



The Gift of **THE LAW**



2026 Fall Churchwide

The Gift of the Law

Why this study?

This year, our vision focus is Made to Worship. Our plan for the fall is to focus on learning God's ways by learning his law. Of course, the law finds its fulfillment in and through Christ. The law is not our means of salvation but God's gift to us for ordering our lives, our communities, and our world. It reveals his character and leads us to true freedom, peace, and joy. In Christ, the law is not legalism or a burden but a gift. Our goal is to learn God's law as a means of better knowing him and enjoying a long and happy life in the community of his people.

Component Parts of the Churchwide Study

- 1- Sunday Worship Messages
- 2- Group meetings (and material)
- 3- Special front lawn worship event (in planning with Max)
- 4- Daily podcasts

September 13

Text: Exodus 20:1–2; Deuteronomy 4:5–8

Theme: How grace comes before the law. The law is not the way to salvation but God's gift of order for a people he has already loved and redeemed.

September 20

Text: Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 6:4–5

Theme: How God calls his people to absolute loyalty. God is the center of our lives, with no rivals. We are able to know and love God because he has come to us in Christ.

September 27

Text: Exodus 20:4–7; Colossians 1:15–20

Theme: The danger of creating an image of God through the way we think about him. Jesus is the only true image of the invisible God. This week will cover both the second and third commandments.

October 4

Text: Exodus 20:8–11; Deuteronomy 5:12–15

Theme: How the rest established by God in the pattern of creation is given to us through the gospel.

October 11

Text: Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1–4

Theme: How honor and respect are to be given to those to whom they are due. Jesus opens the way for us to honor God, our parents, and others in authority.

October 18

Text: Exodus 20:13; Matthew 5:21–26

Theme: How God calls us to protect life because he is the one who gives it. Jesus shows how this commandment also addresses hatred and anger in our hearts.

October 25

Text: Exodus 20:14; Matthew 5:27–30

Theme: The seventh commandment addresses adultery, but it also has a wider application to sexual purity and faithfulness. Marriage is meant to display the faithful love Jesus has for his church.

November 1

Text: Exodus 20:15; Ephesians 4:28

Theme: The eighth commandment includes stealing, fraud, and other means of dishonest gain. It also calls us toward honest work, faithful stewardship, and generosity.

November 8

Text: Exodus 20:16; Proverbs 12:17–21

Theme: This commandment prohibits false testimony, but it also addresses the many other ways we misuse our speech. It has a direct connection to justice and points us to Jesus as God's true Word to us.

November 15

Text: Exodus 20:17; Philippians 4:10–13

Theme: How coveting lies at the root of the other commandments. The tenth commandment brings us back to the first by exposing the rival desires of our hearts and directing us toward contentment in God.

Desires for our group meetings:

1. Participate in each session of the study. Being present allows us to grow together and build on what we learn along the way.
2. Take responsibility for your own learning. This means being willing to ask questions and seek the answers together. Your leader is meant to be more of a facilitator rather than a teacher. This makes it essential that everyone contributes to the group.
3. Listen actively to each other. This will allow us to benefit from each other's wisdom and insight. Here we will experience the presence of Christ in our midst.
4. Challenge the study's ideas and build on each other's ideas and thoughts.
5. Be willing to disagree lovingly, knowing this is how we get to the truth and learn to apply it.
6. Realize that Jesus is in our midst and become sensitive to the direction of the Spirit of God. Consider how God would have you take action as a result of what you learn each week.
7. Treat each other with respect in accordance with the Gospel. Encourage and pray for each other.
8. The best time for application and implementation is when our learning is fresh. Look for ways to apply it in your life right away. Remember, the goal is not only to build more knowledge but to grow in Christ.

Week 1 - Relationship Comes First

Getting Started

1. Think back to a rule in your childhood that felt like a burden at the time, but you later understood was actually for your good. What was it, and what changed your perspective of it?
2. How would most people today finish this sentence: "Real freedom means _____.\" Where do you think that idea comes from?
3. What is the difference between a rule meant to control you and a rule that exists to protect you? Can you think of an example of each?

Scripture Study - Exodus 20:1-2

"And God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.'"

Context: Yes, the actual Ten Commandments given by God, the ones we usually see depicted on two tablets, do not begin with the first command. They begin with the Lord's statement about his relationship with his people. Most people come to the Ten Commandments and head straight to verse 3. But before God gives a single command, he reveals the basis for his commands. He does not begin: "Here is how you may earn my favor." He begins by saying who he is and what he has already done. The commandments that follow are not the ladder by which people climb to God. They are the covenant details of a people God has already brought to himself. The Lord has loved them and redeemed them. They are his people. The law was not the way to become the people of God, but the gift of the God who chose them to be his own.

This sequence, grace first, law second, runs through the whole of Scripture. It is the pattern of Ephesians (chapters 1-3 before chapters 4-6), of Romans (the gospel before ethics), and of the Christian life. We do not obey in order to be loved. We obey because we are loved, and because the God who loves us knows what genuine freedom looks like, and what threatens it.

God has watched his image-bearers ground down under the heavy hand of Pharaoh. He knows what happens to a people without order, without structure, without guardrails. The commandments are not a new Pharaoh; they are the anti-Pharaoh. They are a gift from a Father who knows what slavery does to people and is building a community that will not

fall back into it. The law will enable God's redeemed people to live in practice in the Lord's love and freedom.

There is one final major concept to consider. It is this: just as there are physical laws that govern the way our world works like the law of gravity or the law of thermodynamics, there is also a spiritual law that governs the ways our communities and individual lives were created to function. The law is the description the Lord gives of these principles that make for a life of flourishing and unity. It is as firmly established as the physical laws of our world.

Key Scripture Passages

- Exodus 20:1-2 — The prologue to the Law
- Deuteronomy 4:5-8 — The law as wisdom lived before the nations
- Psalm 19:7-11 — The law as precious, life-giving, sweeter than honey
- John 8:31-36 — True freedom and the slavery of sin
- Romans 7:12 — The law is holy and good

Discussion Questions

1. The name the LORD here is God's personal covenant name, the one he revealed to Moses at the burning bush. What does it mean that it is this God, with this history with his people, who is speaking?
2. God describes himself as the one who brought them out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. The commandments are given to a free people, people who have been redeemed and are already loved by God. How does that change how we read them?
3. Deuteronomy 4:8 asks: "What great nation is there that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law?" The nations around Israel were watching. What does this suggest about the law's purpose beyond Israel's own life together?
4. Psalm 19 describes the law as "more desirable than gold" and "sweeter than honey." Does that match your instinctive feeling about God's law? If not, what gets in the way?
5. Our culture prizes freedom above almost everything, the freedom to define ourselves, to live without constraint. Jesus says in John 8 that sin makes us slaves. Where do you see our culture's version of freedom producing its own bondage?
6. God speaks before he commands. He identifies himself and recounts what he has done. Why does that order matter? What would change if the commandments came first?

