

Deuteronomy 5:6-21 The Ten Commandments, part 2

We're back into the book of Deuteronomy today. Last time, we considered the first four of the 10 Commandments, and now we're ready to look at the last six.

Bible students have noticed that the first four commands pertain to one's relationship to God, while the next six commands pertain to one's relationship with his fellow man. These two sets of commands are inter-related. We cannot have a right relationship with other people unless we first have a right relationship with God. We must love and obey God as first priority and love others because we love God. Loving other begins with loving God.

After making sure that our relationship with God is right, we can focus on our relationships with other people. The last six commands help us develop and maintain proper interpersonal relationships. We have conflict in our world today because people disobey these commandments. If we would obey these commands, our relationships will go far better.

Perhaps the most significant relationships for us is with our own family.

1. Honor your father and mother (5:16)
 - a) God's plan for the family requires that children obey their parents. Parental authority is a primary building block in a stable society.

Quote: The well-being of a person, people, or nation begins in the home, a home in which a father and a mother function together in fulfilling the responsibility to train up their children in the way they should go. Within this context, beliefs and values are transmitted from one generation to another.¹

A well-functioning home begins with the command for children to honor their parents.

¹Alistair Begg, *Pathway to Freedom: How God's Laws Guide Our Lives* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 117.

- b) The word for “honor” (כָּבֵד) in this command comes from the Hebrew word meaning “heavy” or “weighty.” To be “heavy” in this sense is to merit respect, esteem, and value. Children are to respect the weight of their parents’ commands. Children ought not to treat the wishes of their parents lightly or casually. Children honor their parents by recognizing the weightiness or gravity of their commands. So that’s the responsibility for children—honor your parents.

And parents must insist that their children treat their commands with due respect. You cannot allow your children to disregard or disobey your commands. Parents must take disobedience seriously. Don’t ignore it when your kids disobey you; don’t tolerate it. Demand obedience from your children, and apply appropriate discipline when your children fail to honor your commands.

And you should not have to issue a command repeatedly. You should not have to beg and plead that your children obey. You should not have to yell or scream or threaten. Command the child, and then apply appropriate discipline if he does not obey.

And don’t ask the child if he wants to do something; don’t issue the command in the form of a question—“Would you like to...Can you do this for daddy?” Tell the child what to do and demand prompt obedience. Demand that your children respect you and your commands.

- c) .16b What are the results of honoring one’s parents? This is the first commandment with promise (Eph 6:2).
- (1) long life—“your days may be long.” That may be referring to the length of one’s life personally, but it may also refer to long life “in the land.” I.e., you’ll be able to remain in the PL.
 - (2) In addition to long life, Moses affirms that “it may be well” for those who obey this command (cf. Eph 6:3). Those who honor their parents can also expect an abundant life.

- d) This is the rule, but of course there are exceptions. Some who honor their parents do not live especially long lives, and some who disrespect their parents live to a ripe old age.
- e) But, all things being equal, the general rule is that those who respect their parents tend to live longer and more satisfactory lives than those who disrespect their parents.
- f) It's in our own best interests to retain a good relationship with our parents throughout our lives.

The assumption here is that parents act honorably. Many parents are dishonorable, and it's hard for children to honor dishonorable parents. E.g., those who provoke their children to wrath.

Parents must insist that their children treat them honorably, and they should make it easy for their children to do that by being honorable people.

2. Do not murder (5:17)

- a) In Hebrew, the command is very simple, composed of only two words: "not kill" (רָצַח). What this commandment prohibits is the wrongful taking of innocent human life.

The Hebrew word used here is never used to describe legal execution or death in the military. It is generally used for wrongful death of some kind. What the commandment prohibits is the deliberate, malicious, and unlawful taking of innocent life.²

Taking human life in some cases is not murder. Sometimes people deserve to lose their lives. Imposing the death sentence for some convicted criminals is just and right.

Because human life reflects the image of God, anyone guilty of murder forfeits his own life (Gen 9:6). Committing murder should be a capital crime.

- b) Human life is precious because God is the author of it and because all humans bear the image of their Creator.

²Alistair Begg, *Pathway to Freedom: How God's Laws Guide Our Lives* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 133.

- c) Since human life is sacred (i.e., special, unique, set apart for God), humans should be treated with respect and dignity, no matter what their physical condition.

App: Both young and old deserve humane treatment. The unborn and the infirm need special protection and care. All humans bear the image of their Creator and deserve protection from anyone who would threaten their life.

