

You Shall Know I AM:
The Second Table of the Law (Exodus 20:12-17)
Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on February 24, 2019

Introduction

- ❖ Last Sunday we started to look at the Ten Commandments, as we've been walking through the book of Exodus. We only covered what's sometimes called the First Table of the Law. The first four commandments are understood to be more vertical in orientation, focused on how we treat God. Today we're going to focus on the Second Table (the remaining six laws), which are more horizontal in orientation, focused on how we treat each other.
 - Now the whole goal is understand these laws as originally given, but of course we want to understand their contemporary relevance to the Church today and to society as a whole. What do the Ten Commandments have to teach us as a society today?

- ❖ Now I understand some might think that that question is not helpful. **Because it's assumed that most people don't take the Ten Commandments seriously anymore.** Decades ago they were removed from public schools, no longer to be taught or displayed. And they've been Supreme Court cases over the constitutionality of displaying the Commandments in public spaces, particularly government owned. **So it seems like there's a secular allergy towards the Ten Commandments.** And so it's reasonable to assume that their influence in our society – and in the hearts and minds of our neighbors – have significantly waned.

- ❖ **But that's why I was surprised last March when a survey came out and concluded that a significant majority of the American public, regardless if they're religious or not, still believe the Ten Commandments are important principles to live by.**¹ So for example, 94% of Americans believe the sixth commandment ("*You shall not murder*") is still an important principle to live by. To be honest, I hope I never meet the 6%.
 - This survey says 94% also agree you shall not steal (eighth commandment). 91% agree that you shall not bear false witness (ninth commandment); 85% agree you should honor your father and mother (fifth commandment); 83% agree you shall not commit adultery (seventh commandment); and 78% agree you shall not covet your neighbor (tenth commandment).
 - I think those results should be encouraging. **Well over three-fourths of the American public still believe we should live by what's taught in the Second Table of the Law.** Now when it came to the First Table, there was less agreement, but it was still a majority who agreed that commandments one to four are important to live by.

- ❖ So what can we learn from all that? Well we shouldn't conclude that we, as a society, are actually good about keeping the Ten Commandments. A majority of us can say they're important to live by but actually living by them is an entirely different matter. **But even so, it seems that, no matter how secular our society gets, the Law of God has an enduring resilience.** We can't escape it. Like Paul taught in Romans 2, the Law must be written on the hearts of those who have been created in the image of the Lawgiver (Rom 2:14-15).

¹ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/march/ten-commandments-survey-lying-murder-deseret-news-yougov.html>

- ❖ **So no matter how allergic we get towards religion as a whole, we can't deny that the Ten Commandments describe the kind of life we want to live – and the kind of society we want to live in.** The Law is written in our hearts.
 - But what we learn from Israel's experience with the Ten Commandments is that legislating the Law is not enough. Giving people the Law – even a Law that resonates with their hearts – won't produce a law-keeping people because the human heart is sick (Jer 17:9). It's broken and corrupted by sin.

- ❖ **And that's the fundamental problem because the Ten Commandments have always been aimed at the heart.** They're not merely legislating certain outward behaviors. They demand an inward obedience of the heart that will translate into particular behaviors that set apart a redeemed people – that they might be a holy priesthood, mediating the truth and grace of God to all the nations of the earth.
 - **Last week, we emphasized how the giving of the Law was preceded by the giving of grace in redemption.** By grace alone, God established a covenant relationship with an undeserving people. By grace alone, he redeemed them from bondage. And only after such grace, did God give them the Law to show them how to live out this relationship with him in light of their redemption.
 - So we've already looked at the first four commandments. This morning we'll cover the remaining six. It'll be a faster-than-normal pace through each point as we consider the heart behind these commandments.