7. If God gives the law because he loves his people, not as a condition of love but as an expression of it, what does that say about what the commandments are for? How should this change the way we receive the law and our discussion of it in the weeks ahead?
8. How does the gospel, the love of Jesus, help us to see God as our loving Father and his law as a gift rather than a burden?

Application

This week, ask God to shift your instinct about his law, from burden to gift, from constraint to protection. Notice one place this week where you see the wisdom of an ordered life in contrast to the chaos of unconstrained so-called "freedom."

Week 2 - The First Commandment — God Alone

Getting Started

1. If someone could observe your daily life, how you spend your time, money, and mental energy, what would they conclude you love most?
2. The word "idol" often calls to mind ancient statues. What do you think functions as an idol in our culture today? What about in your own life?
3. Have you ever wanted something so badly that getting it, or losing it, revealed how much weight you had placed on it?

Scripture Study - Exodus 20:3

"You shall have no other gods before me."

Context: The first commandment follows directly from the prologue. Because God is the Lord, the covenant God who redeemed his people, he alone holds the place of absolute loyalty. The phrase "before me" in Hebrew does not mean God takes first place in a ranked list. It means there is no list. No rivals, no alternatives, no competitors permitted in his presence.

The positive form of this commandment is what is called the Shema: "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Jesus calls this the greatest commandment, the one from which all others flow. The first commandment is not primarily about what we must avoid; it is about who we are made to love. Every sin, the transgression of all the other commands, is a breaking of the first command. It is putting something ahead of God. (Yes, this means that though we may separate the second tablet of the law, the duties we have to each other, from the first table, our duties to God, the second table is not possible without the first.)

The challenge for us is that our culture rarely produces people who bow to literal statues. It produces something subtler: people who have quietly installed something else at the center of their lives, something that functions as a god even without the label. For example, career, security, approval, comfort, romantic love, political identity, personal autonomy. These are among the idols of our culture. They do not announce themselves

as rivals to God. They simply occupy the place that belongs to him, and demand the devotion to be for him alone.

Key Scripture Passages

- Exodus 20:3 — The first commandment
- Deuteronomy 6:4-5 — The Shema: the positive form of the commandment
- Isaiah 44:6-8 — "Besides me there is no God"
- Matthew 22:34-38 — The greatest commandment

Discussion Questions

1. The phrase "before me" in Hebrew means something closer to "in my presence" or "besides me," not first in a ranking, but exclusively. What is the difference between God being first in your life and God being central to it?
2. The positive form of this commandment is the Shema and the Great Commandment — wholehearted love for God. How does seeing it as a love commandment rather than a prohibition change how you receive it? What do you think it means to love God?
3. Isaiah 44 describes a craftsman who cuts down a tree, uses half for firewood, and carves the other half into a god he bows down to. What is Isaiah exposing about the logic of idolatry? Why do people gravitate to idols?
4. We don't carve idols as the ancient people did. But we have functional idols, aspects of our lives we look to for security, hope, and meaning. Here are some functional idols: career, security, money, approval, romantic love, comfort, identity. They rarely announce themselves as rivals to God. Where do you find them in your life? What signs reveal that something has taken God's place?
5. Our culture often treats all religious commitments as equally valid, God as one option among many. What is the first commandment's answer to that? How can you hold that conviction without arrogance?
6. Jesus says love of God is the greatest commandment, the one that orders all others. What would it look like for the love of God to be the actual organizing center of your week, rather than one item on the list? How does Jesus open the way for us to love the Father, and give us a reason and the ability to do so?

Application

Identify one functional idol in your life, something that has been occupying a place that belongs to God. Name it honestly. Bring it to God in confession and ask him to reorder your loves. (You may also wish to use Tim Keller's "Idol Assignment" to assist you with this project, included at the end of our material.)

Week 3 - The Second and Third Commandments — His Image, His Name

Getting Started

1. If someone who had never read the Bible asked you to describe what God is like, what would you say? How confident are you that your description is accurate?
2. Have you ever heard someone use religious language, like "God told me," in a way that felt hollow or self-serving? What made it feel that way?
3. What is the difference between being reverent and being religious? Do you think our culture has lost the capacity for reverence? Why or why not?

Scripture Study: Exodus 20:4-7

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God... You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain."

Context: These two commandments belong together, and are taken by the Jewish people as one. The second governs how we represent God, with our hands and in our thinking. The third governs how we handle his name, with our lips and in our lives. Together they call God's people to something our culture has largely lost: reverence, treating God as he actually is, rather than as we make him out to be.

The second commandment is not primarily about statues. At Sinai, God spoke from fire and cloud, no visible form. He deliberately withheld a physical image of himself. The commandment protects that decision. In making a physical image to represent God, we are limiting and objectifying him. The danger is not that we will melt down our jewelry and cast a calf. The danger is subtler: we reshape God in our minds to suit our preferences. The god of our permissive culture never judges, always affirms, and conveniently agrees with whatever we have already decided. That is an idol, made of our assumptions rather than gold, but an idol nonetheless. It is more dangerous than a metal statue because we often fail to see it.

God's response to this is striking: he calls himself jealous. This is not petty like our jealousy often is. Divine jealousy is the right response of a faithful spouse to

unfaithfulness, the appropriate passion of one who loves deeply and will not share what belongs exclusively to him. It is akin to being zealous.

The good news is that God has not left us without an image. Colossians 1:15 tells us that Jesus "is the image of the invisible God." The commandment that forbids human-made images of God is fulfilled in Jesus, the Son, who is the exact representation of the Father's being/nature.

The third commandment extends this reverence from God's image to his name. God forbids handling his name as though it weighs nothing, through false oaths, casual spiritual language, or using his name as a tool to get what we want. The Lord's Prayer gives us the positive form: "Hallowed be your name," may your name be treated as you are to be treated on our lips and in our lives.