We are pro-life because murder is immoral. Killing an innocent human is wrong, whether that human is still in the womb or in a hospital bed. The age or place of the human does not matter.

And beyond that, we should recall

1 John 3:15 *Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*

It's unlikely that any of us would commit physical murder, but we might easily be guilty of hatred.

3. Do not commit adultery (5:18)

- a) Adultery is marital infidelity. Adultery is a terrible sin because it violates the trust between a husband and wife. It breaks the marriage covenant, a promise made before God.³

Quote: Adultery is a betrayal, an intrusion, and a rejection of God's instruction, which has been provided for our good. The adulterer separates what God has joined together and fails to love his neighbor as himself.⁴

- b) The prohibition against adultery is absolute; there are no loopholes or exceptions. The commandment forbids all unchaste thoughts, words, or actions. Any form of extramarital contact of this kind is sinful. Christians are called to moral purity and should allow no hint of moral uncleanness in their lives.
- c) In the OT, adultery was considered a capital crime, punishable by death. It was a very serious matter.

³Philip Graham Ryken, *Written in Stone: The Ten Commandments and Today's Moral Crisis* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003), 153.

⁴Alistair Begg, *Pathway to Freedom: How God's Laws Guide Our Lives* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 159.

Lev 20:10 *He that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.*

d) The seventh commandment protects the institution of marriage. The foundation of social relationships is the uniting of a man and a woman.

(1) Marriage is to be monogamous, heterosexual, and life-long—"till death us do part."

Quote: Society, and the church in particular, must protect the institution of marriage. Stable family units result from stable marriages. A well-run family contributes a certain order and integrity to broader social relationships.⁵

(2) Many today ignore, deny, or break this commandment.

(a) Some reject the idea of marriage altogether. They co-habit or shack-up without the benefit of marriage.

Among adults ages 30-39, 26% are living together without the benefit of marriage. Almost 70% of Americans say that cohabitation is acceptable.

(b) Many who get married are not monogamous. They are involved with others who are not their spouse. Adultery today is very common.

(c) But Christians should not be like other people. We must not be guilty of this great sin.

Jesus said that to look on a woman with lust is committing adultery in our hearts (Mt 5:28). So the command also prohibits adulterous intentions of the heart. Probably the most common way for men to commit adultery of the heart is through pornography.

⁵Michael S. Horton, *The Law of Perfect Freedom: Relating to God and Others Through the Ten Commandments* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1993), 191.

Trans: Christians, of all people, must abide by this important commandment. Adultery should not ever be named among us. We must intentionally avoid anything that would lead us toward adultery.

4. Do not steal (5:19)

- a) This command prohibits robbery or theft, i.e., taking another man's property unlawfully. The Hebrew word (גָּנַב) literally refers to something carried away.
- b) People steal in countless ways. Anytime we gain by causing another to lose, it's theft. Whenever we take something that doesn't belong to us—however we do it—we sin against God as well as our neighbor.⁶
- c) Theft deserves a serious penalty. The thief should be punished for stealing, and he should make restitution for what he stole.
- d) Our legal system is very corrupt/weak on this issue.

Illus.: Until recently, CA had a policy that any theft under \$950 was a misdemeanor, not a felony. They gave out very light sentences for theft. They just reversed that policy because theft became so common, and people became fed up with thieves getting no punishment.

It's very sad when the legal system does not punish theft.

- e) In addition to prohibiting theft, the eighth commandment guarantees property rights. Individuals have the right to own property. Theft violates property rights and threatens the livelihood of those whose goods are stolen.
- f) Property rights are fundamental and basic to human flourishing. We must not steal, and we should demand that the police arrest and punish those guilty of theft.

5. Do not give false testimony (5:20)

⁶Philip Graham Ryken, *Written in Stone: The Ten Commandments and Today's Moral Crisis* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003), 174.

- a) The particular context for this command is the law court. God prohibits a false testimony against one's neighbor in a legal dispute. What God most specifically condemns in the ninth commandment is a lying witness, someone who testifies falsely against anyone accused of a crime (i.e., perjury).⁷

False testimony would corrupt the legal system. Legal justice demands honest testimony. If people are lying under oath, justice is impossible. So we must demand that people give an honest testimony in a court of law.

Witnesses often swear an oath before they testify, verifying that what they are about to say is the "truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." But we should not need to take an oath to verify the truthfulness of what we are saying. We must speak the truth.

- b) More broadly speaking, this command prohibits telling any kind of lie. Lies against our neighbors harm them; a false witness damages his neighbor in some way. Falsehoods may seem trivial and harmless, but they are not. Harm often results from lies, even from little white ones.

