

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS IN THREE EASY LESSONS

February 11, 2007

Today we continue our preaching series on the Ten Commandments. Returning to the text which we began to explore last week, I invite you to turn to Exodus, Chapter 20, verses 1-17. The text is including in your sermon outline. Please follow along or read in your Bible as I share with you the word for today from the Word of God. This is what is written:

“Then God spoke all these words, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work -you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Here ends the lesson. Will you pray with me, please? Lord, in Your commandments You offer us laws that set the parameters - the boundaries - of acceptable behavior. You do so Lord, not to rob us of any measure of delight in life or living, but instead to protect us - to protect our hearts and lives from that which would destroy us. Today Lord, may we embrace Your commandments as more than laws for life; may we receive them this day as the very guidelines to the good life You intend for Your children. In Christ, Amen.

I thought Chernobyl was an accident. I never researched it; I just assumed, I suppose, that it was either shoddy Soviet construction, of poor policies and procedures that led to the Chernobyl nuclear disaster - I just assumed it was an accident. Then I was reading recently and discovered it wasn't an accident at all. Two scientists were carrying out personal experiments, and in the process of those experiments chose to override the alarms on the computer security system *six times*, which led to the greatest nuclear disaster in the 20<sup>th</sup> century! Six warnings were ignored, and the result was a meltdown that will continue to impact that region of the world beyond our lifetime, in essence, creating an environment that is uninhabitable. I suggest to you today, as we look at these last six commandments that God gave His people, that they are nothing short of warning signs intended by the Almighty to prevent us from meltdowns that would make our lives unimaginable.

The best example I can think of is Anna Nicole Smith. We have seen her sad saga played out in the tabloids and in the news - not just this week, but for years. And it isn't possible to survey the wreckage of her life and conclude that it was anything less than tragic and pathetic. And why? Because the very warning signs intended to protect us were so routinely and promiscuously disregarded. I would offer that her life can serve as a warning of sorts - an invitation to us to take seriously and receive the timeless Word of God and apply it in the most timely fashion imaginable, realizing that God offers to us a code of living that is the very key to life. The question is, how do we integrate it into our lives so that it simply becomes part of the lives we live?

It is interesting to note that one of the sponsors of the bill to introduce the Ten Commandments in courthouses and schools was asked off the cuff to name the Ten Commandments, and it was really embarrassing for this representative - he could only come up with three of them on the fly. The problem is, we just simply do not translate the text into our everyday living.

There is a church in Greensboro Tennessee. Has anybody been to Greensboro, Tennessee? They published The Hillbilly's Ten Commandments; they actually have this posted in their church, thinking it would be helpful and relevant. Are you curious? Knowing you, I knew you would be.

- 1) Just one God.
- 2) Put nutt'n before God. Did you catch that? Nutt'n before God.
- 3) Watch yo' mouth.
- 4) Git yo'sef to Sunday meetin'. (I like that one. Git yo'sef to Sunday meetin'. Put that on your mirror!)
- 5) Honor Ma and Pa.
- 6) No killin'.
- 7) No foolin around with another fella's gal.
- 8) Don't take what ain't yers. (That is y-e-r-s for those who are wondering!)
- 9) No tellin' tales, and no gossipin'.
- 10) Don't be hankerin' for your buddy's stuff.

That kind of spells it out clearly, doesn't it? What I want to do is spell it out *so* clearly today that you will begin to realize the incredible construct that God offers to protect us.

I translated the last six commandments into modern paraphrase to help us better understand them, and it really begins with a focus on the family. "Honor your father and mother." When we hear that, the immediate impulse is to turn to your teenager and say, "See there, God says so!" But I think we have the wrong image in mind; we kind of assume that when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai and delivered the Ten Commandments, he looked at the teenagers in their midst and said, "This is for you. I mean, clean up your corner of the tent! Do better in Yeshiva school; none of you is really reaching your full potential! Stop driving the camel so recklessly." It wasn't that way at all! He was actually addressing a generation of Hebrews in relation to their elder parents.