Key Scripture Passages

- Exodus 20:4-7 — The second and third commandments
- Deuteronomy 4:15-20 — Israel saw no form at Sinai
- Romans 1:18-25 — Exchanging the glory of God for images
- Colossians 1:15-20 — Christ as the true image of the invisible God
- Matthew 6:9 — "Hallowed be your name"

Discussion Questions

1. God deliberately withheld a visible form of himself when he met with the Hebrews at Mount Sinai. He spoke, but was not seen. Why do you think the Lord did that? What does the second commandment protect by forbidding images?
2. The more common danger today is not a carved statue but a mental image of God shaped by our preferences. What does the god of our permissive culture look like? What aspects of the true God tend to get edited out? How has your image of God changed as you have come to know him more through Jesus?
3. Romans 1 says people "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man." What drives that exchange? What are we really looking for when we remake God into something more manageable?
4. God describes himself as jealous. What does divine jealousy mean, and how is it different from the often petty jealousy we experience? What does it tell us about how seriously God takes this relationship, and about how deep God's love goes?
5. Colossians 1:15 says Jesus is "the image of the invisible God." How does that change things, that God himself has given us the one true image of what he is like? How does your picture of God change when you look at Jesus?

6. The third commandment forbids taking God's name "in vain," in emptiness. What are the ways we use God's name without consideration for who God really is? Which of these do you find most common in your own life? How can we use God's name right?
7. The Lord's Prayer begins with "hallowed be your name." If that petition actually shaped your week, what would change?

Application

Read and meditate on Colossians 1:15-20, the portrait of Jesus as the image of the invisible God. Ask yourself honestly: where has my picture of God been shaped more by my preferences than by scripture and by Jesus? Bring one specific correction in the way you see God before God in prayer.

Week 4 - The Fourth Commandment — The Gift of Rest

Getting Started

1. When did you last feel genuinely rested, not just finished, but actually restored? What made that possible?
2. What is the difference between rest and leisure? Is there a difference between a lazy afternoon and a Sabbath?
3. If you are honest, does stopping feel like freedom or anxiety? What does that tell you? Do you feel guilty for taking time away from work? Why do you think that is?

Scripture Study: Exodus 20:8-11

"Remember the Sabbath day, to 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... For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

"You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day."

Context: The fourth commandment is the longest, and it comes with two different explanations, one in Exodus, one in Deuteronomy because the Sabbath is rooted in both creation and redemption. Both help us understand how to think about this commandment.

In Exodus, the Sabbath rests on the pattern God established at the beginning of creation: he worked for six days and rested on the seventh day. This is not because God was tired. It is because God built rest into the structure of his good creation. The rhythm of work and rest is not a concession to human weakness; it is a feature of the world God made. To keep the Sabbath is to live with the grain of creation. God created us to need rest, and he gave us rest as his gift.

In Deuteronomy, the focus shifts. Here God says: Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. Slaves didn't get a day off. They worked until their masters were satisfied, and

their masters were never satisfied. The Sabbath is what sets free people apart from slaves. It is a weekly declaration: we are not owned by our work, our productivity, or anyone who would drive us. We belong to God, and God has granted us rest.

Both Exodus and Deuteronomy speak directly to us. Our culture runs on hustle, the belief that we are what we produce, that stopping will make us fall behind, that stopping will cause us to lose value, that rest is something you earn rather than something you are given. But our culture's alternative to overwork is often not genuine rest either.

Purposeless leisure, scrolling, binge-watching, distraction, leaves people feeling empty. The Sabbath is something different from both: a deliberate, structured turning toward God, a practice that says the world does not depend on us to keep running. To rest means to cease, and also to rejoice in God's delight in us. This means planning times of healthy solitude as well as enjoyment with others, times not given to our "work."

This commandment carries a bold spiritual claim at its center: you can stop. You are not the source of your own life. God was at work before you arrived and will be at work as you rest. The sabbath is not a burden, it is freedom. Of course, the Jewish people multiplied rules about the Sabbath making the keeping of it a burden. But this was not God's original plan. In Jesus' ministry, he restores the Sabbath and enables us to truly rest from our work.

Key Scripture Passages

- Exodus 20:8-11 — The Sabbath grounded in creation
- Deuteronomy 5:12-15 — The Sabbath grounded in redemption
- Genesis 2:1-3 — God's rest at creation
- Isaiah 58:13-14 — Sabbath as delight, not duty
- Mark 2:23-28 — Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath
- Hebrews 4:1-11 — The Sabbath rest that remains for God's people

Discussion Questions

1. God rested on the seventh day not because he was tired, but because rest belongs to the pattern of his creation. What does it say about our culture that we have largely abandoned that rhythm? What have we lost?
2. The Deuteronomy passage says: Remember you were slaves. Slaves don't get days off. How does the Sabbath function as a declaration of freedom? In what ways does today's work culture resemble slavery more than freedom?

3. Isaiah 58 describes the Sabbath as a delight rather than a duty: "if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable." What would it take for a day of rest and worship to feel like delight rather than obligation?
4. In Mark 2, Jesus allows his disciples to pluck grain on the Sabbath, and is accused of breaking the law. He responds: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." What is Jesus correcting? What does this tell us about how the commandment had been misunderstood? How can we avoid doing that?
5. Hebrews 4 speaks of a "Sabbath rest" that still remains for the people of God, pointing to something beyond a weekly practice. How does the rest that is coming shape our understanding of the rest we enjoy and practice now?
6. Exodus grounds the Sabbath in creation; Deuteronomy grounds it in redemption from slavery. What does each teach us? Which one speaks more directly to where you are right now?
7. Our culture offers busyness on one side and empty distraction on the other. How is the Sabbath different from both? What would a genuinely restorative, God-centered day of rest look like for you practically?

Application

Make one deliberate decision about how you will keep the Sabbath day. It doesn't have to be big. Start small. It might begin with turning off your phone for an afternoon, attending worship with full attention, taking a walk, sharing a meal with friends, or simply sitting quietly in God's creation. The point is intention: a slice of time shaped by rest and reorientation toward God rather than productivity or distraction.

Week 5 - The Fifth Commandment — The Weight of Honor

Getting Started

1. Think of one person in authority over you, a parent, teacher, coach, or mentor, whom you genuinely respected. What made them worthy of that respect?
2. What is the difference between honoring someone and agreeing with them? Can you honor someone you disagree with?
3. How does our culture generally talk about authority, parents, institutions, leaders? Is that perspective healthy? What do you think has shaped this perspective?

