

YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

Series: Awesome Father, Precious Son

by Ron Ritchie

In his second address to Israel in the book of Deuteronomy (5:1-11:32), Moses has been reviewing the covenant that God made with Israel on Mount Sinai. Within that covenant God revealed to the Jews his heart, clearly set out in the Ten Commandments. He gave those Ten Commandments (notice, they are not Ten Suggestions) to the second generation of redeemed people after the Exodus, who knew they could not keep the good, holy, and righteous Law of God without depending on the power of the Spirit of God within them. These people knew that if they were going to go in and defeat a pagan people as well as settle the land of Canaan, they would have to cling to the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph---the one and only living God who could lead and protect them. They also knew that God was going to use them as his holy people to bring his love and salvation to the surrounding nations.

The first four commandments began with the equivalent of "Love the Lord your God with all your heart," and ended with the Sabbath rest. As we continue our study in Deuteronomy by looking at the last six commandments, we will find that they relate to loving our neighbor. And we will again see the wonderful character of our awesome heavenly Father and his precious Son Jesus.

The Fifth Commandment

Deuteronomy 5:16:

Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

This commandment parallels Exodus 20:12, where God said, "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you." In this commandment Moses is focusing on the sanctity of the family. The covenant relationship between God and Israel was like the relationship between a father and a son. This is clearly seen in the way Moses encouraged the Jews earlier to put their trust in the Lord as they faced the challenges of moving into Canaan, reminding them of "...how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son..." in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 1:31). So as the Israelites were to honor (to hold in high regard, esteem, respect, and glorify) their spiritual heavenly Father, who was the giver of their physical and spiritual life, Moses commands sons and daughters to honor their parents for giving them physical life and teaching them from the Torah about the spiritual life they can have with the one and only living God, Yahweh. The children's honoring their parents will lead them to have a high regard for their parents' relationship with God. This honor is the glue that will keep the covenant relationship intact. It will deeply affect future generations.

The Lord adds a most important promise (this is the only command with a promise): "...so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you." The parents of this generation of Jews were responsible for teaching them the Torah, the Sinai covenant, because within the terms of that covenant God was offering the choice of life over death. He wanted them to enjoy life as he defined it: a loving relationship with him and a heart that desired to please him. Moses is speaking about quality of life as well as length of life on this earth. Children experience quality of life as they learn how to live within a solid family structure. They learn to honor God and their parents as they watch their parents honor God. They learn to trust God for all their needs as they watch their parents trust God. They also learn to trust God for the power to love him; keep his commandments; love their family, extended family, and neighbors; and take their place of responsibility within the family and the covenant community. The love and commitment between God and the family is at the core of the covenant community. With all that in place, God promises to pour out his blessings.

If the children of the covenant disregard this commandment, they invite an early death to befall them at the hands of the elders (see Deuteronomy 21:18).

The precious Son Jesus confronted the Pharisees of his day because they had set this commandment aside to observe their own traditions. He reminded them, "For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition" (Matthew 15:4-6).

The apostle Paul gave this same commandment to the Ephesian Christian community, made up of both Jews and Gentiles (6:1-3): "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'---which is the first commandment with a promise---'that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.'" Paul transferred this promise from a relationship with God in the land of Canaan to one within the body of Christ and within Christian families. Children were to obey and honor their parents within the home. Once they left home, they were no longer to obey their parents, but they were to honor them in word and deed all the days of their lives, especially in their parents' old age.

I have watched many in our body take this commandment to heart over the years I have lived among them. I have noted especially the way many have honored their aged mothers and fathers until they were taken home to be with their loving Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In their loving and caring they have been the examples Anne Marie and I needed when our turn came to honor and care for her aging invalid mother. Many are currently seeking the Lord's wisdom as they make plans to honor their aging parents. At the same time, I know you may struggle with honoring your mother and father, and I would encourage you to go before the Lord and ask him to give you the courage and love to take the first steps toward a godly reconciliation.

The Sixth Commandment

Deuteronomy 5:17:

You shall not murder.

Moses now moves to the subject of the sanctity of life. This commandment is greatly misused, because at times it has been translated, "You shall not kill." Based on that translation, some have said that no one is to ever kill another human being, thus ruling out capital punishment and war. Other have said that based on that commandment we are not even to kill animals, bugs, trees, etc. There were seven different words for killing in the Hebrew, but the word for murder, *râtsach*, is the word used here.

