stimulated to be dissatisfied with what we have and yearn for more or "newer." Whether it is a new type of laundry detergent or a new spouse.... we are always encouraged to desire something more or different than what we already have.

How to better obey this commandment.

1. Keep your eyes and heart focused on Christ

because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of
which you previously heard in the word of truth, the
gospel
- Colossians 1:5

Prayer, worship, study and service to Christ will guarantee that we will know and serve the true God and walk in His ways. The more we know and see Christ, the more we know and see the Father (for if you have seen Christ, you have seen the Father - John 14:9). The more we know Christ the less likely we will fall into idolatry and worship another, including sinful self.

2. Be content with what you have

⁵ Make sure that your character is free from the love of

money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," ⁶ so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?"
- Hebrews 13:5-6

The antidote to greed is contentment, and the way to contentment has 3 steps:

1. Recognize that all we have is from God - you did not produce it and without His blessings you would not have acquired it - this is true whether a person acknowledges it or not.
2. Practice giving thanks.
 - The giving of thanks to God is what sanctifies (purifies for our use) what we have - I Timothy 4:4.
 - Being grateful and showing our gratitude for what we have neutralizes the temptation to constantly yearn for more or newer.
3. Trust God's portion.
 - God knows both what you need and how much you need, even before you realize it.
 - Greed moves us to search for and acquire more than what we need and thus reject God's will in this area of our lives.
 - This is why people cannot satisfy themselves even with more, bigger or newer. Satisfaction comes by accepting and doing God's will.

And so, to obey the 2nd commandment regarding idolatry let us keep our focus on the Lord and let us learn to be content with what we have.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What "idols" have been most prevalent in your life?
2. Some think that having a "cross" in the church building is idolatrous. Do you agree? Why?
3. What prevents you from having a steady and clear focus on Christ?
4. Why is "contentment" so difficult to achieve and easy to lose?
5. What is the hardest thing to trust God with in your life?

4.

THE HOLY NAME

THE 3RD COMMANDMENT

The 10 Commandments were referred to in various ways in the Old Testament:

- The "words" - Ezekiel 20:1
- "Words of the Covenant" - Deuteronomy 5:22

We read in Exodus 31:18 that they were written by God Himself and given to Moses at Mount Sinai. Moses returned from the mountain and found the people worshipping a golden calf fashioned by non-other than Aaron, Moses' brother. Exodus 32:15-16 says that Moses, in anger, broke the tablets containing God's commands.

God gave Moses a second set which were eventually deposited in the Ark of the Covenant which was kept in the Holy of Holies (Exodus 34:1; 40:20). These were eventually lost.

There are different opinions as to how the commandments were separated on the tablets. The concept that some commandments were on one stone and the others were on another led many to imagine how they may have been. The custom at the time for the declaration of laws by a king was that two copies were made. One for the king and one for the people.

Scholars are fairly certain that according to the custom of the period, God fashioned two tablets of stone with all 10 Commandments on a single tablet front and back. Both were then put into the ark which symbolized the place where God and man met.

Augustine (4th century theologian) supposed that there were three on one and seven on the other. He was the one who grouped the 1st and 2nd commands into one command and

divided the 10th into two commands - a division Roman Catholics use to this day.

Later Protestant theologians (Calvin in the 16th century) as well as modern scholars have grouped them into four and six on respective tablets. This accommodates length, divides the duties to God and man, and also reduces well to two basic commands as Jesus said in Matthew 22:34.

Augustine / Roman Catholic	Calvin / Protestant
God/Images - 1	God - 1
Name - 2	Images - 2
Sabbath - 3	Name - 3
Parents - 4	Sabbath - 4
Murder - 5	Parents - 5
Adultery - 6	Murder - 6
Theft - 7	Adultery - 7
Lies - 8	Theft - 8
Covet Goods - 9	Lies - 9
Covet Wife - 10	Covet - 10

Division notwithstanding, these were not totally new ideas. The commands concerning the treatment of others were already incorporated in Egyptian legal codes. The command to respect

God's "name" was also followed by the more enlightened cultures in their religious practice.

What was truly new were the 1st, 2nd, and 4th commands:

- To worship only one God because only one existed - this was new.
- To refrain from characterizing God with idols and images - this was new.
- To set aside a particular day every week for the worship of God - this was new and particular to the Jewish people.

Altogether the commandments summarized the basic moral responsibilities men had towards each other and introduced the true nature of God and an acceptable way of addressing Him. All of this was given to man with the accompaniment of miracles to confirm the truth.

Let us now turn our attention to the 3rd commandment.

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.
- Exodus 20:7

Note another command that states the ordinance and the punishment for failure to comply.

Names in Jewish Culture

To properly understand this command we have to understand the role of names in Jewish and other ancient cultures. For these people (as well as indigenous cultures here in America) a person's name represented his heritage, his character as well as his role in the community. The name was given with this in mind.

- Eve: "the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20) or "life-giver"

- Abraham: "Father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5)
- Jesus: Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua which means "Jehovah saves"

This focus on names is less prevalent in our society, but it is nevertheless still important. How many would name your sons Adolph or your daughters Jezebel? How many of you have names that mean something or represent someone we love or remember? Even for us today names are meaningful and important.

The Name of God

God revealed His name, Jehovah, to the Jews. This name in Hebrew means "self-existent/eternal." The name implies not only who God is but also denotes His nature, His power and His authority among other things. Because He is what His name represents, the 3rd Commandment requires us to use that name, as well as other references to Him, with respect.

The inference is that to use references (like God's name) without respect is to disrespect God Himself and God promises to punish those who do so. People who have unusual or complex family names can relate. If you make fun of their name, you make fun of them. Because God is supreme and unique as God, anything that lacks respect is an offense to Him.

How do we break this commandment?

We do it in a variety of ways:

1. Using God's Name to witness in frivolous matters.

- "I swear to God, I'll be there on time"
- "This is the best _____ under heaven"

This does not mean we cannot take an oath using God as our witness (e.g. oath of office/marriage/court). These are serious things and we are asking God to witness and help us carry out our duties and responsibilities. In these cases we are not using His name to validate ourselves or our witness.

It is a serious offense to violate an oath or covenant that we have asked God to witness. The patriarchs in the Old Testament saw the value and seriousness of oaths and covenants - so much so that they took God as witness when they made a promise or offered a blessing.

In Matthew 5:37 when Jesus teaches on oaths, He is instructing the people to allow their word as Christians to be their bond in everyday matters (let your yes be yes, no be no) and to not take God as witness to their everyday affairs which would be disrespectful to Him and His name - and dishonest on their part.

2. Using God's Name in careless or disrespectful ways.

Using God's name in "exclamations" that are not in context of worship or study. For example:

- "Oh my God" / "My Lord"
- "For God's sake"
- "For the Love of God"
- "Oh Jesus"

Using it in coarse ways or to curse.

- Making fun of God/Christ
- Using God or Jesus' name in swearing/cursing
- Euphemisms ("sounds like")
 - Jeez (Jesus) Jiminy Christmas
 - Gosh (God)
- Words that sound like "Christ"

These are simply habits that are hard to break.

How do we keep this commandment?