Scripture Study: Exodus 20:12

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."

Context: This is the first commandment that comes with a promise, and the first that turns from our relationship with God to our relationships with one another. That placement is not accidental. The family is the first community God establishes, and the parent-child relationship is the first authority structure we experience and learn. How we learn to give and receive honor shapes the relationships that follow. This commandment serves as a hinge between the first and second tables, with one foot in each, our duty to God and to each other.

The Hebrew word translated "honor" is literally, to give weight to someone, to treat them as significant and substantial. It is the opposite of treating someone as unimportant. Significantly, the commandment does not say obey your father and mother, though obedience is certainly included for children. It says honor, which is a broader and deeper word. Honor can be given even when obedience is not required, even when the relationship is complicated, even when the parent has failed, or the children have grown up and left home.

The commandment comes with a promise: that your days may be long in the land. Paul notes in Ephesians 6 that this is the first commandment with an attached promise, and he applies it to children within the covenant community. Yes, the promise points beyond individual reward to the flourishing of the whole community. People that honor the family structure and the legitimate authorities God places over us tend toward stability and

strength. Societies that abandon those structures tend toward disorder and disintegration.

Our culture's deepest instinct is autonomy, the belief that we are self-made, self-sufficient, and accountable to no one. The fifth commandment runs directly against that. It tells us we are creatures who were welcomed into the world by others, shaped by others, and called to honor those whom God has placed over us, not because those in authority are always right, but because the structure of authority itself is a gift of God. This authority is part of God's created order.

At the same time, this commandment has been misused. It has been used to demand obedience from those who have been harmed, to keep victims in dangerous situations, and to shut down legitimate disagreement. That is not what God intends. Honor does not require us to call evil good, to enable harm, or to deny what happens. The God who commands honor for parents is the same God who sees every wound inflicted in the family home. He is not asking us to look away or sweep it under the rug. This commandment is for good and not for ill.

Key Scripture Passages

- Exodus 20:12 — The fifth commandment
- Proverbs 1:8-9 — A father's and mother's teaching as a gracious garland
- Mark 7:9-13 — Jesus rebukes religious evasion of duty to parents
- Ephesians 6:1-4 — Children and parents; the first commandment with a promise

Discussion Questions

1. The Hebrew word honor means to give weight to someone, to treat them as significant. How is that different from mere obedience? What does it look like to honor a parent in that sense? What is dishonor?
2. Paul calls this "the first commandment with a promise" and connects it to flourishing, both personal and for the community. What is the relationship between honoring legitimate authority and a society's long-term health?
3. In Mark 7, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for using a religious vow to avoid caring for aging parents. What does this tell us about how we can use piety as a cover for dishonor? How might we do this today?
4. Ephesians 6 is notable because Paul addresses children directly, treating them as moral agents, and then immediately turns to fathers: "Do not provoke your children to anger." What does this symmetry tell us about how authority is meant to function? What does it look like when it functions well?

5. Honor is not blind obedience. Where are the limits? How do we know when we have reached them? How might we honor those in authority and dishonor God?
6. For those whose experience of parental authority was painful, marked by absence, harshness, or abuse, this commandment can feel like salt in a wound. What does it mean to honor a parent who has failed or been hurtful? What does it not mean?
7. Beyond the parent-child relationship, this commandment reminds us that we all live within structures of legitimate authority, in the church, the workplace, the country. How does the posture of honor translate into those relationships without becoming unhealthy deference?

Application

Identify one relationship where honor is called for but has been withheld through neglect, resentment, or distance. It might be a parent, a stepparent, an aging relative, or another authority figure. Ask God what one concrete expression of honor might look like in the days ahead. It does not have to resolve everything. It just has to be significant. For those with painful parental experience: this week's application might look different, perhaps bringing your grief honestly to God, and asking him to show you what honor means in your specific situation.

Week 6 - The Sixth Commandment — The Sanctity of Life

Getting Started

1. When have you witnessed someone being treated as less than fully human, dismissed, dehumanized, or written off? What did that look like, and how did it make you feel?
2. Our culture seems both increasingly violent in its rhetoric and increasingly sensitive about physical harm. How do you explain that combination?
3. Is there a difference between anger and contempt? Which do you think is more dangerous?

Scripture Study: Exodus 20:13

"You shall not murder."

Context: The sixth commandment is the briefest of the ten, but its reach is greater than it first seems. The command is about unlawful killing, not all killing. The same law that contains this commandment also legislates capital punishment and regulates warfare. The commandment is not a statement of unmitigated pacifism. It is a prohibition on the unauthorized, unjust taking of human life. It is about murder in the truest sense.

The foundation beneath this commandment is given by God earlier as recorded in Genesis 9:6: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image." Human life is protected not because of what a person can do, produce, or contribute, but because every human being bears the image of God. That dignity is not earned, not granted by the state, and irrevocable. It is given by our Creator God and belongs to every person from the moment of their existence.

That foundation has implications that extend across the full range of human life. The protection of life that this commandment requires is not limited to the prohibition of homicide. It speaks to how we regard unborn life, to decisions made at the end of life, to how a society administers justice and punishment. Christians across traditions have wrestled deeply with these questions, and they deserve serious discussion. But the anchor beneath them is the same: each human being bears God's image and is not ours to dispose of.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, takes the commandment and drives it inward. He tells his listeners that the law against murder reaches the heart. Anger harbored against a brother, contempt expressed in a cutting word, the dehumanizing dismissal of another person, these, Jesus says, are subject to judgment. The root of murder is a failure to see the image of God in another person, to treat them as less than fully human. That failure does not require a weapon.

This is a commandment that our rage culture most urgently needs to hear. Political contempt, social media dehumanization, the casual cruelty of people who have decided that those who disagree with them are not merely wrong but worthy of destruction, these are the forms the sixth commandment often takes today. And 1 John 3:15 puts a fine point on it: "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer."

The commandment also carries a positive duty. It does not only forbid taking life; it requires protecting it. We are called to be people who actively work for the preservation, safety, and flourishing of those around us.