Oh, well *that* casts this in an altogether different light. When he says honor your father and mother, he is talking about an entire family dynamic that extends to generations. And he is suggesting that our propensity is to react with dishonor to those closest to us. You see that all the time, don't you? Visit a nursing home, and ask a few of the residents when they were last visited by family or friends. For far too many, it is painful; their loneliness is palpable! And why is it, that in our homes with the people who are closest to us, we feel most at ease unleashing our tirades that are so dishonoring and disrespectful? It is not what God intends. God intends that we create an atmosphere of honor and appreciation, affirming and encouraging. Yes, we are going to get frustrated with one another; yes, we are going to get angry with our spouses, with our children, even with our parents, but so long as it is in the context of love and respect, an awesome family is created.

And we mustn't forget that our relationship with God is crucial. Remember last week when I said that by putting God first, we elevate every other relationship? I went to lunch with a new member of our church just this past week, and as we sat and talked, he picked up on that theme and said, "You know something? My wife and I some time ago started the practice of doing daily devotions together." He said, "You know, we read the devotion, and then we discuss it. You can't believe how that has blossomed, and has made our relationship so much richer!"

I remember that when I was growing up, my father would sit and read aloud "The Upper Room" after our evening dinner, and then turn to us as children and say, "What do you think it meant?" And it led to so many fascinating conversations, and addressed so many issues that were so close to his heart. I am so glad and thankful for those times, because he died when I was 12, and I would have missed all that if he hadn't made the intentional investment in creating a family of love and honor.

That really struck me this last week when I was at the hospital in the Intensive Care Unit waiting room with Mary Conkling, Bill, Richie, Amy, and Kitty – and a steady stream of our church family came and went. And I mean, here is a lively family! Winston was an educator and administrator in the school system; well-loved, strongly opinionated, a "dyed in the wool" Democrat who loved to argue politics passionately, and yet always

did so with such a wonderful sense of appreciation and honor for his family, friends, and others. And he conveyed such love and invested himself so much - not just in his family, but in his students, other administrators, his community, and his church. As I sat with them in that environment, a family that was there at the same time watching this stream of visitors said to Mary, "Are all those people from your church?" She said, "Yes." And the family said, "Would you ask them to pray for us?" You see, they saw first-hand the power of love, and that is what happens when we create an environment that is truly honoring - one which focuses on the family - not just on the immediate family, but on the extended family, the church family. So first, honor your father and mother.

Do not kill. What Moses was teaching here is true respect for human life. Do you like action movies? The men are like, "Yes!", and the women are like, "Oh dear, let's not talk about action movies!" But you have to admit, there are some great action movies, aren't there? And we can't forget the great action heroes. I always loved John Wayne, didn't you? He always had that rolling walk, you know, and he was so quick with a gun that he shot down the bad guys. Yes? And then there is Harrison Ford in Raiders of the Lost Ark and that whole series, and Air Force One. Do you remember Air Force One? It is probably one of the very best action movies ever made. It has a visceral appeal; it just speaks to the root of us. The terrorists in that movie are so evil - I mean, so absolutely heartless - that, near the end of the movie when the President (Harrison Ford) puts that rope around the terrorist's neck and pushes him out of the ramp of the plane and you see his neck snap . . . Well, I guess that is a little graphic, isn't it? But part of us, if we're honest, responded to that scene with a resounding, "Yes!" didn't we?

Well, that is part of the problem. Darrow said, "I have never killed anyone, but I have read some obituaries with deep satisfaction." What God is teaching us - and be very clear about this - is a sense of the sacred. The human life is sacred and to be cherished, and that means we really don't have the prerogative to wrap a rope around anyone's neck and snap it. God's grace is so powerful, I really believe there is no life beyond the touch of His love, and we do not have the divine prerogative to end a life before God has had the opportunity to touch it. That type of an attitude about human life would transform our culture, which has, sadly, cheapened human life. All we need do is look around us; look, for instance, at our cities; where gun play is common, where people have altercations which result in gun battles, where life is considered so cheap as to be extinguished without thought. I once heard a pastor speak, whose two sons both died due to gang violence. His mission is to go throughout the country and teach the truth that life is sacred by God.

