

ON EAGLES' WINGS

IX. "Loving One Another: Commandments 5-10"

11-13-05
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Exodus 20:1-21

INTRODUCTION

Sandy, from Pennsylvania, tells about a family devotional they were having one evening that included the story of the Ten Commandments. Her husband, by way of review, asked, "How many commandments did God give to Moses?" Their five-year-old son quickly replied, "Too many!"

While it may sound different to a five-year-old, the conciseness of the Ten Commandments is in itself refreshing—just ten basic rules to govern the two major relationships of our lives: relating to God and relating to other people. Jesus, asked about the greatest commandment, summarized them even further, quoting two separate passages, one from Deut. 6:5 and the second from Lev. 19:18 when he says,

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Matt 22:37-39).

In those two commands, Jesus says, we have a summary of all that the law teaches.

- The first four of the Ten Commandments that we covered last Sunday give us the specifics of *Lov[ing] the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*. They provide the framework for a fulfilling relationship with God.
- The next six give us the specifics of *Lov[ing] your neighbor as yourself*. In them we'll find the keys to peaceful, life-enhancing relationships with one another.

THE 5TH COMMANDMENT

"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. (Ex 20:12)

I've come to see this commandment as a bridge between loving God and loving neighbor. The command to honor parents is a way of honoring God in everyday life. The love and trust we learn from infancy toward our parents is analogous to our relationship with God. Jesus encourages us to call God "our Father."

Paul, in Eph. 6 points out that this is the first (and only) of the Ten Commandments that contains a promise, *so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you*. When Moses reiterates these Commandments in his sermon in Deuteronomy, he adds another phrase to the "live long" part, saying *so that you may live long and that it may go well with you* (Deut. 5:16). Living long and living well is tied to honoring our father and mother.

Certainly psychology corroborates this truth. Our emotional health is tied directly to our homes and the relationship with our parents. Notice as well that this commandment stands at the beginning of the ones about relating to one another. This lets us know that if we don't get this

relationship right, we can have trouble with the rest of these commandments. For instance:

- we may have trouble in our marriages;
- we may become angry and hateful– murderers;
- we may put one another down– false witnesses;
- we may seek to gain our worth through things– stealing;
- we may be filled with envy and jealousy at other’s good fortune.

We acknowledge the effect our parents have on our behavior in many ways. We hear, “I come by it honestly, my mother was a worrier....” In place of “worry” you can insert any number of things, including fears, habits, life-styles, and the way we deal with stress. One of the most foundational function of parents is in helping develop our self-esteem. Parents provide the early mirror through which we get our sense of self-worth. There are three basic questions we all struggle with in discovering our worth, sometimes referred to as the “triad of self-esteem.”

- “Do I belong?”
- “Am I worthy of love?”
- “Am I competent?”

If those basic need-questions are not answered in an adequate way, “it will not go well with us,” and we will be crippled with low self-esteem. Now, there has never been a perfect father and mother, so all of us have grown up with a less than perfect sense of self-worth.

This commandment contains the basics for beginning of the healing of any damage we suffered in our growing-up years. “Honor” is the operative word here. What does it mean to “honor our father and mother?” The Hebrew word means to ascribe worth, value, or respect to a person. That doesn’t mean agreement or being subservient to a person who is trying to control you in inappropriate ways. 1 Pet. 3:17 uses the Greek equivalent word in *Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.* The “honor the emperor” part clues us in, especially if we’ve had some very bad parents. To honor means to accept them and love them for who they are. It means forgiving the past, letting that go. It means letting go of your judgment of them, for how do you know how you would have done given their circumstances and the parenting they had? To honor is a choice we make, independent of our feelings. It means letting go of hurt and pain and simply showing honor– letting that person feel valued by us. That’s the beginning step of healing this most vital of our human relationships.

God also wants us to make use of spiritual support in that healing process. I’ve helped many work through the issues involved in this toward wholeness and healing. I encourage you to get help if you’re stuck. It is one of the means of healing grace given to us. Now we begin a series of five short, staccato commands beginning with “You shall not.”

THE 6TH COMMANDMENT

You shall not murder (Ex. 20:13).

