

DHW

LESSON 18

THE BOOK OF EXODUS

Chapter 20-B

INTRODUCTION

In the last lesson we discuss the first four of the Ten Commandments which God gave to the children of Israel. You would observe that these commandments form the basis in which Israel might have a proper relationship with God – people should have no other gods other than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who is the only One Living and True God; they should not make any graven images and worship them; they should not use the name of God in a frivolous way; and they should set the Sabbath day apart, holy unto God. But the remaining six commandments touch on people's relationship with one another. Noticeably, there is a sign of the

cross, the vertical relationship between man and God, and the horizontal relationship between man and man.

After giving the Ten Commandments to the children of Israel through Moses, the LORD warned the Israelites concerning their allegiance and faithfulness to Him as their God. The LORD also taught them to be humble and serious about Him.

The following is an outline of Exodus 20:12-26:

- 1) The remaining six commandments were about people's relationship with one another (20:12-17);
- 2) Moses taught the Israelites the right attitude of mind and heart towards God (20:18-21);
- 3) God reminded the children of Israel of the sin of idolatry (20:22-23); and
- 4) God required His people to serve Him with simplicity of hearts (20:24-26).

STUDY THE WORD

The Fifth Commandment

Honour thy father and thy mother (v.12). This commandment regarding the relationship between children and their parents touches the very foundation of human society. The family is the most basic and foundational unit of any community or country. If the fabric of the family is broken or torn, the country will become weak and unstable. Therefore this is a very significant and important commandment for all people to obey. It is imperative that children must never forget to honour their fathers and mothers.

It is clear the commandment places no distinction between the father and the mother. Both parents must be honoured and respected equally. The word *honour* has a wide range of meaning.¹ It is almost an open ended commandment meaning that the

children ought to treat their parents in whatever way that respects or honours them. In all their dealings with their parents, the children must show due respect, esteem, affection, concern, considerateness, and appreciation. This kind of relationship with their parents must continue until the day their parents pass away. Negatively, it forbids children not to curse or speak disparagingly of their parents.

As noted this is the only one of the Ten Commandments that has a promise, as commented by Paul, Apostle (Ephesians 6:2-3).² Whether the promise of blessing is directed to the individual child or collectively to the people is difficult to resolve. But it can be understood in this way. If children respect and honour their parents, peace and unity will prevail within the family. God promises that there will be a prolonged period of peace, prosperity, and progress in the family. And when this

¹ The Hebrew for “honour” is *kabad* which can mean “heavy,” “glorious,” “honourable.” It means to consider someone important or to give him due respect.

² Ephesians 6:2 *Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;)* 3 *That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.*

condition of a family unit happens, the country in which they are citizens will also flourish and prosper. Interestingly, we have learned that the Hebrew word for “honour” strongly suggests, “heavy, rich, wealthy, and glorious.” We can also rightly apply this promise not only to each family unit but also to their country. If the children respect and honour their parents, the family will stand together. It will not be broken. A family that stands together will be strong for a long time. Even when their parents are long gone, the siblings should remain respectful of one to another, and in their own families when their children are taught the same, the promised longevity and prosperity would follow! And now we shall consider the final five commandments.

The Sixth

Thou shalt not kill (20:13).

This commandment has recently been frequently referred to in discussion groups relating to war,

capital punishment, euthanasia, suicide, self-defence and abortion. As can be seen, the commandment is a simple straightforward one. It does not make any distinction with regard to the meaning of the way killing is committed. What it says is what it means; plain and simple.