The Heart of the Fifth Commandment

- ❖ So we begin with the fifth commandment. Look at v12, "*Honor your father and your mother; that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*" **Now what does it mean to honor your father and mother?** What does that entail? And do you ever outgrow this command? Or is it always applicable as long as your parents are alive?
 - The first thing to note is that the word for "honor" is the word for "weightiness". **To honor someone is to ascribe a weightiness to them.** You're saying their significance or value is not light or trivial but weighty. **So by honoring your parents, you're communicating, by word or deed, that your parents are significant.** That's the heart behind this commandment – to esteem your parents as of great value to you.

- ❖ Notice that there's a promise attached to this command – "*that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*" Don't read that as a personal threat – as if God is threatening a short life if you dishonor your parents. Remember, he's speaking to Israel as they're about to enter the Promised Land. **God's saying that their collective faithfulness in honoring their parents will result in a corporate blessing** – where they will possess and live long in a Promised Land, under the reign of the LORD, as a light unto the nations.
 - So the promise in this command was in reference to Israel and living long in the land of Canaan – **but we can legitimately derive a present-day application in the principle that all the commandments are meant to bless us.** That was my point last week. All the commandments are intended to provide maximal human flourishing.

- ❖ Now in the NT, Paul reinforces the fifth commandment in **Ephesians 6:1-3** where he exhorts children to obey their parents in the Lord for it is the right thing to do. And then in **Colossians 3:20**, he calls children to obey their parents – why? – for this pleases the Lord. So there are a few motivations to keep the fifth commandment: because it's the right thing to do, because it pleases God, and because it's going to bless you.
 - **Now some of you may have noticed that the fifth commandment says to honor your father and mother, but Paul says to obey them. Is that the same thing?** To honor your parents is to obey your parents? No, even though they're related, I think there is a proper distinction to be made, and your age does play a factor.

- ❖ **For those of you who are children or youth, honoring and obeying your parents are often going to be one and the same.** It's God who chose your parents for you, so they're responsible *to God* to take care of you. So you honor God and you honor mom and dad when you give them your attention and obedience. When you don't ignore them when they ask how your day went, and you don't give them attitude, when they ask you to do something.
 - **But even still, your obedience to your parents is second to your obedience to the Lord.** So if your parents, for whatever reason, ask you to do something that will displease the Lord, especially if it results in hurting you or other people, then you're actually honoring your parents by *not* going along with their disobedience to God. Because to do so would only increase their guilt.

- ❖ **But having said that, I realize some of you may have parents who do not follow Jesus.** And they may not like the fact that you do, and they may try to curb your enthusiasm or limit your participation in the church. They could say, "I don't want you to go to church or to be involved in the youth group." And you could argue that that's going to displease the Lord – to keep you from worshiping and fellowshiping with the body of Christ.
 - But as long as God has you under their household, under their supervision, your parents have responsibility over where your feet go, what your hands do, and what time the rest of you has to be back home. That's part of their God-given authority.
 - **But what goes on in your heart – what you believe in your heart and who you pray to in your heart – is beyond their authority.** Your heart belongs to God. So you give him your heart and give your parents your obedience.

- ❖ Now I realize it gets trickier when you're a **young adult** in college or starting your career. The distinction between honoring your parents and strictly obeying is definitely greater, but it's still fuzzy at times, especially if you're not fully independent – if you're still living in their home or being financially supported.
 - But even if you're **an adult** – fully-independent and not expected to strictly obey anymore – you can still honor your parents by asking for their advice (or you can respectfully listen if they're going to give it anyway). And if you decide to go a different direction, you can still show appreciation and honor even as you disagree.
 - When life comes full circle, and you're taking care of **your elderly parents** – and you find yourself having to tell them what to do for their own good – you honor them by how you speak and care for them in their advanced age.

- ❖ I know many of us carry a burden because we're not the perfect child we felt like we were expected to be. **But let me try to help lift that burden by reminding you that there has only ever been one Perfect Child and his name is Jesus.** He was the only one to give perfect honor and obedience to his Father – to the point of death, even death on a cross for our failures to honor and obey our parents rightly.