Key Scripture Passages

- Exodus 20:13 — The sixth commandment
- Genesis 9:5-6 — The image of God as the foundation for human dignity
- Psalm 139:13-16 — The dignity of life known and formed by God
- Matthew 5:21-26 — Jesus addresses anger and contempt
- 1 John 3:11-15 — Hatred as murder
- Romans 12:17-21 — Overcoming evil with good; our positive duty

Discussion Questions

1. The commandment uses the word for unlawful killing, not all killing. What does it mean that the commandment forbids murder specifically, and what does that tell us about how we are meant to interpret the law carefully rather than superficially?
2. Genesis 9:6 grounds the prohibition against murder in the image of God that human beings bear. What does it mean for every person to have that dignity? How should that truth change the way you see people you find difficult, disagreeable, or threatening?
3. Jesus says in Matthew 5 that anger against a brother puts us in danger of judgment, and that calling someone a fool makes us liable to the fire of hell. He is being deliberately provocative. What is he trying to expose? Do you find his standard too demanding, or does this seem right and helpful?

4. 1 John 3:15 says that everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. That is a startling claim. What does John mean by it, and how does it strike you when you consider it?
5. Our political and cultural moment is saturated with contempt, the dismissal of whole categories of people as not worthy of serious engagement. How does the sixth commandment speak to that? What would it look like for your engagement with people you deeply disagree with to be governed by this commandment?
6. The positive duty of this commandment is to actively protect and preserve life. In what ways can we protect life that might be in danger? Where might you be passive in a situation that calls for action? What does it look like to be an active guardian of life in your ordinary relationships?

Application

Is there someone toward whom you carry anger, contempt, or bitterness, even someone you feel you have good reason to resent? Bring it before God honestly this week. Confess it for what it is. Then identify one concrete step toward that person, a conversation, a prayer for them by name, or simply the decision to stop feeding the resentment. Reconciliation may not be immediate or even possible, but you can change your attitude toward that person this week.

Week 7 - Everlasting

Getting Started

1. What does our culture most commonly say love is? Where do you see that definition fall short?
2. Think of something genuinely valuable, a relationship, an object, a place, that was damaged because it wasn't protected. What did that loss feel like?
3. Do you think the church has generally done a good job talking about sex and sexuality? What has it done well? Where has it fallen short?

Scripture Study: Exodus 20:14

You shall not commit adultery."

Context: God invented sex. Before the fall, before God issued these commandments, before any prohibition, God created human beings as male and female, declared the creation very good, and established the one-flesh union of marriage as the covenant context for sexual union. The seventh commandment does not exist because God is suspicious of sexuality. It exists because he created it, values it, and desires to protect it.

The commandment is given as a prohibition, but its positive vision is faithfulness: wholehearted, covenantal loyalty between a husband and a wife. Ephesians 5 tells us that this covenant is not incidental. It is designed to reflect the relationship between Christ and his church, the faithful love of the Savior who gave himself up for his bride. Marriage, at its best, is a living sign of that greater covenant. Sexual faithfulness within marriage is not a restriction on love; it is love's fullest expression.

Hebrews 13:4 puts it plainly: "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled." The commandment places a fence around something precious. God is not trying to diminish our experience of love and intimacy. He is protecting it from the forces that would reduce, exploit, and ultimately destroy it. But we live in a culture that has largely disregarded that fence, and the wreckage is everywhere. Sexual sin fractures marriages, wounds children, distorts our capacity for genuine intimacy, and leaves people, often people who thought they were simply exercising freedom, carrying damage they did not anticipate. The commandment is not a restriction invented by people afraid of sexual pleasure. It is the word of a loving Father who has seen what sexual disorder does to those he loves. Here are some ways sexual disorder has impacted us.

Pornography has reached into virtually every home and rewired the way millions of people understand desire and intimacy. It trains people to treat human beings as objects of personal pleasure and consumption, making genuine covenantal intimacy even more difficult to enjoy. An unwillingness to commit to marriage, for all its cultural acceptance, consistently produces worse outcomes, for adults and especially for children, than the covenantal commitment it tries to replace. Adultery fractures the trust that holds families and communities together in ways that take years, sometimes generations, to repair. And same-sex sexual relationships, whatever genuine love and longing may be present, fall outside the covenantal framework God provides as the safe place for sexual expression.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, extends the commandment inward, to lust, the mental and emotional claiming of someone who does not belong to you. Why does he do this? Jesus is identifying the root from which sexual sins often spring. He insists that faithfulness is first a matter of the heart and the imagination before it is a matter of behavior. The battle for sexual faithfulness is won in the mind and heart before any action takes place.

The commandment also speaks to those who are single. Chastity is not merely the absence of sex. It is a positive calling, the orientation of all one's energy toward God and genuine love for others, whether or not that includes marriage. The church has too often treated singleness as a waiting room and celibacy as a loss. The Lord treats them as a calling with its own integrity and dignity.

There is so much that we have gotten wrong in this arena of life. But where sin abounds, grace overabounds. The commandment speaks with grace to those who have already failed, which is most of us, in one form or another. The same Jesus who exposes the root of sexual sin in Matthew 5 is the one who said to the woman caught in adultery: "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." There is no sexual history beyond the reach of his forgiveness, and no sin too entrenched for his grace to address and heal.

Key Scripture Passages

- Exodus 20:14 — The seventh commandment
- Matthew 5:27-30 — Jesus extends this commandment to lust
- 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 — The body belongs to God
- Ephesians 5:22-33 — Marriage as a sign of Christ and the church
- Hebrews 13:4 — The marriage bed held in honor
- Song of Solomon 8:6-7 — The power and beauty of covenantal love

Discussion Questions

1. God created sexuality before the fall and called it very good. How does starting with the goodness of sexuality, rather than its dangers, change how you read this commandment?
2. Ephesians 5 describes marriage as a sign of Christ's relationship with the church, a covenant of faithful, self-giving love. What does that vision do to our culture's understanding of marriage as primarily a romantic arrangement between two people who suit each other?
3. Jesus says that looking at someone with lust is already committing adultery in the heart. Pornography has made that kind of looking available to the point of being virtually ubiquitous. What does Jesus' teaching mean for how we think about pornography, not just as a moral category but as a specific spiritual and relational danger?
4. Our culture treats cohabitation as a reasonable trial run for marriage. Scripture places sexual union within covenant commitment. Where do you see the difference playing out in real lives and relationships? How can you see the wisdom of God here?
5. Same-sex sexuality is one of the most contested questions of our moment. How do we hold the church's historic, Biblical conviction about the covenantal context for sexuality while treating people with genuine dignity, love, and care?
6. 1 Corinthians 6 says the body is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and that our bodies are members of Christ himself. How does this teaching about the body as belonging to God and destined for resurrection shape a Christian sexual ethic?
7. For those who carry weight from sexual sin, your own or someone else's: what does the gospel offer? What does restoration look like, and how does the support of the body of Christ help?