⁷Philip Graham Ryken, *Written in Stone: The Ten Commandments and Today's Moral Crisis* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003), 186.

Extended Quote: A falsehood can be described as an invention, an equivocation, a falsification, a fabrication, or a prevarication. Dishonesty also comes in all different sizes. There are the big lies—the whoppers and the grand deceptions. Then there are all the little lies we tell—the half-truths, the flatteries, and the fibs. What we say may be true, as far as it goes, but we leave out the details that might put us at a disadvantage. Or we say something that is technically true, yet nevertheless intended to deceive. We overstate our accomplishments, putting ourselves in the best possible light. At the same time, we exaggerate other people’s failings, thinking and saying the worst about others. We mislead, misquote, and misinterpret. We twist people’s words, taking things out of context. In these and many other ways, we exchange the truth for a lie.⁸

That’s a perfect description of politics and fake news.

- c) The command prohibits telling lies, and it also implies that we should always tell the truth. God is true, his Word is true, and those who follow Jesus must be committed to truth.
 - d) The old saying “Honesty is the best policy” may not come directly from the Bible, but it is true.
6. Do not covet. (5:21)
- a) Covetousness is desire for something not rightfully owned; an illegitimate yearning to have what someone else possesses. When desire becomes an overwhelming craving or longing to possess something someone else has, it has become covetousness.
 - b) Desire to have something is not necessarily evil. We hunger and desire food. We get tired and desire sleep. We become lonely and desire companionship. We need various things to live and we desire to acquire them—a spouse, home, car, furniture, tools, toys, etc. These are all normal, healthy yearnings that are part of human nature.

⁸Philip Graham Ryken, *Written in Stone : The Ten Commandments and Today's Moral Crisis* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003), 189.

- c) But like our other natural appetites, our desires are easily corrupted. When we desire the wrong thing at the wrong time in the wrong way for the wrong reason, we are guilty of covetousness.

Quote: Covetousness is “little twinge of disappointment whenever someone else gets what we want. It’s how we react when a coworker gets the promotion, when our roommate finds romance and we [don’t], or when a friend goes where we can only dream of going for vacation. We are always comparing ourselves to others, and frankly we resent it when we don’t get what they have.”⁹

- d) The Bible repeatedly tells us to be content with the things God gives us (Heb 13:5). We should be thankful for what God provides and not focus our desires on things we do not own.
- e) When others succeed and enjoy things we cannot have, we should “rejoice with those who rejoice” (Rom 12:15). Instead of feeling sorry that we are not able to have certain things, rejoice when others do have those things. Don’t be covetous; be content.

Luke 12:15 beware of covetousness...

Paul exhorts us to be content “in whatsoever state” we may be (Phil 4:11).

- f) Contentment is really just trust in God. You can be content if you believe that God has providentially arranged the conditions of your life. God has given you what you need, and you should be satisfied with that.

Quote: Faith believes that God will provide; that he who feeds the birds will feed his children; that he who clothes the lilies will clothe his lambs; ... If we are content with our own, we shall not covet that which is another’s.¹⁰

⁹Philip Graham Ryken, *Written in Stone: The Ten Commandments and Today's Moral Crisis* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003), 203.

¹⁰ Thomas Watson

- g) When we consider all the spiritual and physical blessings God bestows on us and are sensitive to the needs of others, covetousness will not get a grip on our lives.

The 10 Commandments are a summary of the entire OT law. When Jesus summarized God's law, he said, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mt 22:37–38; cf. Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18; Rom 13:9). In other words, the Ten Commandments can be summarized by two commandments: love God and love your neighbor. We obey these commands because we love God and neighbor.

We love God by worshiping him properly and using his name reverently. We love our parents by honoring them. We love our spouses by being faithful to them. We love our neighbors by protecting their lives, respecting their property, and telling them the truth.

The God who gave these commandments is a God of love, who wants us to love him and to share his love with others. As Jesus said, "Whoever has my commands and keeps them, he it is who loves me" (John 14:21a; cf. 1 John 5:3a). If that is true, then we cannot separate God's law from God's love.

The Ten Commandments display the character of God. They reveal his sovereignty, jealousy, justice, holiness, honor, faithfulness, providence, truthfulness, and love.

How are you doing on the last 6 of the 10 commandments? Following these commands help our relationships with other people.

The Ten Commandments express God's will for our lives because they are based on God's character. The law, with all its goodness, springs from the goodness of God. The law is good because God is good, and his goodness penetrates every aspect of his law.