The Heart of the Sixth Commandment

- ❖ Now what about the sixth commandment? What's the heart behind this commandment? Look at v13, "*You shall not murder.*" That could also be translated, "*You shall not kill*", but that could create confusion because the particular word was never used in the context of war or capital punishment or hunting animals. That's why translators hesitate to use the word "kill" because it's not addressing all forms of killing.
 - The particular word is best translated as murder, but even so, it has a wider range than just intentional homicide. It would also include unintentional homicide due to gross negligence like if you carelessly let your wild ox gore a neighbor to death (Ex 21:29). **So the focus is on any form of unlawful killing of a fellow human being.**
- ❖ So what's the heart behind this commandment? **It's ultimately about the sanctity and preservation of human life.** And it's about respecting God's sovereignty over life and death, and so the taking of human life is only legitimate if so authorized by his Word. Now there's no time to defend just war theory or capital punishment, which I believe has biblical warrant.
 - **But what I want to stress is how the sixth commandment is the foundation to our Christian response to the culture of death.** We are the people of life who worship the God of life – the Creator of all living things who made humans in his own image.
 - Every single human being – from the richest to the poorest, from the privileged to the underserved, from the bright and capable to the mentally and physically impaired, from the biggest to the smallest (even those in an embryonic stage) – **every human life is sacred and to be protected and preserved.** That's the heart of this commandment.
- ❖ Now I assume we all agree that this is a very important and serious commandment that needs to be respected and obeyed, but I'm not surprised if most of us also assume that the sixth commandment is one of the easier ones for us to personally keep.
 - **But based on Jesus's own explanation of this commandment, we know it's about more than just *not murdering your neighbor.*** It's about loving your neighbor and doing good to them. It's about the attitude of your heart. If you hate someone, if your heart is embittered towards them, then Jesus says you've committed murder in your heart (Mt 5:21-26).
 - **The same conditions present in the heart of an actual murderer are there in your heart when you hate, detest, or despise.** You just happen to be raised with good morals. But having good morals and the good sense never to kill someone is not enough. That's missing the heart of this commandment.

- ❖ So this is not an easy commandment to obey. Our hearts condemn us. **Our only hope is the good news that the God who hates murder ordained the murder of his own Son, so that those who turn their hearts to him will receive forgiveness and grace.** That's our gospel hope in light of our failure to keep these commandments.

The Heart of the Seventh Commandment

- ❖ Now let's turn our attention to the seventh commandment in v14, "*You shall not commit adultery.*" Just like with the sixth commandment, we have to be careful not to limit the scope of this commandment by the word "adultery". The word itself refers to any form of sexual intimacy that violates the covenant of marriage. Whether it's your own marriage or the marriage of the person you've committed adultery with.
 - But that doesn't mean all other forms of sexual sin are *not* in view. **What we see in this Second Table is that a general sin is in view and each commandment is forbidding the severest form of the sin.** So murder is the severest form of hatred, and the severest form of sexual sin is adultery. The thought is: **If the severest form is condemned, then all lesser forms are also.** Like Jesus explained in the Sermon on the Mount, any behaviors that typically precede an act of adultery – even any lustful thoughts – are out of bounds (Mt 5:27). Let there not be even a hint of sexual immorality among you (Eph 5:3).
- ❖ But adultery is the worst of all sexual sins because it's not just a sin against your own body (1 Cor 6:18) – **it's a betrayal of a sacred trust between a husband and a wife.** God has joined them together as one flesh in a life-long marital union. To tear it apart is a great offense to not just the victimized party but to God himself (Gen 39:9). **So the heart of the seventh commandment is to honor and preserve the sanctity of marriage as the only bounds within which to enjoy the good gift and pleasures of sexual intimacy.**
 - I've heard it said before that sex is like superglue. It's very purpose is to seal and cement the bond of marital union between a man and a woman. **But when you try to isolate the pleasure of sex apart from marriage, you end up making a mess of things. It's like squeezing out superglue at the wrong time or in the wrong place.** You're asking for a lot of pain as you try to unstick yourself from those you were never meant to be bonded with in the first place.
- ❖ C.S. Lewis gives a similar illustration in *Mere Christianity*. **He tries to explain why a sexual union should never be separated from the spiritual and emotional union between a husband and wife.** He says when you try to isolate the pleasures of a sexual union from a marital union – it's as unhealthy and self-destructive as trying to get the pleasures of taste without swallowing or digesting your food – by chewing things and then spitting them out again. That's why any form of sex outside of marriage is so harmful.
 - **This reinforces the point that these commandments were given for our good and flourishing.** The seventh commandment is not trying to ruin a little risqué fun. It's trying to bless you and keep you from making a mess of your life.

