



## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS—PART 2

Exodus 20:12-21

The last six of the Ten Commandments give us vital instruction on how to get along with one another in our families and in society. They offer restraints on wickedness and reveal the heart of a gracious God.

In our Wisdom Journey, we return now to the Ten Commandments as given in Exodus 20. We could call the Mosaic law the constitution and bylaws of the nation of Israel; it forms the moral basis for law and order in this young nation.

As followers of Christ, we are not Israel. The church has not replaced Israel; in fact, the nation of Israel will be reconstituted, and all twelve tribes will be represented in the coming millennial kingdom. But there's much we can learn from the Mosaic law, and particularly from the Ten Commandments. In fact, nine of them express timeless, universal, moral absolutes that are based on the character of God and are not confined to Israel's law.

Now we've already looked at the first four commandments. They are often called the first table of the law, and they concern a person's relationship with God. The final six commandments are considered the second table of the law, and they deal with a person's relationship with other people.

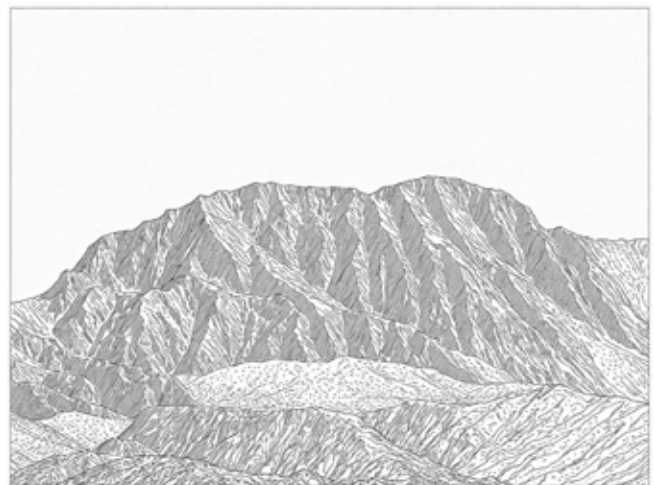
So, let's begin with the fifth commandment here in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 12: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."

Right away you notice the transition from our rela-

tionship to God to our relationship to others. And there's a clear connection between our vertical love for God and our horizontal love for our parents—or anyone else for that matter.

One author wrote, "When I have learned to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my [earthly] dearest better than I do now."<sup>1</sup> In other words, a love for God will produce a genuine love for others.

Each of these commandments actually includes a principle of grace. The commandment here protects the honor of the family. And when parents are honored, it brings stability and order to society—and that's a gracious gift from God.



Jebel Musa, the traditional Mount Sinai



Now did you notice that God adds a promise that is clearly limited to Israel? He says here, “If you honor your parents, you’ll live on in the promised land.” Right now, I don’t own any land in Israel—and I don’t plan to move there. But I can certainly obey this command to honor my parents and know that I’m pleasing God in the process.

Some of you reading this will find that it’s not easy to honor parents who mistreated you or even abused you or just didn’t love you like they should have. Let me tell you that one way you can honor your parents is by praying for them. Pray God will open their eyes to their sin and convict them and bring them to repentance. There is no more loving act than praying for your parents, who in many ways might not deserve your time and attention.

The sixth commandment, which we find in verse 13, is one everybody knows: “You shall not murder.” The reason for this prohibition against murder is found in Genesis 9:6: “for God made man in his own image.” Murder is not only robbing a person of the precious gift of life; it’s also profaning God’s image. And let me tell you, this commandment certainly includes the image of God in the life of an innocent, unborn child!

This law is also infused with grace. It’s a reminder that life—your life, my life, everyone’s life—is a sacred creation of God, the Giver of life. Every life is worth protecting. And built into this command is the warning that anybody who murders another person will one day answer to God.

Now in verse 14, we’re given the seventh commandment: “You shall not commit adultery.” We’re living in a day when adultery is excused in any number of ways—it was a passing affair, or it gave someone the attention that person needed. Well, beloved, this universal commandment doesn’t make any excuses for it; in fact, it lets you know exactly what God thinks of it. Adultery is a direct attack upon the institution of marriage and family, which God Himself established.

But like any sin against God’s moral law, God can still forgive. He can forgive murder, He can forgive idolatry, and He can forgive adultery. In fact, he can *restore* marriages damaged by adultery, whenever there is genuine confession and genuine repentance from this sin.

I’ve seen that take place; in fact, I’ve seen God bring healing to the heart of a spouse who suffered through the adultery of a husband or wife. I’ve seen the adulterer repent and the offended spouse offer incredible—nothing less than supernatural—grace in forgiving his or her spouse and restoring their marriage.

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love for others.*

In verse 15 we read, “You shall not steal,” the eighth commandment. The principle behind this law is that God owns everything. As humans we simply take care of the stuff God graciously gives us to manage.

Stealing, therefore, is an attack on God. Stealing is really saying, “God didn’t give this to me, but He should have” or “God doesn’t know what’s best for me or He would let me have this; so I’m going to take it myself.” This law is God’s gracious way of saying we can trust Him to give us the things we really need.

Now verse 16 reads, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” This ninth commandment specifically has a courtroom setting in view. This is where a lie can have the most devastating effect on someone’s life—even to the point of bringing about a person’s incarceration and perhaps even execution.

This command, then, is God’s gracious protection over someone’s reputation, and even life itself. At the heart of this command, though, is the demand for honesty—speaking the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Jesus said, “I am . . . the truth” (John 14:6). When we tell the truth, especially in difficult situations, we can be sure the one who is truth *is* standing with us.

The last of the Ten Commandments is recorded in verse 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 is your neighbor’s.”*

This law is designed to stop a sinful act where it starts—in the heart. To covet simply means to desire. When desire is misplaced so that it becomes a craving for what someone else has, it becomes sinful covetousness. To covet is to say in your heart, “I’ve got to have that!” Covetousness is the central motivation behind sins such as stealing and adultery.

This law is God’s gracious reminder to desire Him. “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, “and all these things [that God wants us to have] will be added to you.”

After the people of Israel heard God deliver these commandments, we’re told here that thunder, lightning, smoke, and the sound of a trumpet came from the mountain. And verse 18 says, “The people were afraid and trembled.” They could have spared themselves centuries of misery had they maintained that kind of awe and respect for God, and the law He had given them.

Well, we’ve raced through these commandments in our Wisdom Journey here in Exodus chapter 20. I hope you have seen that these laws are not just a bunch of rules imposed by an uncaring God. No, they are

gracious protections for His people. And because He is a gracious God, even when we fail to obey Him, there is forgiveness and hope

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What does Matthew 22:37-40 contribute to your understanding of the law? In what ways do these verses in Matthew “simplify” the Christian life?

Why do you think many of the Ten Commandments are ignored or rationalized as not relevant today? What can you do to help restore respect for God’s moral absolutes in your sphere of influence?

What does Matthew 22:37-40 contribute to your understanding of the law? In what ways do these verses in Matthew “simplify” the Christian life?

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<sup>1</sup> W. H. Lewis, ed., *Letters of C. S. Lewis* (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), 248.



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