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

...and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

- Ephesians 4:29; 5:4

Eliminate those words, phrases and verbal habits that disrespect God. Replace them with words, phrases and verbal habits that show faith, respect and gratitude. For example: "Praise God," as an exclamation for happiness or encouragement.

¹ In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. ² Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory."

⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. ⁵ Then I said,

"Woe is me, for I am ruined!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I live among a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. ⁷ He touched my mouth with it and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven."

- Isaiah 6:1-7

Isaiah's glimpse of the heavenly glory moved him to see the sinfulness of his lips (even though he was an extremely pious and educated Jew). People who do not know God are usually the ones who break this command. The more we know and interact with God through Christ, the more we want to honor Him with our lips. We do not take the Lord's name in vain if we are continually using our lips to praise, thank, tell and talk to Him in Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the #1 way that you have seen this command broken in the:
 - a. Media
 - b. Work/School
 - c. Church
 - d. Family
 - e. Your life

2. How can we help others keep this command?

3. Write a prayer of praise that uses 100 words.
Read it back to the group.

5.

THE SABBATH REST

THE 4TH COMMANDMENT

² By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. ³ Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

- Genesis 2:2-3

God did not "rest," He ceased His work of creating. "Sabbath" means cessation or rest. "Blessed" in the sense that no further creation was done, the creation stood in its glory giving favor to God by its very existence.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

- Exodus 20:8

The purpose of the command was to give God's people a specific time to worship God. This would be a time to renew the soul as well as the body, a time to permit the worship of God without the pressure of work. This was a new social concept.

Jewish worship was complex and time consuming and this command allowed the time to perform it. No work was permitted on this day, only caring for the sick, priestly functions or rescue of endangered livestock was permitted. By New Testament times when Jesus appeared (1,400 years after the command was given) this ordinance had become more of a curse than a blessing. Instead of a simple day of worship without the pressure of work, the rabbis (or teachers of the Law) had

created so many complications for the "no work" rules that the pleasure and purpose of the day was lost.

There were 39 different categories of things that constituted work and thus were prohibited. For example, a tailor could not carry his needles home on the Sabbath, or one could not walk further than one mile from home.

This type of legalism bred a counter-legalistic mindset in order to get around the rules. For example, a person would walk a mile with his sandals on and then to be in compliance, would remove his sandals to walk further.

Of course this adding of rules and resistance to compliance missed the central idea behind the command.

Principle Behind the Commandment

The 4th commandment was given because God wants man to honor Him with his time. The first four commands deal with how man is to honor God:

1. Honor God by making Him first.
2. Honor God by lifting Him above all.
3. Honor God with our lips.
4. Honor God with our time.

We measure our existence in time. This command required man to honor God with the currency of his existence - time. The Sabbath enabled man to channel his time away from work/business and devote it to God. Man needs sleep, food, exercise, etc. but also needs to worship.

Our sinful nature tends to work and play rather than worship and so this command was given to help man keep the healthy balance between what is physical and what is spiritual. In addition to this, God's perfect and holy nature demands a response from His creation and that response is worship. This command reveals and guarantees that man will receive the blessings of worship.

The Sabbath and the New Testament

One question, or for some groups, challenge, is why Christians observe Sunday as their day of worship and not Saturday as the 4th Commandment required. The "short" answer is that God Himself has revealed to us in a variety of ways that Sunday is to be the special day of worship for Christians in the New Testament era.

Jesus, through His Apostles, has given us this teaching and He has a right to do so because He is "the Lord of the Sabbath," Matthew 12:8. Jesus rules the Sabbath and directs us to worship Him on Sundays. We know this from many sources:

1. It was the day God chose for His resurrection - Matthew 16:9.

2. It was the day He established the church:

Acts 2:1-ff - Pentecost was fifty days from Passover Saturday - it is how we know Pentecost was on a Sunday.

Pentecost Sunday was also the day that the Apostles received power; the gospel was first proclaimed; 3,000 baptized and the Holy Spirit given.

No significant act or blessing occurred on a Saturday after the resurrection.

3. Sunday was the first day that the Lord's Supper was shared after the resurrection - Acts 2:42; 20:7 and continued to be thereafter.

4. It is the day which Jesus selected His name be associated with. Revelations 1:10 "...in the Spirit on the Lord's day."

There are some who argue that we should keep the Sabbath - even have religious organizations built around this idea (7th Day Adventists). They have "arguments" supporting their ideas, here are some and the response to them:

A. The Pope changed the true worship day (Saturday) to Sunday and therefore Sunday is not legitimate.

It is true that Constantine made an edict/law making Sunday the official worship day in the Roman Empire; however, Christians were worshipping on Sundays long before it was made law (Acts 20:7).

B. The 10 Commandments are God's Word and not to be changed - including the 4th one about the Sabbath.

The New Testament shows that this premise is incorrect:

- II Corinthians 3:7-8 says the Law was ultimately to be done away with.
- II Corinthians 3:13 - Paul refers to the Law that was abolished in his own lifetime.
- Matthew 5:18 - The Law remained in force until all would be fulfilled.
- Colossians 2:14 - All was fulfilled at the cross.
- John 19:30 - Jesus declared that all was finished or fulfilled.
- Romans 6:14 - Christians are under the Law of grace.

Every principle contained in the Law concerning man's duty to God and to man is repeated by Jesus in the New Testament, even the one about man's duty to worship. The Sermon on the Mount contains Jesus' expanded teaching on the Law.

However, the New Testament reveals to us that the purpose of the Law is to reveal sin and lead us to Christ - Romans 3:20; Galatians 3:24. Once we are in Christ, we are guided by His word (John 12:48) and His word directs us how and when we should worship. We worship God through Christ and the day Christ's disciples have been given to gather for worship is Sunday.

C. We should observe both the Sabbath and the Lord's Day.

The New Testament makes no mention of the Sabbath in connection with Christ and worship or observances. What was done on the Sabbath prior to Christ's coming was done in anticipation of His arrival. Now that He has come and fulfilled all things, there is no longer any religious significance for the things formerly done on the Sabbath. Also, let's not be confused, Sunday is not the Christian "Sabbath."

- The Sabbath was until Pentecost, after this it no longer exists in God's eyes.
- They took time to be with God on the Sabbath.
- Christians have God dwelling within them through the Holy Spirit all the time.
- The Lord's Day has a different meaning, different worship and different purpose.
- Sunday is when believers come together for a witness of Christ, not a day of non-work.

D. If Sabbath is no longer, do we still have to go to church on Sunday?

Yes.

²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

- Hebrews 10:24-25

The Lord's Day doesn't prohibit work, but it does require Christians to witness their faith collectively. There are many benefits to this but the reason is that the Word tells us that we need to do this and also what to do when we gather for worship (I Corinthians 11).

E. How do I keep the "spirit" of this commandment?

The spirit of this commandment is that we must honor God with our time. We do this in a variety of ways:

- Daily prayer and Bible reading.
- Christian service and benevolence to those in the church and out.
- Investing our "time" in things that are edifying and not destructive.
- Regular meeting and worship with the saints on the Lord's Day.
- Christian fellowship and recreation.