The word “kill” is the Hebrew word *ratsach*, meaning “to take the life of a person.” The word is used to mean murder in the first degree. It can be illustrated in the context of the premeditated killing of Naboth by the wife of king Ahab (1 Kings 21:18, 19).³ It was also used to refer to accidental or unintentional killing (Deuteronomy 4:41, 42).⁴ In this case the guilty party was given a temporary protection until the truth

³ 1 Kings 21:19 *And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.*

⁴ Deuteronomy 4:41 *Then Moses severed three cities on this side Jordan toward the sunrising; 42 That the slayer might flee thither, which should kill his neighbour unawares, and hated him not in times past; and that fleeing unto one of these cities he might live:*

was ascertained. If he was found to have committed first degree murder, he would be duly penalised. It is also used to refer to the execution of a convicted murderer (Numbers 35:30).⁵ But such killing was justifiable. Interestingly, the same word is not used in the context of war. Another word is more commonly used—Hebrew *charam*, which means “to destroy” (see Numbers 21:3; Joshua 6:21).⁶

These words teach us that the life of a human being belongs to God (Genesis 9:6). God only has the right to determine what shall be done with life. Life is not given to a man for him to do what he likes to do with it. Man has no such right for he is not God, who gives

man life. Man must respect the life of another man. If a man takes the life of another, he has violated God’s ordained order and must be punished as God had declared in this commandment. However, God later did give specific laws pertaining to the violation of this commandment (Exodus 21:12-17; 22:18-20).

The Seventh

Thou shalt not commit adultery (v.14). This commandment concerns men and women who are married. It also concerns sexual behaviour in general. The married man is forbidden to have sexual intercourse with another person’s wife, and the married woman may not have the same with any man other than her own husband.⁷ The seriousness of breaking this commandment is seen in the punishment of the death penalty.

⁵ Numbers 35:30 *Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die.*

⁶ Numbers 21:3 *And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah.*

Joshua 6:21 *And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword.*

⁷ Leviticus 20:10 *And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.*

Adultery is a sin against God and man. It is obvious that the purpose is to protect the unity of the family and the integrity and sanctity of holy matrimony. We can see that sexuality is not a casual or promiscuous matter. Relationship between two healthy and lively man and woman should be characterized by mutual respect, honour and integrity.

In addition to the positive benefits of maintaining harmony and happiness in the family and the sanctity of marriage, there are also the negative effects of sexual sins. Sexual permissiveness without restraint has resulted in venereal diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhoea, not to mention AIDS too, which are passed on by sexual intercourse. These diseases attack almost any part of the body; worst still they affect the innocent unborn baby. Man should praise and thank his Creator God for giving us this law, that in obeying it we are not plagued by these terrible diseases.

The Eighth

Thou shalt not steal (v.15).

This commandment forbids stealing of any kind. It concerns the matter of ownership. Stealing is to take or keep what does not belong to us. The quantity and value of the stolen goods are not the issue. The issue is more than that. The breaking of this commandment is a sin against man because it is a criminal act as it shows a disregard for the property of others. It is also a sin against God because it betrays the trust in Him.

We are familiar with the obvious ways of stealing, but there are more subtle ways. We steal from the government by not honestly declaring our income. We steal from our employer by not giving him a full day's work for the pay we receive or vice versa, employers remunerating inadequate and improper wages and benefits. We steal by denying others of their proper dues. And unimaginably worst still is when we withhold our tithes and offerings from giving

our dues to God; we literally rob God (Malachi 3:8-10).⁸

The Ninth

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour (v.16). This commandment forbids the giving of false testimony that is, telling lies or untruths in legal proceedings and even in ordinary situations. The commandment therefore protects a person's reputation and justice for anyone particularly in the judicial system.

Man bears false witness in many ways. A malicious lie, idle gossip, half-truth, insincere flattery, remaining silent, even a raised eyebrow or shrugged shoulders can be a form of bearing false witness and can violate this commandment. Lying is not just deliberately deceiving others but

⁸ Malachi 3:8 *Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. 9 Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. 10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*

also the more casual gossip and rumour.⁹

We must be honest at all times, as the saying goes: *Honesty is the best policy*. This commandment definitely calls for a commitment to the truth in our entire dealings with one another.

The Tenth

Thou shalt not covet (v.17). This tenth commandment forbids the uncontrollable lust and desire of a neighbour's possession, spouse, servants, animals, or any other thing. On the surface it seems that this commandment concerns a sin of the heart and mind only and is hardly known to man. However, it is common that such inordinate desires eventually lead to action. Hence, in obeying this commandment it is not just avoiding the action of realizing the thing coveted, but the suppressing of the attitude or intention of the lust or greed in the heart.