The next commandment is, "You shall not commit adultery". Let's be honest with ourselves and with God. What is not our own often seems more alluring. We've all seen or experienced this situation: we tend to see the people we are not married to at their very best - they are made up, they are looking well, they don't have morning breath, and their hair is styled. They look so appealing from a distance, and there is often that allure that speaks to the heart and draws so many into adulterous affairs. It seems so painless, so appealing, that people far too often conclude, "How could it be wrong?"

Do you remember Glenn Close in Fatal Attraction? Do you remember? The brilliance of that movie was that it revealed the horror and the wreckage that result from an adulterous affair. I know this first-hand, because I see it in my office. People believe that no one will get hurt; it is simply not true. I've seen hearts and lives broken and shattered, and I cannot tell you the number of times I have had couples in my office only to have one partner say, "Oh, I wish to God I had never done this! I never imagined what would happen." Well people, imagine, and imagine hurting the people who are closest to your heart - your spouse, your children, your parents. Imagine the heartbreak of two families often shattered and torn apart. Imagine the broken trust that takes literally years to rebuild, if ever. Imagine the betrayal and the sense of rejection and the human pain. The beauty of Fatal Attraction (and it is time to make a new one!) is that it revealed the horror our society neglects to acknowledge.

The next two commandments, "You shall not steal" and "You shall not bear false witness", I have combined, because they really are addressing the same thing. Our culture today plays fast and loose with integrity. We do not treat one another with honor, which is why we have no conviction about cheating, stealing, and gossiping. And it really is tragic, because those behaviors have become the norm rather than the exception.

Reader's Digest selected 226 auto repair garages randomly, and sent a team of people in with a car. All that was wrong with the car was that it was missing a spark plug wire. What is interesting is that 74% - 167 of those garages - repaired something that wasn't broken or did nothing at all, and still charged up to 500 dollars for the repair. And I need to qualify this, because I know people who are in the 26%. Doug Stoll is one of my best friends, and he is a man of honesty and integrity. My father owned a garage; that is how he got started in business before he went into insurance. I know many men and women of integrity, but what does it tell you when 74% choose to cheat, steal, and lie? Something has gone horribly wrong in our culture today, and it is not just found in garages. What I would suggest to you is that the story I just told is an apt analogy of what has happened to the moral climate in our culture, throughout our society.

It is interesting though. Remember when the West Point cheating scandal broke a couple of years ago? They expelled 151 cadets for violating the honor code and cheating on a test. West Point later did a survey of alumni, in which they asked what they believed to be the reason for the cheating scandal and the violation of the honor code. Do you know what one-third of them wrote back and said? They stated their belief that the elimination of MANDATORY worship had robbed the honor code of its foundation of sanctity. And I think they are right! You see, if God is not first in your life - if you are not striving to love your brother and sister as yourself - well then, you have no moral constraints to keep you from taking advantage - from lying, stealing, cheating, and everything else. But when we do so, we steal from ourselves, we lie to ourselves. Every time we gossip, we diminish ourselves, because how can we look in the mirror at a person we know lacks integrity?