If it seems like a constant "sacrifice" to do godly things and be with godly people then perhaps too much of your "time" is offered to the god of this world and not enough in the pursuit of honoring God. Realize that it is not the elder or preacher that places demands on your time; it is God Himself that requires you to offer your time to Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the "perfect" Sunday like for you?
2. Why do you think God requires us to worship Him regularly when the repetitious nature of our worship threatens to become boring?
3. Did God simply replace Saturday for Sunday or were there any other differences between Old Testament and New Testament worship?
4. What part of your "time" do you tend to hold back from God?

6.

THE COMMAND WITH A PROMISE

THE 5TH COMMANDMENT

So far we have covered the first four commands having to do with God's relationship to man and man's need to honor God:

- As the only God
- As the highest being
- As the Holy one
- As the Lord of our time

The next six commands address man's relationship to other humans:

- Honor our parents
- Honor our fellow man
- Honor our spouse
- Honor our society
- Honor our neighbor
- Honor ourselves

The first four lead to peace with God and ourselves, the last six promote peace within society as a whole.

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you. - Exodus 20

Why should we all obey this command?

1. It is right in and of itself

Paul says that this is the right thing to do:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
- Ephesians 6:1

There is a natural chain of authority given by God, and parents have been given charge over children. Disobeying parents (in the Lord) is the same as disobeying the Lord, for He is the one giving the authority to parents. In some countries like Canada it is the law.

2. Parents deserve obedience

In most cases parents will or have done more for you than any teacher, mentor or friend. Again, in most cases even poor parents have done more for us than we will ever be able to repay in our lifetimes. We should obey parents from a sense of gratitude if from nothing else.

Is it wise to obey parents?

Parents provide wise advice from experience. They usually want what is best for you, even if it is to their disadvantage. They have nothing to gain from your unhappiness and usually want nothing in return for your success.

You need all the help you can get.

If you do not learn obedience from your parents, you will eventually have to learn it from someone else (e.g. drill instructor, supervisor, policeman, guard, etc.).

If you want to succeed in life at something (music, business, personal relationships, etc.) you need to learn to follow

someone else's instructions and leadership. It is wise to return that love in the form of obedience.

We should not wait until parents are gone to show them respect and love. Some people lose their parents when they are young and would give anything to spend just one hour with them.

What the 5th Commandment demands from parents

We know from other passages that the instructions to children about parents work the other way as well. Parents have a responsibility also:

1. Discipline

He who withholds his rod hates his son,
But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.
- Proverbs 13:24

Parents need to teach children the "art" of obedience and self-control.

2. Training

Train up a child in the way he should go,
Even when he is old he will not depart from it.
- Proverbs 22:6

Solomon explains how to conduct oneself in order to produce a happy and fulfilling life (e.g. education, emotional development, social graces, etc).

3. Spiritual Guidance

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
- Ephesians 6:4

Parents need to show their children by word and deed how to please God and save their souls.

Children are not very impressed with what we say or even with what we do. They are impressed however if what we say and do consistently match and if we consistently aim high with our thoughts and deeds. They will aim high if we aim high, they will do what they say if we do what we say.

What the 5th Commandment demands from children

We have discussed why it is wise to obey, but what does it ask children to do specifically?

1. **Obedience** - Knowing and doing the will of the parents without disrespect (Ephesians 6:1). The key is to obey, not judge how wise or capable the parents are.
2. **Honor** - Live your life in such a way that who you are and what you do bring honor to your parents, not disgrace and shame. Note that the command does not mention love. This we need to do to all men, even our enemies. It is not always possible to love our parents because of what they may have done or not done, but it is necessary that we honor them - this is always in our control.

What the 5th Commandment does not allow

Again, there are lessons about parenting connected to this commandment taught elsewhere about what parents cannot do.

1. Tyranny

Parents who see themselves as dictators, kings, unapproachable, never wrong, never teachable. Kids are not perfect and it is unreasonable to expect them to be.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger

- Ephesians 6:4a

Children need forgiveness, flexibility and the possibility that sometimes parents are wrong and willing to admit it.

2. Abuse

Verbal, emotional, physical or sexual abuse are all wrong. Sometimes parents use punishment, manipulation, or intimacy in an ungodly way. Punishment, manipulation, or intimate contact that stimulates or gratifies us is abuse and abuse is unholy use of our authority.

3. Corruption

Teaching or encouraging children to adopt habits or a lifestyle that is immoral and ungodly.

but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

- Ephesians 6:4b

Most parents who corrupt their children do so by default. For example, they don't correct their own immoral habits and attitudes and thus pass them on to their children.

Most alcoholics took their first drink out of their parents' liquor cabinet. Most children consume their first pornography when they stumble across their father's hidden magazines. The first cigarettes smoked are stolen from a parent's pack lying around the house.

Children will be influenced by evil in this world; hopefully it should not be their parent's evil.

Summary

Paul says that this command is the first one with a promise. The promise works for both parents and children:

- Children who obey open themselves up to a better life here on this earth.
- Parents receive the satisfaction that comes from seeing children who are fulfilled and less subject to the pitfalls and hurts of this world.

For Christian parents and children there is the joy of knowing that obedience to parents leads to the ability to obey God and receive the eternal blessings as a result.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is there a way in which you feel that you have dishonored your parents?
2. If you could, what would you do or say to them about that situation?
3. Is being a parent harder today than when you were a kid? If yes, why and how?
4. Why do you think that some children turn out bad, even with good parenting?
5. What is the quality you liked best about your mother/father as a parent?
As a Christian parent?

7.

THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

THE 6TH COMMANDMENT

You shall not murder.
- Exodus 20:13

The 6th commandment refers specifically to the taking of a "human" life. If you kill your cat, you may be cruel but you are not a murderer. There are two purposes behind this command.

1. To demonstrate and maintain the nature and value of human life. The sanctity of life is tied to the belief that humans are created by God in His own image. Aggression against another human is also aggression against God and for this reason is wrong.
2. To protect human life in our evil world. Those who believe that there is no God can easily be led to believe that human life is only as valuable as the service it renders to society. For example, if you are poor, handicapped or old then your life is not valuable because you do not contribute much.

In nations where belief in God is widespread, every person is considered equally important because of their nature not their productivity. Where there is no belief (e.g. communism), there is also no problem with abortion, killing people who speak out, eliminating people like the poor, the sick and elderly, because they are a burden and no more than just flesh - old flesh.

The danger in our country is the growth of humanistic philosophy in the last 100 years. Humanism is dangerous because it denies the existence of God but uses ideas that come from a belief system that does. For example, they believe

that caring for the sick and poor is a good idea since this is the best way to run a society and promote peace.

They do not do it because it is a divine command; rather they do it because they see that a system based on the principle of "loving your neighbor" really works and serves their social goals. The danger is subtle here but very real. It is not a big step from believing in God with love to disbelieving in God with love to disbelieving in God without love.

If someone comes along and says that they have a better plan for society (do it my way or I will kill you) and they have the muscle to back it up, there is no moral authority to stop them. This command establishes God as the final arbitrator over life and death, and over how we treat each other - not man.

What is the rule?

You shall not murder. That is the unlawful taking of another human life. What does this mean in every day terms?