- ❖ **Friends, I know the sexual sin in our lives is very shameful, and all we want to do is hide it from ever seeing the light of day.** You want to cover up your indiscretions. But cover ups never work. You'll always be exposed in the end.
 - But there is an alternative. Psalm 32:1 says, "*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*" **Ironically, God agrees with the sinner that there needs to be a cover up.** Sin needs to be covered. But the question is, "Who will do it?" If we try to cover our sins and not confess them, then God won't cover them. They'll remain in plain sight to condemn us on the last day.
 - But if we confess our sins and stop our feeble attempts to cover up, then God, in mercy, promises to cover them for us with the blood of the Redeemer, which can fully and finally cover our sins once and for all.

The Heart of the Eighth Commandment

- ❖ Let's consider the eighth commandment in v15, "*You shall not steal.*" I think it's important to understand that this commandment is not so much rooted in the idea of individual property rights as it is in the idea of God's ownership of all things. **Only God has the right to give or take away, which makes it wrong to take what God has not authorized you to have.**
 - Now this word for steal covers a wide range of sinful behaviors. It would include burglary, robbery, larceny, embezzlement, extortion, and racketeering. And just so we don't excuse ourselves since we would never commit such crimes, let's ask what theft could look like at work? It doesn't just apply to stealing office supplies. It would include calling in sick merely as an excuse, padding expense accounts, or just idling away while you're on company time. You're stealing wages in a sense.
 - And the eighth commandment would also apply to theft of intellectual property like the unlawful duplication of music, videos, or software and to any form of plagiarism. **My point is: Don't excuse yourself too quickly.** I think we all fall short of this commandment in one way or another.
- ❖ But what's the heart behind the eighth commandment? **It's not just about prohibiting stealing. It's about promoting stewardship.** It's about understanding why God entrusted you, as a steward, with a degree of money and possessions. It's not to serve your own interests but to glorify him as you use those things to serve others.
 - **Jerry Bridges**, in his book *The Discipline of Grace*, describes three attitudes towards earthly possessions. The first attitude says, "*What's yours is mine; I'll take it.*" That's the **attitude of the thief**. The second says, "*What's mine is mine; I'll keep it.*" That's the **attitude of the selfish**. And my point is that the selfish – who might be innocent of theft – is ultimately violating the same heart behind the same commandment. But the third attitude towards earthly possessions says, "*What's mine is God's; I'll share it.*" That's the heart attitude of the steward. That's what's behind this commandment.
- ❖ Friends, if you're feeling convicted because you realize you're more of a thief than you thought – take comfort in this thought: **Jesus died as a thief for thieves like us.** He was numbered with transgressors. He died in between two thieves, counted among them, so that every thief that trusts in him will be saved.

The Heart of the Ninth Commandment

- ❖ Let's look at the ninth commandment in v16, "*You shall not bear false witnesses against your neighbor.*" To understand this commandment, you need to understand that, back then, since there were no surveillance cameras or digital footprints or DNA testing – **establishing legal guilt or innocence depended solely on credible eyewitnesses.** So to bear false witness in court was a gross injustice. In those days, courts would've found someone guilty on the basis of a single accusation, even a baseless one. People were presumed guilty until proven innocent. Justice, in those days, was chaotic and disorderly.
 - **So at the heart of the ninth commandment – this prohibition essentially against lying – is not for the Israelites to be nice people who treat each other nicely.** It's so God's people might live in an orderly, just society amid the chaos around them. So that they can be good witnesses and a holy priesthood – showing God to the nations.