Application

Ask God honestly where this commandment has not been kept, in behavior, in the imagination, in patterns you have allowed to take root. Bring it to God in confession. If there is a specific sin that requires a specific step, accountability with a friend, ending a relationship, or seeking help, ask God for the courage to take that step. The goal is not guilt but freedom: the genuine freedom of a life ordered by covenant love.

For those who are single: consider what it looks like to live from the calling of singleness this week. Consider how you can give the wholehearted offering of your relational life to God and to genuine love for others.

Week 8 - The Eighth Commandment — Honest Hands, Open Hands

Getting Started

1. Have you ever had something taken from you, not necessarily a physical object, but credit, time, opportunity, or trust? What did that feel like?
2. What is the most surprising thing you have ever heard described as stealing? Did you agree?
3. If someone could see the financial transactions you made this past month, not just the legality but the fairness, what would they see?

Scripture Study: Exodus 20:15

"You shall not steal."

Context: The eighth commandment is easy to underestimate. Most people in a group study have never robbed a store or picked a pocket, and it is tempting to move through this week quickly. But the commandment's application is more expansive than its four words suggest, and its positive vision is one of the most practically demanding in the entire Law..

The law surrounding this commandment makes clear that stealing is not limited to taking what belongs to someone else. Leviticus 19 places in the same category: defrauding a neighbor, withholding wages from a worker, using dishonest weights and measures in commerce, and failing to leave the edges of your field for the poor to glean. The commandment covers the full range of ways one person can unjustly enrich themselves at another's expense, including many that are perfectly legal.

This matters because our culture has developed sophisticated methods of doing exactly that. Predatory lending, wage theft, misleading advertising, phone and email scams, exploitative contracts, and insider trading. These are rarely prosecuted and sometimes even celebrated. The eighth commandment does not ask only whether something is legal. It asks whether it is just: whether what I am gaining is genuinely mine, and whether how I am gaining it honors the person I am dealing with.

The subtler forms are worth considering. Taking credit for someone else's work. Stealing time from an employer. Using someone's intellectual property without permission. Returning something for new after it has been used. Withholding what is legitimately

owed because the other party cannot easily enforce their claim. None of these involves breaking and entering, but all of them involve taking what does not belong to us. The positive vision of this commandment is stunning. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:28: "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need." The purpose of honest work is not merely self-sufficiency. It is generosity. The goal is not to accumulate, but to produce, so that you have something to give. That is a different relationship to money and possessions than most of us have been taught.

Underlying all of this is a fundamental spiritual claim: we are stewards, not owners. Everything we have is held on loan from the God who gave it to us. The gleaning laws of Leviticus are built on that truth. The edges of your field do not belong to you in an ultimate sense. They belong to God, and God has designated them for the poor. A theology of stewardship does not diminish the legitimacy of property. It gives ownership context. What we have is genuinely ours to manage, to enjoy, and to give, but not to hoard, exploit, or cling to as though it defines us.

Zacchaeus is the New Testament portrait of repentance when this commandment is applied. He does not merely stop defrauding. He gives back what he has taken and more. He distributes half his goods to the poor. Restitution, not just remorse, is the sign that real repentance has taken place.

Key Scripture Passages

- Exodus 20:15 — The eighth commandment
- Leviticus 19:9-13 — Gleaning laws, honest wages, and business
- Proverbs 22:1-2 — The LORD made both rich and poor
- Ephesians 4:28 — Honest work with the goal of generosity
- Luke 19:1-10 — Zacchaeus; repentance expressed in restitution
- 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19 — Godliness with contentment; the love of money

Discussion Questions

1. Leviticus 19 places defrauding a neighbor, withholding wages, and using dishonest scales in the same category as stealing. How does that expand your understanding of what this commandment covers? What does it include that you might not have considered?
2. Ephesians 4:28 says the goal of honest work is having something to share. How does that reframe the purpose of earning money? What would it look like to approach your work with that as an explicit goal?

3. Zacchaeus does not just express remorse. He makes restitution, and generously. Why is restitution an important fruit of genuine repentance when theft is involved? What is the difference between feeling sorry and making it right?
4. What are the subtle forms of stealing we rarely think of as theft: in the workplace, in commerce, in everyday life? Which of these are most normalized in your experience?
5. Proverbs 22:2 says that the LORD is the maker of both the rich and the poor. A theology of stewardship holds that everything we have ultimately belongs to God. How does that change the way you look at your possessions, your savings, your home, your income?
6. The gleaning laws required landowners to leave the edges of their fields unharvested for the poor. That is not charity. It is an obligation built into God's plan to provide opportunity and care for everyone. How should Christians think about economic structures that enable exploitation of the poor and vulnerable? What does this commandment ask of us beyond our personal honesty?
7. 1 Timothy 6 warns not that money is evil but that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. How can you know whether you have a healthy relationship with money or whether money has too strong a hold on you?

Application

There are two directions of thought for this week. First, honesty. Identify one area where your financial or professional conduct needs to be brought into alignment with this commandment. It might be something you have taken, something you have withheld, or something you have avoided thinking about. Bring it before God and ask what faithfulness requires. Second, generosity. Identify one concrete act of giving this week, not out of surplus but as a deliberate expression of stewardship. Honest hands make open hands possible.

Week 9 - The Ninth Commandment — Truth Telling

Getting Started

1. Think of a time when something false was said about you or when a true but incomplete account created a misleading impression. What was the impact? How did you feel?
2. What forms of deception does our culture treat as normal or even admirable? Where do we draw the line? Why there?
3. Is there a difference between lying and not telling the whole truth? Where does that distinction hold? Where does it break down?

Scripture Study: Exodus 20:16

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

Context: The ninth commandment begins in a courtroom. Ancient Israel had no police force and no detective agencies. The community depended on each individual being a custodian of the law and the testimony of witnesses to establish truth, settle disputes, and protect the innocent. A false witness could destroy a reputation, or even send an innocent person to their death. Proverbs 25:18 puts it plainly: "A man who bears false witness against his neighbor is like a war club, or a sword, or a sharp arrow." Words misused can become lethal weapons.