1. Unlawful physical aggression

One continuous line of unlawful aggression beginning with anger and including violence, rape and murder. Jesus connects anger and murder in the sense that both are on the same continuum.

2. Suicide

We can permit a terminally ill patient to die naturally without keeping them on a support system that might prolong their lives. We cannot kill someone who requests to be killed because of depression or pain. There are many reasons why people kill themselves (depression, substance abuse effects, pain) but these do not justify the act. As Christians we believe that God will not allow us to carry more than we can bear: physically or emotionally.

3. Abuse

This is the taking of unnecessary risks to our or other's lives in order to feed our egos. Our bodies belong to God, not

ourselves. Foolish risks to gain fame or approval or excitement are presumptuous before our creator.

So is the abuse of our bodies through consumption of unlawful or harmful substances. This includes tobacco or illegal drugs as well as the overindulgence of food, drink and prescriptions, etc. The commandment also prohibits damaging our bodies with overwork, over-exercise or overdoing. Christians are to bring honor to God with their own bodies and honor the bodies of others as they honor their own.

What the command does permit

This command does permit killing in certain circumstances.

A. Hunting and Fishing

Animals are not human, not made in the image of God and do not face judgment. There is no intrinsic difference in the value of the life of a bird, an elephant, or a whale - only size and species. The issue here is not murder but stewardship. We are the stewards of the earth's resources of animals; are we managing it well and without cruelty?

B. Capital punishment

The Bible considers life so precious that to unlawfully take one leads to the forfeiting of one's own in many cases (Genesis 9:6; Deuteronomy 19:11-13; Romans 13:1-ff). All murder is killing but not all killing is murder. God gives the State permission to execute criminals. This is seen in both the Old and New Testament.

- Rapist - Deuteronomy 22:25
- Kidnappers - Exodus 21:16
- Murderers - Genesis 9:6; Romans 13:4; Acts 25:1

Of course there are those that argue that a God of love and mercy would not condone such a thing - and this is a Biblical argument for the other side.

The balance is found in Exodus 23:7:

Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or righteous, for I will acquit the guilty

The goal in the consideration of the death penalty is not to stop rape and murder (these will always be because of sin), the goal is divine justice carried out by God's servant - the State. In doing its job the State must make absolutely sure that justice is carried out fairly in every case because in the end God will demand a reckoning from the accused as well as those carrying out His justice.

C. Police Work

¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

- I Peter 2:13-14

We are not allowed to take the law into our own hands because we have not been given this right by God or the State. Upholding the law is the duty of government and God will judge those who have served in this way. You may have a good reason to want personal revenge, but you have no legal right or spiritual support for it (Romans 12:19).

D. Self-Defense

If the thief is caught while breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there will be no blood guiltiness on his account.

- Exodus 22:2

God makes provision for us to use legal means to protect ourselves. This extends to national defense as well.

- In Luke 13:14, Acts 10, the soldiers in question were not obliged to give up their roles to follow Christ.
- In Romans 13, Paul speaks of the legitimate right the government has to use force in defending society.

Justified self-defense is where an individual or a country defends itself against unjustified aggression against itself or those it is responsible to protect.

How do we keep this command?

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹ But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰ If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. ⁴¹ Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴² Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your

Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

- Matthew 5:38-45

vs. 38 - Refers to the Jewish law of restitution that said that you must repay what you have lost, stolen or damaged. The purpose was to "regulate" restitution so that it would not escalate to revenge (2 eyes for 1 eye) In a broader sense this also refers to the role of government - to regulate justice and mete out punishment fairly for everyone.

vs. 39-43 - Refers to the "law" by which the Christian lives. This law is above the law of government. The idea is that the Christian does not build upon evil for evil but overcomes evil with good. Christians do not run the government but in their

personal lives they do control the law by which they will live. Christ calls us to this higher law. This does not mean a Christian cannot protect himself or seek protection or justice from the State.

Even Jesus said that if His battle was on earth He would call 10,000 angels to defend Him (John 18:36).

Allowing a murderer to attack your family or violate your home and responding by "turning the other cheek" is foolish and not really loving your family to whom you owe your first loyalty in society. This type of misguided attitude encourages evil. Obeying this command as Christians requires us to exercise Christian love and forgiveness with wisdom and proper judgment. For example, I will pray for and forgive the drunk driver who kills one in my family, but I will also support the government's right and duty to punish this person according to the law. Both are required of me and the government by God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you break the 6th commandment?
2. Should the death penalty be applied in every murder case? Why or why not?
3. What is the spiritual condition of Christians who commit suicide?
4. Was our war with Iraq a "just" war? Why?

8.

THE PROBLEM OF ABORTION

Let's look at an issue that is addressed and forbidden by this command, and has become one of our nation's most controversial - abortion. The key question surrounding abortion is:

When does human life begin?

Common sense tells you that once a seed is planted, the beginning of the cycle of life begins. This is why very few farmers are pro-abortion.

In 1967 at the International Conference on Abortion in Washington DC, authorities from around the world and from different fields came to the conclusion that "...there was no point in time between the union of the sperm and egg and the birth of the infant at which point we could say that this was not a human life."

U.S. Court confirmed this decision recently in the case of the fertilized eggs of a woman who won custody of them from her husband. A fertilized ovum is not just a potential human being; it is a human being with vast potential.

But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.
- Matthew 1:20

The Bible teaches that we are not permitted to take the life of another, no matter how young.

What are major arguments for abortion?

A. Rape and incest (emotional)

This is a difficult question because you are put into a situation where it seems cruel to force a person to have a baby conceived in this way. The truth of the matter is that the occurrence of this is very rare. Statistics show that pregnancy for this reason is below 1%. In a "legitimate" case of pregnancy caused by rape or incest, the real question is "how will it help the victim of the crime (the woman) by committing another act of aggression against her (killing the innocent child)?"

Two wrongs will not equal right.

These rare cases are not easy to decide and there is no painless answer, but having the child will cause less scars than killing it, and it is morally correct and merciful.

B. Psychological reasons

Abortion is necessary because women may have psychological problems if they continue pregnancy. Statistics show that:

1. There is no mental illness that can prevent a woman from having a baby.
2. Male suicides: 16 per 100,000
3. Non-pregnant females: 3.5 per 100,000
4. Pregnant females: 0.06 per 100,000
5. Danger of suicide is overrated for pregnant women.
6. More psychological problems stem from having abortions than being refused to have one.

7. Studies have shown that when a woman is having serious psychological problems, having an abortion served to increase her problems, not eliminate them.

Most women in the best of circumstances have anxiety, fear, strain and doubt about the pregnancy. These are made greater the more difficult her life situation is. However, to have an abortion to relieve these mental problems usually has a negative effect and creates more problems, not less. Also, this reason is often given as a convenient excuse by women who simply refuse to accept the responsibility of having and rearing a child.

Every child should be a wanted child.

If we follow this reasoning it gives us the right to eliminate unwanted spouses, sick, old, etc. "Being wanted" is the wrong criteria for deciding whether someone has the right to life or not. Statistics show that a significant percentage of children born were not planned at first but parents grew used to the idea. The argument that unplanned children will become unwanted, battered and abused when born is statistically untrue.