- ❖ Now this commandment is not just applicable to bearing false witness in the court of law. **Remember we said that each of these prohibitions are forbidding the severest form of the sin in order to condemn all lesser forms.** So the severest and most injurious form of lying is the kind that leads to the condemnation and false imprisonment or even execution of an innocent man. So underneath that you could include lesser forms of lying like fibs, fabrications, half-truths, self-serving exaggerations, misleading statements, twisting other people's words, slander, libel, and gossip.
 - Now you might push back and say, "Wait, how is gossip a form of lying if what I'm sharing is actually true about that person?" Because even if the words of gossip are true – the testimony is false because your intent is malicious. You're trying to tarnish someone's reputation in the guise of simply conveying information. That's deceitful.
 - **Here are three helpful questions to ask yourself to catch yourself from gossiping.** First, is what I'm about to say true? Second, if so, does it really need to be said to this person? Third, would I say it or put it this way if the person I'm talking about was here to listen? If you hesitate to say yes to any of those three questions, then you're better off not saying anything at all.

The Heart of the Tenth Commandment

- ❖ We finally made it. Let's look at the tenth commandment in v17, "*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 is your neighbor's.*" **Now this one could really be seen as a summary of the other commandments.** Think about it. If you covet your neighbor's wife, it'll lead to violating the seventh commandment – committing adultery with her. If you covet your neighbor's property, you'll end up breaking the eighth commandment – stealing their goods. If you covet your neighbor's approval and acceptance, you'll end up breaking the ninth commandment – lying just to impress.
 - But what the tenth commandment does most clearly is to demonstrate what we've been saying all along – **that the Ten Commandments were never aimed at external conformity or mere behavior modification.** The heart was always the focus and so what's also forbidden is any internal impulse – like coveting – that leads you to violate commandments five through nine.

- ❖ Now what's the heart behind this commandment? **To covet is essentially to set your heart on anything that's not yours. And not just something that you don't have but specifically something someone else has.**
 - And unlike what most Eastern religions teach, the problem is not that you desire. Desires aren't the problem. The problem is when those desires grow inordinate and illicit. **The problem is when we want the wrong thing, in the wrong way, at the wrong time, for the wrong reasons.**

- ❖ You can tell when you're guilty of covetousness when you feel bitter and resentful when that guy gets the promotion you were vying for; or that girl gets the acceptance letter you were praying for; or that roommate finds romance while you're still single; or when you're jealous of someone's age, looks, smarts, talents, situation in life (married, single, parents), or their ministry giftedness or success.
 - **Martin Luther says the tenth commandment was written for the nice, upright, moral people in the world – who assume they've kept commandments five through nine.** This commandment leaves us without any excuse and proves that we're all sinners in the end.

- ❖ And that's one of the main uses of the Law. We're going to talk about more the uses of the Law next week, but **one of them is to show us our sin and our need for a Savior.**
 - Donald Barnhouse explained it this way, "The law of God is like a mirror. Now the purpose of a mirror is to reveal to you that your face is dirty, but the purpose of a mirror is not to wash your face. When you look in a mirror and find that your face is dirty, you do not then reach to take the mirror off the wall and attempt to rub it on your face as a cleaning agent. The purpose of the mirror is to drive you to the water."²

- ❖ **Friends, the purpose of the Law is not to cleanse you from sin but to drive you to the Living Water, who is Christ.** He died for sinners like us, and if you turn away from sin and towards Jesus in faith – receiving him as your Lord and Savior – he'll wash you and cleanse you from all sin and unrighteousness. He'll reconcile you to God his Father, and his Spirit will write his Law on your heart, so that you'll know the kind of life you should live in relationship with him. And, by his grace, you'll be able to actually live it out.

² Donald Barnhouse, *Exposition of Bible Doctrines: Romans 2:1-3:20*, pgs 275-276.