The KJV and RSV use the familiar, “Thou shalt not kill.” However, the Hebrew word, *ratsach*, is more properly translated “murder.” In the 46 times it is used in the Old Testament, almost every use carries a sense of personal willful vengeance and murder. So it is not a proper verse to use against the slaughter of animals and its use against killing in war is suspect, since that usually

lacks the personal element of murder.

God is saying that life is sacred, precious. We cannot just destroy another person, no matter how disgusting or how much they thwart our purposes. Jesus expands the scope of this command dramatically in the Sermon on the Mount when he revisits some of these Ten Commandments. He says (using The Message paraphrase), *"You're familiar with the command to the ancients, 'Do not murder.' I'm telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder. Carelessly call a brother 'idiot!' and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell 'stupid!' at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. The simple moral fact is that words kill. (Mtt. 5:21-22)*

In other words, it is not just the body that can be murdered. Words can kill someone's spirit. When another person verbally assaults you, you feel something die within, don't you? Anger, wishing the other person dead counts as violating this command. Letting anger fester into a grudge, letting our hearts become bitter, and continuing in unforgiveness is poison in our hearts but also will spill out killing the possibility of relationship with the other person whom God loves.

THE 7TH COMMANDMENT

You shall not commit adultery (Ex. 20:14).

Adultery, unfaithfulness to our marriage vows kills the living union marriage brings about. Jesus, quoting Gen. 2:24 refers to it as "one flesh"(Mtt. 19:5)— a living reality.

[Jesus said], *'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.'* (Matt 19:5-6)

Adultery cuts into that "one flesh," killing it. One is one— you cannot be "one flesh" with two or three people. The sexual unfaithfulness of adultery rips apart the "one flesh" of marriage. Paul makes it clear that the act of sexual intercourse is a life-uniting act in a graphic passage in I Cor. 6:16, *Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh."* We do not have a body, we are a body. We don't have a spirit, we are a spirit. What touches the body also touches the spirit.

Sex outside of marriage is wrong because it violates the inner reality of the act. It is wrong because unmarried people engage in a life-uniting act without life-uniting intent. Life-union means marriage. Sex outside of marriage is deeply wounding and destructive to the person. The Bible is very pro-sex. It is holy, and considered a part of God's good creation. But sex is for marriage. Period.

Of course this is not the message we get from sitcoms and movies. I've read that about 90% of the sex portrayed in the media is not between people married to each other. But how seldom is the true picture given: marriages destroyed, children affected, grandparents, and on and on. There is a huge amount of destruction and incredible pain.

Again, Jesus expands the scope of this Commandment in his Sermon on the Mount (Mtt. 5:27-30) saying lust is mental adultery and violates this Commandment. What is in our minds is not

harmless. Every sinful act begins with a thought– including adultery and fornication, which includes all sex outside of marriage. Pornography is likewise sinful. Lust is a perversion of love that destroys true love and relationships. Lust seeks to use the other person– seeing them as a sex object, not a real person. Lust cheapens sex, denying the self-giving at the heart of relationship.

THE 8TH COMMANDMENT

You shall not steal (Ex. 20:15).

This command protects our property rights. Think how crazy our world would be if there was no respect for ownership? You couldn't leave anything anywhere. Stores, as we know them, would cease to exist. Stealing speaks of materialism gone wild.

But the ramifications reach far beyond that. Aren't things like short-cuts, or failing to do as the contract says in construction to increase profit forms of stealing? How about manufacturers making excessive profits? Doesn't goofing-off on the job steal from your employer? And, don't some of our ecological issues fit here when pollution steals the water and land from future generations merely to make a quick buck. We can worry about government debt and the robbing of the so-called Social Security Trust Fund in how it steals from future generations.

THE 9TH COMMANDMENT

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor (Ex. 20:16).

At the core, this is another form of stealing– stealing a person's reputation. Language is the community lifeblood and must be protected. This of course includes all lying. But we also give false testimony against our neighbor when we are part of spreading rumors, stories, or "hearsay" about them. While we think we may know all the facts, remember we never know everything about context and motives. Selective facts, while true, can certainly lead to wrong implications. And, even our silence when another person is being attacked can be taken as agreement, so we become part of the company bearing false testimony. Even tone of voice, a facial expression, or rolled eyes, can communicate volumes.