Statistics show that unplanned pregnancies usually become wanted babies when born. In our society we have a well developed system to care for these children who are still unwanted at birth. Adoption is still a better alternative than death - for the child and the mother.

Having or not having a baby should be the decision of the woman and her right to decide for her own body. (Strongest argument today)

That is why they call it "pro-choice" and not "pro-abortion". What we need is medical honesty:

- An appendix is part of your body, its cells are your cells. You can have it removed or not.
- A fertilized ovum lives within the body of the woman but has its own genetic code. It is a separate and unique person living within the mother.

- A woman has a right to her own body but the baby inside of her is not her body, it is a different body, a body being nurtured by her body but not her body.

The ability to conceive also carries with it the responsibility to nurture what is conceived. The only way that a person can defend abortion on the basis of personal rights and freedoms is by completely ignoring the rights of the unborn child. Both parties have rights - to live. We would never condone a child killing his mother because:

- He didn't want her.
- She made him feel nervous and tired.
- She caused him to live in poverty.
- She interfered with his personal rights & freedoms.

The ability to conceive and carry a child does not automatically carry with it the "right" to destroy it.

Abortion saves malformed children and their parents from misery and an unhappy life.

The assumption here is that handicapped and retarded children have a greatly deficient ability to enjoy life. This has been shown to be untrue. The handicapped and malformed have the same degree of life satisfaction as the normal. With care and treatment their lives can be fulfilling for them (if not normal by our standards). We should not judge them and their happiness by our standards.

No association of parents of handicapped children has ever endorsed abortion as a means of solving their problems.

Abortion as a means of handling handicapped or deformed children was the first step taken by the Nazis in Germany to solve their problem. It was not long before they had become so dulled in conscience that they saw killing as the solution for those who were old, sick and eventually those who were just different. There is very little difference between the "Master Race" idea and the "quality of life" theory of pro-abortionists. (Let's destroy people who interfere with the quality of our life.)

It can happen here. We already have many groups and politicians who support abortion and euthanasia. This is the first step.

Abortion is needed to keep population down.

The birth rate has dropped in North America. There is no danger of overcrowding. Mismanagement of our economy and ecology are the problems, not human reproduction. Only 2% of the U.S. population produces the food for the other 98%. The USA has 8 acres of useful land for every person.

The problem in third world countries is not overpopulation, it is economic in nature. When their standard of living is brought up, they will voluntarily have less children. Again, economic greed is responsible for this and many times the leaders of these countries are the ones guilty of causing the poverty. Abortion never solved overpopulation problems (e.g. China).

In any society where life is considered no more than cells evolving from a primal gene pool, abortion can make sense and be defended as an option. But as Christians we believe that life is in the image of God and that any willful destruction of life, no matter how young, deformed or handicapped, is an act of aggression. The reverse is also true: mercy shown to those who are His, is mercy shown to Him.

Abortion: Are there any exceptions?

When the mother's life (**not lifestyle**) is truly in danger:

- Pregnancy in a cancerous womb.
- Pregnancy outside the uterus, etc.

In these cases the doctors are treating the woman and in so doing may harm the fetus, but it is not a direct attack on the fetus - it is a life saving operation for the woman.

In a perfect world there would be no such problems - rape, incest, unwanted babies, life-threatening pregnancies. In our imperfect world the Lord extends His grace and mercy to all children who have died this way - they are with Him.

He also extends His grace, mercy and forgiveness to all those who because of weakness, ignorance or hardness of heart went ahead and had abortions. He also offers strength, mercy and grace to those who risked careers, comfort or health and went ahead with their pregnancies.

In the end, for those who come to Him, Jesus makes all things okay.

Summary

1. The 6th Commandment establishes that human life is precious because God creates it in His own likeness and to willfully damage our own or someone else's life is an act of aggression against God.
2. Because of sin and evil in the world, God allows government to protect society against evil by punishing and executing criminals (in fairness and justice) and also defend the nation against evil power in the world.
3. The Christian attitude toward evil and violent people is to try to win them over with good whenever possible but not at the expense of what is good. I do not allow someone to harm others or me in order to show them I love them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever known someone who had an abortion? How did you feel about it?
2. Why do you think seemingly "good" and "sincere" people openly support the pro-choice movement?
3. Should we give instruction to young unmarried people about birth control methods in addition to the teachings about abstinence?
4. If your (wife, sister, etc.) risked death during pregnancy would you intervene medically if it meant harming the baby? What moral or spiritual rationale would you provide for this?

9.

GOD'S PLAN FOR SEXUAL FULFILLMENT

THE 7TH COMMANDMENT

You shall not commit adultery.
- Exodus 20:14

The word "adultery" refers to sex outside of marriage. This command was needed because the human sex drive is an extremely powerful force. Some feel embarrassed or ashamed for merely having the need for and the power of this sex drive within them. There is no need for shame.

We need to understand how God wants us to direct this force within us so that we can use it in the way He has designed, not in the way it has been perverted by sinful men. There are, of course, 2 extremes to avoid:

1. Extreme Puritanism where sex and everything connected with it is seen as dirty, base or unworthy somehow.
2. Extreme worldliness where sex is everything; where the stimulation and gratification of our sexual appetite is the focus and primary goal.

The Bible teaches us the proper use and role of sex so that it can be enjoyed physically, emotionally and spiritually to its maximum. You see, it is possible to be fully satisfied sexually as women and men. Some might not believe this because it has never happened to them. They always want more or different or newer in their quest for sexual satisfaction.

To be "full" sexually, however, requires that we obey God's commands in the Bible concerning sex. No one ever became sexually satisfied or sexually at peace with themselves unless they obeyed God's will. For example, it has been said that Hugh Hefner (the publisher of Playboy) sleeps with three blonde 20-year-olds. He is in his seventies and he takes Viagra but his actions do not convince me he is satisfied, content or at peace sexually. On the contrary, his conduct points to a pathetic old man still searching for a sexual fix that 50 years of sexual immorality has failed to give him.

The Rules about Sex

There are three basic rules that form a triangle within which sex is blessed by God and becomes a blessing and not a curse for us.

1. Sex is for the enjoyment of a husband and wife within marriage only (Genesis).

Marriage is a legal covenant between a man and a woman to live as husband and wife for life. There is no other combination permissible.

- Without the legal component the relationship is not a marriage.
- If it is not a valid marriage in society's eyes, it is not a valid marriage in God's eyes.
- A legal covenant of marriage is accepted and blessed by God regardless of the culture or religion. Marriage is blessed by God, and so is the sexual activity within it.

God created sex to be the unique and exclusive right and pleasure of those who entered into a lifetime marriage agreement with one another.

2. Sex comes after marriage, not before.

It is not the sex that you share that makes you married, it is the covenant or contract that you enter into to live as husband and wife that makes you "married." You are married when you say "I

do" and sign the papers, not before. The honeymoon is the privilege shared by married people, not the thing that makes them "married." Otherwise you would be married to everyone you ever had sex with.

Sex before marriage or sex with someone who is not your marriage partner is sin. The first is called fornication; the second is called adultery. Both are deadly in building a good "sex life" within marriage.

Studies confirm that people who live together or have sex together before they marry are twice as likely to encounter marital problems as those who do not. Remember, you cannot be completely fulfilled sexually if you disobey God's rules about sex.