The word *râtsach* was used in two ways. First, it was used for the premeditated killing of a personal enemy or innocent victim as well as for suicide. The roots of this commandment are found in Genesis 9:6, where God said to Noah,

"Whoever sheds the blood of man,
by man shall his blood be shed;
for in the image of God
has God made man."

"To kill a person was tantamount to killing God in effigy. That murderer's life was owed to God, not to society, not to the grieving loved ones, and not even as a preventative measure for more crimes of a similar nature." (W.C. Kaiser, Jr., *Towards Old Testament Ethics*.) God alone not only created man in his own image, but imparted to him His life, so life is sacred to Him and it should be to us. It is God alone who has the right to terminate life on this earth. Christian medical professionals are struggling today with secular medical professionals as they seek to define life and death and determine when to abort or let premature babies die, when to "pull the plug" on the aged and those in comas, and whether to assist the suffering in committing suicide.

The second usage of the word *râtsach* was for the case of manslaughter by negligence. The Jews were required

to rid their herds and flocks of animals that could kill a person, to cover wells lest someone fall in and drown, and to build parapets around high roofs so no one could fall off and be killed (see Exodus 21:29, 33-34; Deuteronomy 22:8). (Deuteronomy 19:1-13 deals with manslaughter that was not due to negligence.) God has called us as his people to love him and to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to do everything we can to honor the image of God in them by preserving their lives.

The precious Son Jesus challenged the Pharisees with this commandment by taking it to the level of the heart: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" (Matthew 5:21-22).

The Scriptures address themselves to the sanctity of life as David understands it in Psalm 139:13-16:

"For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.

My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place.

When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,
your eyes saw my unformed body.

All the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be."

The Seventh Commandment

Deuteronomy 5:18:

You shall not commit adultery.

Here Moses addresses the sanctity of marriage. Adultery is the act by which a married man or woman becomes sexually involved with a member of the opposite sex outside the marriage. The punishment for adultery was death (see Deuteronomy 22:22; also see Deuteronomy 22-25 for all the other sexual violations). The gift of the marriage relationship from the hand of God to Adam and Eve (see Genesis 2:18-24) was to become a spiritual symbol of the oneness built on loyal love that God wanted to have with both Israel and the church. He has offered his loyal love to us, and he wants us to demonstrate that loyal love within a marriage relationship for our joy and as a witness to the world around us of our faithful commitment to him. When a man or woman who is within the covenant relationship with God commits the sin of adultery, they demonstrate not only unfaithfulness to their partner but also unfaithfulness to God and his Son Jesus. Israel had always had an adulterous heart spiritually as she pursued one lover or god after another in her long history.

The precious Son Jesus addressed the Pharisees on this subject and again went to the heart of the sin: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28).

Not a day goes by that the Christian community is not exposed to many stories of adulterous relationships around us. Our newspapers, TVs, books, magazines, computer bulletin board services, etc., and even our brothers and sisters within the Christian community tempt us to consider the possibility of entering into an adulterous relationship under some other name: a loving and meaningful relationship, a casual affair, a harmless but fun liaison, a one-night stand, or an open marriage arrangement. But may we all have the heart of

the young and handsome Joseph, who in the midst of being "hit on" by the sexually aroused wife of his boss, said, "How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9).

The Eighth Commandment

Deuteronomy 5:19 :

You shall not steal.

Upon first reading this commandment, one would think that God is addressing himself only to the subject of stealing material property as spoken of in Exodus 22:1-15. But the subject is much more serious than that. It also has to do with human relationships within the covenant community. This commandment is literally, "You shall not "man-steal," or, "You shall not kidnap another person." It is made clearer in Deuteronomy 24:7: "If a man is caught kidnapping one of his brother Israelites and treats him as a slave or sells him, the kidnapper must die. You must purge the evil from among you." (This is a shadow of the story of how Jacob's sons kidnapped their younger brother Joseph and sold him into slavery in Egypt; see Genesis 37:17-28.) God never created men and women in his own image to have them kidnapped against their will, then sold like cattle for personal gain and sent into slavery. Since everything and everyone belongs to God, stealing material goods or kidnapping another person is the same as stealing from God himself (see Psalm 24:1).