We live in a society where truth is misrepresented all the time. Many politicians twist facts or even lie to gain an edge. Quotes are taken out of context. Innocent people's reputations are thoughtlessly destroyed.

As Christians, we should be known as people who guard one another's reputations and are careful with the truth. Our neighbors, as Jesus says, are all those we have contact with. We should not be tearing down, but seeking to find out the good and uphold the truth.

THE 10TH COMMANDMENT

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (Ex 20:17)

This is the only one of the six love-your-neighbor commands that does not target an overt action, but an attitude of the heart. To covet is to desire what you don't have. This commandment extends it to more than things, but people as well. You'll notice it is the longest and most

detailed of these Commandments regarding relating to one another. It is silent and sinister in its destructive work within a community. It leads to discontent, envy and jealousy. I don't need to tell you how destructive they are in human relationships. Stealing, murder, backbiting, and even adultery often find roots in covetousness.

Much of the advertising we are bombarded with is designed to create covetousness— wanting what others have, but that we don't have. I don't need to tell you that the more we have, it seems the more we want. We live in the wealthiest, most prosperous society that has ever existed and yet are some of the most discontented people on the face of the earth.

Our Thanksgiving season provides a time for us to reset our hearts toward contentment.

Contentment can be learned. Paul says this in Phil 4:12-13:

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

God was Paul's source. Whatever God gave was adequate. To complain and desire more is a form of rebellion against God. Again, Paul writes:

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. (1 Tim 6:6-7)

CONCLUSION

In the Ten Commandments, we have a constitution for living a life of faith and living in community. They are not really restrictive— they are freeing. They put us in relationship with God, our Creator. They enable us to live freely in communities that don't hurt and destroy other people— places that will honor, protect, and enhance life.

I've read that we have something like 35 million laws on the books in the United States. Many are needed, to be sure. But, these ten will do quite well if we *really* take them to heart and live by them. Almost every other good law is rooted in these that God gave.

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ON EAGLES' WINGS, VIII. "Loving One Another God: Commandments 5-10" For Further Study and Reflection from Sermon 11-13-05

Scripture: Exodus 20:12-21

1. Honor your parents. How do you reconcile this commandment with Mtt. 10:37 where Jesus says: *Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me...?*
2. "Do not murder." Jesus gives additional insight in Mtt. 5:21-26, *"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to*

judgment.' 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

25 "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. 26 I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Discuss how you've broken this commandment and how we can guard against this sin.

What is the significance of leaving our gift at the altar and being reconciled?

Have you had some good experience in being reconciled with an "adversary?"

3. "Do not commit adultery." Consider Jesus' additional insights in Mtt. 5:27-30– Matt 5:27-30– *"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.*

While Jesus is using hyperbole here in gouging out eyes and cutting off hands, He is clearly calling for radical action against this sin. Why is that?

When does interest and appreciation cross the line to lust?

4. "Do not steal." Lev. 6:1-7 is an expansion of this commandment. *The LORD said to Moses: 2 "If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the LORD by deceiving his neighbor about something entrusted to him or left in his care or stolen, or if he cheats him, 3 or if he finds lost property and lies about it, or if he swears falsely, or if he commits any such sin that people may do — 4 when he thus sins and becomes guilty, he must return what he has stolen or taken by extortion, or what was entrusted to him, or the lost property he found, 5 or whatever it was he swore falsely about. He must make restitution in full, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the owner on the day he presents his guilt offering. 6 And as a penalty he must bring to the priest, that is, to the LORD, his guilt offering, a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. 7 In this way the priest will make atonement for him before the LORD, and he will be forgiven for any of these things he did that made him guilty."*

Name some of the ways of stealing mentioned. Can you think of other ways we steal?

5. “Do not give false testimony.” Also consider Eph. 4:25– *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.*

Why do you think lying is so prevalent today?

What are some more subtle ways we give false testimony that we may not see as sin?

Do we take this sin seriously enough?

6. “Do not covet.” Jesus begins his parable of the Rich Fool with, *“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”* (Luke 12:15)

How can we know when we've gone from admiration for another's possessions to coveting?

List some ways to combat this sin in our lives.

7. Moses ends the presentation of the Ten Commandments with, Ex 20:20– *Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.”*

How do you understand “the fear of God?”

Do we have enough fear to prevent us from intentionally breaking God's commandments?