3. God blesses sex within marriage.

Within marriage the couple is free to express themselves sexually without fear or shame. Some people have trouble accepting the sexual freedom God gives them within marriage. Human sexuality is complicated and mysterious. Even Solomon said that it was one of the few things he could not quite understand (Proverbs 30:19).

The exclusive and lifetime nature of marriage gives a man and woman the confidence and time to explore their own and their partner's sexual character. The only instructions about sex within marriage are that it should stay within marriage and that the partners should strive to satisfy each other (1 Corinthians 7). The marriage partners have to work out what that means for themselves.

How do we keep this commandment?

1. For everyone: Decide that you are going to keep it. So many times this is where Christians, or those who want to be, fall away. They cannot believe that God wants them to experience sex only within marriage and that once they marry they will have sex with only that woman/man for the rest of their lives. This is not an idea that is often reflected in our culture through movies and books and the general conduct of our society.

Remember, God wants you to be sexually fulfilled and knows how to do this better than you do. Decide you will do it God's way, not only because it is His will and it is right, but also because it will ultimately lead to your sexual peace and happiness. We are called out of the world as Christians and this includes what the world thinks about the issue of human sexuality.

2. If you are single: Realize that you are an easy target for Satan. When you are single you have a difficult sexual burden to carry in order to remain pure. The lack of intimacy, affection and encouragement from a marriage partner leads to loneliness, resentment, anger, even despair and depression. Many times these feelings will lead us to "act out" sexually as a way of filling this void.

- Casual sex (fornication / adultery).
- Pornography or homosexuality as well as other forms of sexual perversions can become great temptations.

Remember that no matter how great the "release" and pleasure, these activities destroy your ability to find sexual fulfillment, they do not improve them - that is why they are forbidden! God wants us to have the best, not the worst sexual experience. The void created by sexual hunger can only be filled by God through prayer, worship and service. We can be assured that He will lead us to that peace.

3. If you are married: Find the true road to sexual fulfillment. Most men, when asked, usually complain that they do not get enough sex. They do not do it the number of times that they would like to - whatever that is. There could be plenty of reasons for this: wife is less interested, babies, work, long hours, schedules, illness, etc. One of the main reasons that men want more sex is because they think that more is better, more often will be more satisfying somehow.

Women do not think this way because they know better. And so in the search for more, men use all kinds of tactics:

- **The pay-off method.** They trade for more by finishing the chores, clearing up the "honey-do's", buying flowers,

saying something nice about her mother - whatever, so long as I get more.

- **Intimidation method.** If the romance and flowers pay off does not work, some men sulk. They get quiet, pouty, angry - anything to convey that I am not getting what I want; even threaten to quit.

If you are married, the surest way to "more" is to focus on the two things that your marriage is based on:

1. Exclusivity - The more you focus, work on and demonstrate the absolute exclusive nature of your relationship - the greater your desire for each other will grow. This means that your eyes, your mind and your heart are openly and obviously focused on only her in private and in public. You become more desirable to one another when the quality of your exclusiveness improves.

2. Longevity - In everything you say and do you need to demonstrate your lifetime commitment to your marriage. The commitment is the wall that you build around the two of you that permits honesty, openness and freedom, especially when it comes to sexual matters. When men work on building exclusiveness and longevity in their marriage relations, their sex lives naturally become better and more satisfying so that "more" is no longer an issue.

A mature sexual relationship is no longer based on frequency; it is based on depth and power of feeling and satisfaction. This is God's plan for human sexuality and His command is there to help us remember it.

You'll never be satisfied sexually if you break God's commands about sex.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is it possible to maintain the early sexual excitement in a marriage throughout a lifetime? How?
2. What is the relationship between faith and sexual fulfillment?
3. What is your typical reaction when you are denied sexual fulfillment (for whatever reason: single, wife is ill, separation, etc.)?
4. Can a person be happy in a marriage without sexual intimacy?

10.

TAKING WITHOUT PERMISSION

THE 8TH COMMANDMENT

You shall not steal.
- Exodus 20:14

The basic command is that you are not to take without permission what does not belong to you. This includes objects, feelings, rights, knowledge, potential, ability, etc.

The key question regardless of the object is, "Does this truly belong to me?" and the key principle is that we should love our neighbor as ourselves. Aside from property violations, stealing is always an act of unkindness towards someone else.

How do we break this command?

1. Taking property that is not ours to take.

- Stealing
- Fraud, cheating, borrowing without paying back
- Extortion (threaten for money)

2. Gambling - the effort to gain without work or honest effort.

- Effort to gain at someone else's loss (many have to lose so one can win big)

- Poor stewardship of one's possession; risking to gain instead of working to gain
- Gambling is exercising low moral standards

No one is able to witness or exalt Christ through gambling - even non-believers see gambling as a vice (not something Christians should be doing).

3. Failing to give full value.

- Companies that overcharge for their products.
- Employers who do not provide for employees.
- Lazy employees.
- False or misleading claims about the value or effectiveness of products or services.

4. Denying someone else's rights.

- It is a just thing to press for true and equal rights.
- However, not everything is a "right" and not everything we do is right. (for instance it's not our right to yell "fire" in a crowded theatre for fun when this is not true.)
- To deny someone their *true* rights by law, this is a form of stealing.

5. Failing to give to the Lord.

¹ Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. ² On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. ³ When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem;
- I Corinthians 16:1-3

God commands us in His Word to provide a generous portion of what we have been prospered with to the Lord. When we fail to do so, we fail to recognize who it is that provides us with everything. We are stewards for Christ and should be able to make a good witness with our offering to God. Make no mistake, no one is impressed with a stingy Christian, no matter how much Bible he knows. If Christ gave His life for us, how can we hold back in the giving of money so that others can be saved by Him?

There are other aspects to this commandment, but these few give you an idea of the many ways we break it in relationship to others and how we break it before God.

Positive elements

Although this command is stated in negative terms (thou shall not...) there are some positive elements attached to it.

A. Good stewardship

It is not just about stealing; the reverse is the admonition to care for the things that God has given to you and into your care. God wants us to be good managers of what He blesses us with (small or great) and if we are, we are not tempted to steal.

The Parable of Talents in Matthew 25:14-30 teaches that:

- God provides us with everything we have (money, health, talent, opportunity, ability, etc.).
- God allows us to manage it.
- God will, however, require us to give an accounting of what we have done with our blessings and opportunities.
- God will reward and punish accordingly.

The positive and pro-active side of this commandment calls on us to practice good stewardship of our blessings - good stewardship is the opposite of dishonest gain.

B. Proper priorities

Good stewardship requires us to establish the right priorities with our blessings, whatever they may be. Here is a basic priority list:

1. Give the first portion of your blessings to God

²⁴ No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth...

³¹ Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' ³² For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

- Matthew 6:24; 31-33

This may not be the biggest portion you give or spend or invest, but it needs to be the first you consider if you want your priorities straight. If you give God the first portion, He will bless you in your management of the rest.

2. Your Family

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

- I Timothy 5:8

If you do not care for your family, you are not witnessing for Christ. Your family includes those in your family who need your help (parents, grandparents, widows, orphans in your family).