I wish I could remember the name of this certain golfer, back in the 1990's. You know, I'm sure, that the rules of golf are really strict. There was a pro golfer playing a

tournament, and his ball was on the green. Someone was behind him, so he needed to move his ball. He placed his marker so that it was not in the path of the putt that was to follow; actually using his putter to mark the ball behind the putter, so that it was about 3 inches from its original spot. The next fellow putted; then the first man came up, placed his ball, putted, and continued to play. As he was walking to the next green, it occurred to him that he may have placed his ball on the marker rather than on the spot it should have been placed, and so he penalized himself - he assessed the one stroke penalty the USGA rules prescribe - and he didn't win the tournament. He was that close. He didn't win. And as he was being interviewed on television (This was great! I wish I had a copy of the video to show you; it was so good!), he was asked, "Don't you feel terrible assessing yourself the penalty when you may not have been in the wrong, and you lost the tournament?" And he looked at them he said, "Well yeah, but I'd feel so much worse if I won and always wondered if I had inadvertently cheated." That is integrity. Don't you see? And it is all about us and our relationship with God. No one else really factors in that equation. Because when we are straight with God - when we look at ourselves in the mirror and see a man or woman of integrity - that means we can treat everyone else with honor, and we undoubtedly will, because our integrity is so precious.

The last commandment is (and I really have to admit that I like the hillbilly version of this -Don't be hankerin' for your buddy's stuff."), "Don't covet what is your neighbor's. You know, we are amazing human beings, we really are. We tend to be fully satisfied with ourselves and what we have right up until the moment somebody else has something better. Have you noticed that? Your house is perfectly adequate - it is just fine - and then you visit a dear friend who has just built a new one, and it is hard not to fall into the trap. "Oh! Look at that kitchen! Oh, look at the 'man room'! This is awesome!" And all of a sudden, you go home and you see your house through different eyes. This is notoriously true for cars, isn't it? I mean, your car can be running well and have a great service record; everything can be just fine, and you are completely satisfied. Then, all of a sudden, your buddy shows up in a brand new car and takes you for a ride. Suddenly, your car looks kind of shabby, doesn't it? It doesn't seem to matter how old it is; all of a sudden, it is really not satisfying. And so we fall into the trap of believing that "if only. . . if only we acquire that new house, then I will be happy. I will be happy; that is all I need! Or, if only I could get that new car, I would be perfectly content. Or, "Oh boy, did you see where they went on vacation? Maybe if we get the new house, the new car, **and** we go on vacation where they are going, then we will be fully happy; finally content and satisfied.

Do you believe it? Do you believe it? No! Because nothing could be further from the truth - nothing. It is an addiction, and here is how it works. Some people call it "Retail Therapy". Let's say you are feeling somewhat depressed, somewhat dissatisfied, so you think if you buy something, you will feel happy. And you know something? You will for a short time. But then you will be faced with the bill, and worse than that, in a short while you will be dissatisfied with whatever it was you bought. It is human nature. If you believe **things** will make you happy, you will never be satisfied.

The key to true contentment is not what you acquire and hold in your hand, it is what fills your heart. What distinguishes a successful soul from one who isn't, is not the

accumulation of wealth, things, toys, and everything else; it is the satisfaction that leads to a true savoring of life, that says, "This is a blessed gift from God." It is so much better to want what you have than to eventually have what you want, because it is all a matter of the heart. And why does any of this matter to God so much that He would spell it out in commandments passed down through the ages, to this day, to you? Because God wants your life to be a blessing! David summed it up beautifully, the promise of God: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." That will only happen if you abide by the parameters God has set.

Do you remember Hurricane Andrew? It struck Florida back in the 1990's. There was a video clip in which the news crew was going through a neighborhood in which every house had been leveled except one - one house was left standing, and it actually looked remarkably good. And the guy who owned the house happened to be a builder, who had built his own house. So, as they were going around surveying the wreckage, they came and interviewed this guy and asked, "Why is it that your neighbors' houses are all down and yours is still standing?" This guy was so good - he was "salt of the earth", a regular fellow, just a good old boy - he was wonderful! He kind of looked down, shuffling his feet, and he said, "I don't know . . . I just built it to code." Did you catch that? I just built it to code. Believe me, the lives that last are built to code. Those are lives of love that last eternally. Amen?

Pray with me, please: Lord God, thank You for Your wisdom, Your Word, and Your truth poured into our lives. Inspire us to build our lives to Your code that we might live forever. In Christ, Amen.