But the commandment is not only for the courtroom. The same God who forbids perjury forbids all the ways we weaponize words against our neighbors, slander, gossip, flattery, exaggeration, deliberate silence when speaking the truth is called for, and the subtle distortions we share to make ourselves look better and others look worse. The Westminster Larger Catechism's treatment of this commandment is remarkably comprehensive. Among its forbidden sins: "prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbors,... raising false rumors, receiving and countenancing evil reports, and stopping our ears against a just defense."

Behind all of this stands a core spiritual reality. God created all things with his word. We also create our worlds in the way we use our words. In other words, order in our world comes through our use of words. Jesus identifies Satan as "the father of lies," the original deceiver whose primary mode of operation is the distortion of truth. Deception is not merely a bad habit or a social faux faux. It is the native language of the enemy of God.

When we bear false witness in any of these forms, we are speaking Satan's native language.

We live in a post-truth culture. The idea that objective truth exists and can be known has been widely abandoned in favor of spin, and "my truth." Social media has dramatically expanded the misuse of words. Rumors travel faster than corrections. Reputations are destroyed in hours, and character assassination has become common. Political life has become a theater of managed deception and outright lies. The ninth commandment stands as a quiet but radical protest against this.

The group context makes this week particularly immediate. The community of people sitting in this room is itself a place where the ninth commandment operates, in how we speak about each other, in whether we protect or expose the confidences shared in this room, in whether we are honest about ourselves or present a version of ourselves that needs no grace. A community shaped by the ninth commandment is one where words can be trusted, reputations are safe, and truth is held as a sacred gift rather than a weapon.

The commandment also has a positive face: the duty to speak up. Silence in the face of false accusation is itself a form of false witness. To say nothing when someone is being lied about, to let a false narrative stand when we could correct it, to withhold a true and needed word out of cowardice, these are violations of this commandment just as much as an outright lie.

Key Scripture Passages

- Exodus 20:16 — The ninth commandment
- Proverbs 12:17-22 — Truthful lips endure; lying lips are an abomination
- John 8:42-47 — Satan as the father of lies; truth as belonging to God
- Zechariah 8:16-17 — Truth-telling as the foundation of healthy and faithful community
- Ephesians 4:15, 25 — Speaking truth in love; putting away falsehood
- Colossians 3:9-10 — The new self renewed in the image of its Creator

Discussion Questions

1. The commandment begins in a legal context, the false witness who destroys an innocent person with words. What does that legal setting reveal about the kind of community God is building, and who he is most concerned to protect?

2. Jesus calls Satan "the father of lies" and says that when anyone lies, they speak their father's native language. What does it mean that deception is fundamentally a spiritual category, not just a social one? How does that reframe the seriousness of dishonesty?
3. The Westminster Standards extend this commandment to gossip, slander, flattery, exaggeration, and deliberate silence. Which of these do you find most tempting? Which does our culture treat as least serious?
4. We live in a post-truth moment, a culture where narrative and spin have largely displaced the pursuit of objective truth. Where do you see this most clearly? How does it affect the way you receive information, including about people?
5. Zechariah 8:16-17 connects truth-telling directly to justice: "Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace." What is the relationship between a community's commitment to truth and its capacity for justice? What happens to vulnerable people when that commitment breaks down?
6. This commandment has a positive duty: to speak up, to defend, to correct false accounts. When have you stayed silent when truth was called for? What made it hard to speak?
7. We are sitting right now in a group, a community where this commandment directly applies. What would it look like for this group to be genuinely governed by the ninth commandment: in how we speak about each other, in how we handle what is shared here, in how honest we are with each other? How can I make a commitment to only sharing good reports?

Application

There are two opportunities this week. First, examine your speech: is there a false or distorted account of someone that you have circulated or allowed to stand? Is there gossip you have received and passed on? Bring it to God honestly. Second, consider whether there is a truth you have withheld, a word of correction, a defense of someone being falsely accused, an honest account you softened to protect your own image. Ask God for the courage to speak it.

As a group, consider making an explicit commitment to one another: what is shared in this room stays in this room, and no one's reputation will be treated as material for conversation.

Week 10 - The Tenth Commandment — The Wanting Heart

Getting Started

1. What is something you wanted badly and eventually got only to find it did not satisfy the way you expected? What did that teach you?
2. What do you think advertising understands about human nature? Is that right?
3. Looking back over these ten weeks, which commandment surprised you most, either in its depth, its reach, or how personally it landed?

Scripture Study: Exodus 20:17

"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."

Context: Every commandment before this one addresses something we do. The tenth commandment addresses something we want. There is a clear purpose in this. With this final commandment, God reaches past the public act, all the way down to the place where every act of unfaithfulness is born, the disordered heart.

The Hebrew word to covet means to desire intensely, to crave, to set the heart on something. It means to take possession of something in your heart before you can get it in hand. It is not describing casual envy or passing admiration. It is describing the sustained, consuming fixation on what belongs to someone else, the neighbor's house, wife, servants, animals, and anything else that is his/hers. The commandment is comprehensive and unapologetic. It governs not just what we take but what we want. Paul tells us in Romans 7 that this is the commandment that broke through his legalistic defenses. He had managed, at least in his own estimation, to perform well enough on the external commandments. He was blameless by the law's standards. But the tenth commandment could not be satisfied by performance. It reached into the interior of his life and exposed what was actually there. "I would not have known covetousness if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'" The commandment that addresses the heart is the one that finally revealed his heart to him.

Paul makes the link clear elsewhere. In Colossians 3:5 he calls covetousness idolatry. That word is carefully chosen. It is the key that unlocks the whole of the Ten Commandments. The tenth commandment circles back to the first. The first

commandment says: no other gods, no rivals, no alternatives. God alone holds the place of supreme loyalty and devotion. The tenth commandment reveals why we keep breaking the first: we covet. We want what God hasn't given. We are dissatisfied with God himself. We look at the neighbor's life and believe that his portion is better than ours, which is to say, that God has been less than generous with us, less than loving toward us. Every commandment points us back here. We murder because we covet what someone else has. We steal because we covet what isn't ours. We commit adultery because we covet the intimacy or closeness we see in our neighbor's marriage. We bear false witness because we covet the reputation or advantage that honesty would cost us. And, so on. The tenth commandment is not simply the last in a list. It is the starting place of all the others.