The scope of coveting is not limited to our neighbour's

⁹ Dunnam, 267.

possessions. It should include the lust after position, money, and opportunities. We often look at our peers and friends and crave for the things which they have, and declare that if we were given the same opportunity we would do equally well. Such covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).¹⁰

The biblical way of overcoming this spirit of covetousness in our heart and mind is to be contented with what we have.¹¹

The Right Attitude towards God

The Israelites who congregated at the foot of the mountain saw and heard *the thundering, and the lightnings, and*

¹⁰Colossians 3:5 *Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:*

¹¹ Hebrews 13:5 *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

Philippians 4:11 *Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*

the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking (v.18). They instinctively distanced themselves from the mountain and stood afar off. They saw the majesty and awesomeness of God that they were afraid to speak to God lest they die. They would only speak through Moses. In that instance, Moses called them not to be afraid for God had appeared in order to test them that this fear which they showed would always remain with them so that they would not sin (v. 20). A right knowledge of God should cause a believer as well as an unbeliever to maintain the right attitude towards God. Many believers and unbelievers have a low or distorted view of God and that is why they have no fear of God and they sin in their mind, speech and actions.

The Sin of Idolatry

God reminded the children of Israel that they had seen Him talking to Moses from heaven. Since they had requested that only Moses should talk to them, they

must always remember that whenever Moses would speak to them, it would be from heaven, that is, it was God who spoke to them from heaven.

Then God through Moses reminded them not to commit idolatry. They must not make *gods of silver* and also *gods of gold*. The reminder of God to the Israelites strongly suggests that they were prone to making idols and worshipping them as their gods. God knew that they would commit this sin. They should fear God and not to sin.

Serving God with Simplicity

God instructed them the way they ought to worship Him. In the place where they would erect an altar for making their offerings and sacrifices of their sheep and oxen, the altar they would erect must be made of the earth of the ground and if the altar was to be made with stone, they should not hand-craft the stones, but use only rough stones. The reason why God wanted to be worshipped in this

way was because the pagans of Canaan built steps to their altars which were beautifully crafted. This was a form of idolatry. And when they had to step up to the altar to worship God, they must not expose their nakedness. This was forbidden because the pagans practised ritual prostitution in the worship of their gods. God demanded that their worship of Him should be simple and nothing should be done for show. In this matter of worship of God, He has the right to prescribe the way He ought to be worshipped.

PRACTICAL VALUE

This study of the Ten Commandments has shown that God is not narrow-minded or even old fashioned. The commandments are the best laws man could ever have for his spiritual, political, economic, and social well-being, progress and prosperity. At the core of man's activities in all his fields of endeavour is his proper relationship with one another. This divine gift of moral laws should be

faithfully observed. The fear of God puts man on a right relationship with Him. The practice of the commandments liberates man from the bondage of his own depraved and sinful nature

We should get right with God by believing and trusting Jesus Christ who died for our sins. When we get right with God, He will give us the grace and strength to observe and practise these commandments. They should be obeyed and followed, otherwise God would not have given man these commandments. It is His mercy and love for mankind whom He created that He gave these laws through Moses. Therefore, it is unimaginable and foolhardy for any nation, least of all so-called Christian nations, to remove or obliterate the Ten Commandments. One can safely predict that in such nations, the morality of the people will decline appreciably and they will face a lot of social ills.

Modern Christians are tempted to be beautifully and artistically elaborate in their

worship of God. P. G. Ryken aptly remarks: “All He asked was a simple altar made from the good earth and rough stone that He created. Our worship should be simple too. What God requires is for us to worship Him in the ordinary acts of singing songs, and hymns, saying prayers and petitions, celebrating the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, giving tithes and offerings, and reading and hearing God’s Word. Nothing should be done for show.”¹² AMEN

¹² P. G. Ryken, *Exodus*, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2005, p. 692.