3. Your Commitments

Taxes, bills, loans, living and recreation expenses, savings, investments.

They said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's."
- Matthew 22:21

not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;
- Romans 12:11

You are part of a community and you support the community with your taxes; your neighbors with your timely payment of your bills and your future with wise savings and investments. God will always provide for these things if you provide Him with the first portion and your family with the next.

These can be sub-divided in many ways, but for our stewardship to be successful and for God to bless us and prosper us, we need to keep the priorities in the right order.

Summary

The 8th commandment demands that we not take what does not belong to us rightly. The way to avoid the temptation is by practicing good stewardship and establishing right priorities for the management and distribution of our wealth. We also avoid the temptation to steal if:

- We learn to be satisfied with what we have.
 - Do not envy, complain, blame others for our lack.
 - Ask God - He will provide!
- Give thanks for what we have.
 - Prosperity begins with a thankful heart.
- Learn to be faithful with little things.

- You can cheat and steal to have big things but this will not teach you faithfulness.

God will bless you with wealth when He thinks you can handle it. In the end all wealth is to help us demonstrate our faith.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe a time when you took something that did not belong to you. How did you feel?
2. In which way does this command tempt you the most? Why?
3. Describe the person that you feel is a good steward. What is it about him/her that impresses you?
4. What would it take to make you satisfied financially? Will it be possible?

11.

TRUTH EQUALS INTEGRITY

THE 9TH COMMANDMENT

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

This command prohibits a false witness against someone else, especially in a court of law. It uses a serious legal application to put forth the everyday need to tell the truth - not just in court, but in everyday affairs as well.

Some Types of Lies

1. **Perjury.** Lying under oath; falsifying legal records. Peter denying Jesus with an oath (Matthew 26:7).
2. **Concealment.** Holding back information that causes a false impression. Reporting an accident but neglecting to report that alcohol was in use. Abraham only saying that Sarah was his sister (half true / half sister) and holding back that she was also his wife (Genesis 12:11-19).
3. **False Accusation.** When we accuse others of things based solely on suspicion, gossip or prejudice. Jesus was accused of being a glutton, a drunk, a rebel, a blasphemer, a devil.
4. **Conspiracy.** When several people unite to plot or cover up something so that truth will not come out. Rebekah and Jacob conspired to fool Isaac (Genesis 27).

5. **False Witness.** An exaggeration or outright lie concerning the value or integrity of something or someone. Satan's lie about the power of the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:4-5).
6. **Hypocrisy.** To say one thing and knowingly do another. A good example is Peter the Apostle refusing to eat with Gentile Christians when Jewish Christians were around (Galatians 2:11).
7. **False Teaching.** Those who promote and teach what is essentially incorrect, inaccurate or untrue. Those teaching a different gospel than the Apostles (Galatians 1:6-8, Colossians 1-4).
8. **Lying.** Knowingly telling or suggesting a falsehood. Ananias and Sapphira who lied about the true amount of money they received for their land and gave to the Lord (Acts 5:1-10).

There may be other manners of dishonesty and lying but these eight are the most practiced types of deception.

The Principle Behind the Command

Not to lie is the desired effect, but why? Why is lying a sin? What is the principle that supports this command?

1. There is one truth about everything.

- It is God's truth (what He sees and judges - this is true) - Psalm 117:2; Psalm 33:4.
- His truth is everlasting (nothing changes His truth) - Psalm 117:2b.
- His truth is contained in the Word. What is true about all life and morals and the universe and the spiritual world. - John 17:17.

Today we are taught that truth is relative, whatever you see as truth is truth for you. If it works for you, feels good, does not hurt anyone, does not stop anyone else from pursuing his or her truth - this truth is true for you now. This idea of truth is seen everywhere in our society:

- Cannot censor anything, everyone is free to say anything.
- Equal rights for everyone, even those who are in prison or who are here in this country illegally.
- We are afraid to judge a student's work because it may lead to one thinking he is wrong and we want everyone to feel good about themselves, even if they fail basic skill tests!
- Politicians lie and call it something else, disinformation/ dysfunctional statement

As Christians we may feel out of sync because we hold to the notion that:

- There is a standard of truth by which people and things can be measured.
- We can know this standard of truth that gives us the power to make accurate evaluations of things.
- They call this quality - enlightenment (John 8:32).

Lying and falsehoods therefore do two things to this principle:

1. It denies or hides the truth, which in essence is like trying to hide or deny God Himself - it is a form of blasphemy.
2. It darkens our own minds to the extent that we separate ourselves from the light of truth and salvation - we end up condemning ourselves (II Thessalonians 2:12).

2. Truth = Integrity

How do we place value on something?

- Beauty = Usefulness
- Rarity = Purity

How do we estimate the value of a person?

Outwardly we look for beauty, strength, talent, intelligence, but inwardly his value is determined by his purity or integrity. Integrity means wholeness, freshness, purity of character. The greater degree of integrity, the more valuable the individual. The degree of our integrity is valued mainly by how honest we are, in comparison to God who is totally pure and truthful.

Every time you are involved in falsehood your value (integrity) goes down. It is not one big lie that makes you worthless, it is the thousands of little ones that ultimately make you bankrupt in personal integrity. Every time we tell the truth we are contributing to the value of our personal worth, every time we lie we are decreasing our worth.

The rewards for telling the truth.

Truthful lips will be established forever,
But a lying tongue is only for a moment.
20 Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil,
But counselors of peace have joy.
21 No harm befalls the righteous,
But the wicked are filled with trouble.
22 Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord,
But those who deal faithfully are His delight.
23 A prudent man conceals knowledge,
But the heart of fools proclaims folly.
24 The hand of the diligent will rule,
But the slack hand will be put to forced labor.
25 Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down,
But a good word makes it glad.
26 The righteous is a guide to his neighbor,
But the way of the wicked leads them astray.
- Proverbs 12:19-26

vs. 19 - Salvation - no condemnation for truthfulness

vs. 20 - Joy - no guilty conscience, peace of mind

vs. 21 - Protection - no fear of evil even when it threatens (Jesus spoke truth and was crucified, but He did not dread evil).

vs. 22 - Favor - God loves an honest man.

Rewards from men:

- Credibility - people will value your input, person.
- Responsibility - society searches out honest individuals as leaders. They want someone they can trust.
- Respect - an honest person is respected whether he is rich or poor, literate or totally uneducated. His sincerity shines through.

When weighing out the scales between truth and falsehood, comparing the results of each, we see that honesty is not the best policy, it is the only policy.

Summary

Bearing false witness/lying is a sin that is done in a variety of ways (conspiracy, false accusations, lying, etc.). It violates several principles:

1. It denies truth which is a form of denying God = blasphemy.
2. It separates us from the light of truth and makes us prisoners of darkness - a form of self-imprisonment.
3. It lowers our personal integrity or value.

The rewards for honesty are great:

- Salvation, joy, peace, favor from men and God.
- A solid and favorable standing among men.