Our newspapers and TV programs are filled with stories of unredeemed humanity kidnapping one another for personal gain of some sort. At times Christians are victimized by the sins of others. I recently saw this report of the death of two American missionaries from the New Tribes Mission located some thirty miles southeast of Bogotá. They were kidnapped by the Colombian guerrillas of the Marxist Revolutionary Armed Forces and held for a large ransom, which the mission refused to pay. Finally they were killed in a gun battle between the kidnappers and the Colombian police on June 19, 1995, leaving behind two widows and seven children (Christianity Today, July 17, 1995, p. 60).

The Ninth Commandment

Deuteronomy 5:20:

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

Moses now moves to the sanctity of truth in all areas of life. This commandment refers particularly to the testimony that a brother or sister within the covenant community would give against their neighbor in the context of a court of law. To despise truth was to despise God, whose very being and nature is truth. A man's or woman's future, and in some cases their life, could hang on the word of a witness. This is a call to make sure your testimony is always filled with truth in order to avoid a miscarriage of justice (see Deuteronomy 19:15-21). The key principle in this command is that God is truth and Jesus is truth, so the children of God should be filled with truth. To lie against a brother or sister in court involves some self-interest. God has called all his children within the covenant community to live and speak with honesty, integrity, and sincerity. The one and only living and faithful God Yahweh has never lied to his people or dealt with them in deceit, and he expects them to reflect his truthful character among themselves and in the world around them. Proverbs 6:17 tells us that God hates "a lying tongue." If a Jew were caught giving a false witness against his brother or sister, he would suffer the full penalty for the alleged crime of the defendant.

The precious Son Jesus was asked by the Jewish supreme court if he were the Son of God, and he responded, "Yes I am." This answer so angered the Jews that they brought him before the Roman ruler Pilate. "And they began to accuse him, saying, 'We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king'" (Luke 23:2-3). This false witness eventually led to the death of the innocent Lamb on the cross of Calvary.

I am involved in two cases at this moment of Christians' being falsely accused, as far as I can tell from all the current evidence. The stress, loss of sleep, loss of jobs, and possible loss of children is heartrending. In both cases we prayed to the one and only truthful God that he would bring out the truth in the midst of the false

testimony. Last Wednesday truth won the day regarding the custody of one child, and a second hearing is coming up this week. The other case is still pending.

The Tenth Commandment

Deuteronomy 5:21:

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Moses finishes up by addressing himself to the sanctity of motives and the quality of our inner contentment. The desire of men and women within the covenant community to violate any one of the commandments all begins when they neglect to love the Lord their God with all their heart and to trust him for all their needs: spiritual, emotional, and physical. The hope behind the violation is personal gain---at great expense to others. To covet (châmad) means to set one's heart on someone or something with the hope of owning or controlling them or it. God is calling his people to not set their hearts on a desire to take their neighbor's wife, house, land, servant, nanny, lawnmower, Lexus, or anything that belongs to their neighbor. The key to resisting this temptation is to remember the words of Paul when he wrote to his spiritual son Timothy: "...Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6).

The precious Son Jesus said to the Pharisees, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts and fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man" (Mark 7:20-23).

Our motion picture and TV stars keep us on a heavy diet of coveting every week as we watch their lives crumble before our very eyes because of this sin. But may that sin not be named among us, I pray, for the end is the death of the human spirit and soul of the man or woman who participates in such foolishness.

By the power of the Holy Spirit we are called to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might (see Deuteronomy 6:5), and love our neighbor as ourselves (see Leviticus 19:18).

The moral law of God, or as James calls it, the "royal law" (2:8), is fulfilled in Christ Jesus. He alone can and will provide the power necessary for his spiritual children to walk in his Law. The Law of God continues to reveal to believers and unbelievers alike the holiness of God and his Son Jesus Christ and to convict all of us of our sin (see Galatians 3:19-22). At the same time, the Law is being used by God as a schoolmaster to lead unbelievers to see that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world (see Galatians 3:24).

Those of us who have invited Jesus to become our Lord and Savior now know that God has placed his Law on our hearts and minds and has given us his Holy Spirit to empower us to walk in his Law. "He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant---not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6; see also Hebrews 8, 10:16).

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