Exhortation

How to improve our ability to tell the truth:

1. Do not talk too much and you will avoid instances of dishonesty (Proverbs 10:19).
2. Get the facts - avoid believing or repeating something about someone else unless you have the facts and then decide if the things are worth repeating.
3. Decide in advance that you will tell the truth no matter what. Most times we lie because we are under pressure of some kind. Ask God to help you tell the truth before you get into situations where you are pressured to lie.

When we do lie, let's have faith in God to forgive us just like He forgave Peter, Abraham, Rebekah and Jacob, and all the other liars who God worked with in spite of their dishonesty and weaknesses.

Let's remember that the ultimate lie is thinking we have no sin and no need for Christ. The ultimate truth is that all those who are honest will acknowledge that they are sinners and need the blood of Jesus to wash away their sins every single day of their lives. It may be time for honesty in your life.

Need forgiveness? Need salvation?

- Confess Christ
- Repent and be baptized

It may be time to acknowledge your dishonesty. If you have claimed to be a Christian but not lived like one, you've lived a lie. If we have a need to tell the truth and be honest with ourselves, others or God let's do that now without hesitation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is it ever "right" to tell a lie?
2. List three ways Christians tend to lie.
3. How would you confront someone who lied to you? Give three examples.
4. What leads you with making false statements?
How are you seduced into lying?

12.

THE DESIRE FOR WHAT IS FORBIDDEN

THE 10TH COMMANDMENT

The best source of good deeds is good desires. The 10th commandment deals with man's desires and how they determine the type of life he will experience.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

- Exodus 20:17

Word Study

The word "covet" means, "enthusiastic desire," and by itself is neither good nor bad. Our enthusiastic desire becomes the sin of coveting when we desire something or someone that is not permitted or something gained unjustly. For example, David the psalmist and king who desired a woman not permitted him because she was married.

It is okay to desire a woman, but not if you are married or the woman you desire is. We see that David did not control his desire and it led to adultery, murder and deception. His first sin

was not adultery (this was his second sin) - no, his first sin was covetousness - the desire for something forbidden (another man's wife).

The Evil in Covetousness

The core of evil in covetousness is selfishness. This is what separates a normal and healthy desire for something from the sin of coveting.

Proverbs 21:25-26 describes the opposite virtue of covetousness - generosity.

²⁵ The desire of the sluggard puts him to death,
For his hands refuse to work;
²⁶ All day long he is craving,
While the righteous gives and does not hold back.

Empty desire, the bottomless yearning of the lazy, the selfish desire of the immature, these are the elements that create coveting. A covetous person desires to gain without effort or to gain merely to spend on self without any thought of serving others or glorifying God. For example, the person who covets your success usually wants it for free and for his own gratification only.

The Destructiveness of Covetousness

Remember, God forbids things because they are destructive to us. Covetousness is especially destructive because:

1. It destroys our relationship with others

As individuals we suffer when we covet because coveting leads us to judge everything in life from the perspective of how it will affect or benefit self. Covetous people ask the same question:

- How will this profit me?
- How will this give me enjoyment?
- How can I make this last?

Instead of asking the important questions like:

- How will this affect others?
- How will this build up the church?

This egocentric thinking creates isolation because it blinds a person to the needs of others and leads one to lose human contact that in turn develops into loneliness, depression, disorientation and depression.

Greedy people as a group engender hatred. Individuals, or nations, who because of this unconscious covetousness, amass supplies of essential products to artificially keep prices high and cause hardship on other groups create hatred and strife. This is one reason there are famines, wars, strikes and social unrest.

If there was less covetousness among nations and true generosity, there would be less hatred and consequently less war and death. Aside from alienating us from others individually and collectively, covetousness also:

2. Destroys our relationship with God

God tells man (in His Word) that if man keeps God as his number one priority in life (Matthew 5-6), man will have peace and salvation. When we sin through covetousness, we replace God with our own desires. This is why Paul refers to covetousness as idolatry in Ephesians and Colossians.

For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.
- Ephesians 5:5

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.
- Colossians 3:5

When our desire for things (forbidden or simply selfish) replaces our service to God and others, we lose the reward of joy and

satisfaction that come from serving the Lord with our time, goods and money. Those who do not make the Lord and His service a priority begin a vicious cycle:

- The less they serve, the less they give
- The less they serve and give, the less they rejoice
- The less they rejoice and receive from God, the less they believe, the less they serve and give, etc.

You know you are in this cycle because you do more complaining than rejoicing; more doubting and depression than service; more of the world and its activities than the kingdom and its influence. In the end we do not know what we want - we just want but are never satisfied. This is the end result of covetousness - empty materialism.

How to obey this command

The command is stated in a negative form, but there are positive ways to honor it and avoid the trap of covetousness.

1. Trust God for everything

³¹ Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' ³² For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.
- Matthew 6:31-32

Do not just trust in God, but trust that God both knows what you really need in every area of your life and is able to provide it. Trust that God knows your needs and will fulfill them in His way and in His time.

2. Keep your priorities straight

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and

all these things will be added to you.
- Matthew 6:33

Our job as Christians in this world is to figure out how to serve God and His kingdom first with our talents and time. God promises that when this is our priority, He will provide what we need materially, emotionally and spiritually to live in this world. When we turn this around and try to serve our needs first instead of our God, we are never satisfied. Why? We never seem to acquire enough to satisfy our desire for more.

The reason for this is that the "feeling" of satisfaction that we crave is a gift given to us by God when we seek Him first, not a result of amassing wealth or goods.

I know that there is nothing better for them than to
rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime;
- Ecclesiastes 3:12

This is why satisfaction in life comes from keeping God and His service first and this satisfaction/contentment protects us from the trap and cycle of covetousness.

3. Be content with what you have today

But godliness actually is a means of great gain when
accompanied by contentment.
- I Timothy 6:6

⁵ Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," ⁶ so that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?"
- Hebrews 13:5-6

Learn to be full with today's blessings. This doesn't condone laziness or glorify poverty. A person can strive to improve, to

succeed, but in order to avoid the trap of covetousness he must also learn to be satisfied where he finds himself today. Some people will only be happy and satisfied in the future, no matter what they have today. This guarantees that they will never be happy.

I can be content today because I know that this is what God has provided today and I trust that He will provide for tomorrow. Not to be thankful or to have endless desire is to reject what God has provided in exchange for what we covet.

Summary

Coveting is the uncontrolled desire for forbidden things or the uncontrolled desire to acquire (greed). This sin is dangerous because:

- It separates and isolates us from others (why the greedy are usually lonely).
- It makes us servants of our needs and desires instead of servants of God.

We can avoid this sin by:

- Trusting God to provide what you need.
- Keeping God first, not needs first.
- Thanking God for what you have now.

As Christians this sin is truly a foolish one because God takes care of all our earthly needs so we can pursue our relationship with Him in peace. In addition to this, He gives us freely the two things no effort on earth could ever buy - forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus Christ.

If we keep our hearts fixed on these treasures, there can never be any thing in this world that can draw us away from the love of God in Christ our Lord.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As a child, what "thing" do you remember wanting the most for? (Birthday/Christmas/etc.)
2. As an adult, what "thing" or situation do you desire more than any other?
3. Why do you think your desire has not yet been fulfilled?
4. Who do you think is most responsible for getting what you want? Why?
5. Can you picture yourself not desiring anything? What does this picture look like?

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