The positive form of this commandment is contentment — and Paul is honest that it does not come naturally. "I have learned, in whatever situation I am, to be content" (Philippians 4:11). Contentment is not a personality trait or a temperamental gift. It is a discipline, learned through practice, suffering, and a life of meditation on the goodness of God in whatever circumstances he has given us. Its deepest foundation is the character of God himself: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). The one who has God has enough, not because material things do not matter, but because the one who gives them is himself the gift.

Our culture has made covetousness into an economic engine. Advertising exists for one purpose: to make us want what we do not have, to stoke dissatisfaction over what we do have, to convince us that our neighbor's life is better than ours. Social media has given that engine extraordinary power by serving up a constant, curated display of other people's relationships, homes, bodies, careers, and vacations, designed to produce exactly the desire the tenth commandment forbids. Of course, the worst outworking of covetousness is envy.

Drawing the Study Together

Ten weeks ago, we began not with a commandment but with a prologue: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." We said then that the sequence was everything, grace first, law second. God does not give these commandments so that his people will earn his love. He gives them because he already loves them, because he has already redeemed them, and because he knows what a genuinely free community looks like and what threatens it.

Each commandment has been a protection, a fence around something precious. But the study has also done something else that the law always does when it is rightly understood: it has shown us ourselves. The law is a mirror (James 1:23-25), and mirrors do not flatter. Every week has shown us the distance between what God calls us to and what we actually are, not to condemn or shame us, but to drive us to the one who fulfilled every commandment perfectly, and who offers his righteousness as a gift to those who cannot produce their own.

This is the gospel that the law was always pointing toward. Christ did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). What we could not do, love God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves, he did, on our behalf. And the promise of the new covenant, anticipated in Jeremiah 31:33 and realized through the Spirit of Christ, is that the law which was written on stone tablets would be written on human hearts: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

We do not keep the commandments in order to become God's people. We are God's people, bought, redeemed, brought out of the house of slavery and therefore we are being made, slowly and by grace, into people who actually want what God commands. For this reason, we see the law not as a burden but as God's gift through and through.

Key Scripture Passages

- Exodus 20:17 — The tenth commandment
- Romans 7:7-12 — Paul and the commandment that exposed his heart
- Colossians 3:5 — Covetousness is idolatry
- Philippians 4:10-13 — Contentment as a learned discipline
- Hebrews 13:5-6 — The ground of contentment: God's presence
- Jeremiah 31:31-33 — The new covenant: the law written on the heart

Discussion Questions

1. The first nine commandments address actions; the tenth addresses desire. Why do you think God ends here? What does it reveal about what he is ultimately after?
2. Paul says in Romans 7 that the commandment "You shall not covet" is the one that exposed his sin. Why this one? What is it about covetousness that breaks through external our religious performance in a way the other commandments might not?
3. Paul calls covetousness "idolatry" in Colossians 3:5. How does that connect the tenth commandment to the first? What does it reveal about the root beneath all the other commandments?

4. Paul says he has learned contentment. What does it mean that contentment is a discipline rather than a disposition? What practices help cultivate it? Where have you found contentment most difficult to learn?
5. Our culture's economy depends on manufacturing desire, making us want more, want new, want what others have. How has that affected you more than you realized? What would it look like to live against that current?
6. Looking back over the whole series: where has the law most functioned as a mirror, showing you something true about yourself that you needed to see? And how does the gospel answer what the law reveals, not just this week, but across all ten commandments?

Application

Identify one area of covetousness, perhaps a relationship, a possession, a career, a body, a life that you have been fixing your heart on. Name it before God honestly. Then replace the coveting thought with a specific act of gratitude: one thing God has given you that you have been taking for granted while wanting something else.

Let's also return to where the series began: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." You have been redeemed. The commandments you have studied are not a ladder to climb to earn God's love, they are the shape of the life you have already been given. Spend time this week in Jeremiah 31:31-33 and ask the Spirit to do what only he can do: to write what you have studied in your heart.

Notes

Notes

APPENDICES

Additional Resources for *The Gift of the Law*

Jesus and the Law

Jesus is the substance of the law. We see the law perfectly fulfilled in him. We also are able to embrace the law because of Jesus. Jesus is the lawkeeper. How does the Law apply to Jesus?

The first commandment is only possible in and through Jesus. We can know God only in and through Jesus, and we can worship God through Jesus. When we worship Jesus, we are fulfilling this command.

The second commandment: Jesus is the image of the invisible God. As we worship him, we fulfill the call to not make images or have idols that we serve.

The third commandment calls us to revere the name of the Lord. It is before Jesus that every knee will bow and every tongue confess.

The fourth commandment calls us to sabbath rest. Jesus alone enables us to truly rest from our labors. He is the Lord of the Sabbath and our Sabbath rest.

The fifth commandment calls us to honor those whom God has placed over us. Jesus restores us to our first family with God as our Father. He submits himself to the will of his Father and honors the Father in all things. He also models respect for all who hold authority.

The sixth commandment teaches us to guard life. Jesus gave up his life to protect our lives. He is our life.

The seventh commandment teaches us covenant loyalty in marriage. Jesus is our bridegroom who has laid down his life for the bride, to present us spotless. He lived this covenant love in all he did, and he teaches us the way of love.

The eighth commandment teaches us not to steal. Jesus has become our inheritance, our treasure training our hearts to receive from God all that he has given to us as a gift. He provides all that we need because he is enough.

The ninth commandment teaches us to value truth. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the Word of God made flesh. He redeems our speech and teaches us how to build our worlds with words as he has. All the promises of God are yes in Christ.

The tenth commandment teaches us to be content in God's provision. We learn the sufficiency of God's gifts through Jesus even as the Father gave Jesus for us.

Gift of the Law - Idols of the Heart, Tim Keller

A. THE DEFINITION OF IDOLS

Romans 1:25 tells us that idols are not sinful things, but **good and basic things elevated into being ultimate things** (v.25 – worshipped... created things rather than the Creator) We look to them for meaning in life, for covering our sense of insignificance, for developing a "righteousness" or worth.

"An idol is anything in our lives that occupies the place that should be occupied by God alone. Anything that... is central in my life, anything that seems to me... essential... An idol is anything by which I live and on which I depend, anything that... holds such a controlling position in my life that... it moves and rouses and attracts so much of my time and attention, my energy and money."

— D.M. Lloyd-Jones, "Idolatry" in Life in God: Studies in 1 John

"[Each person] acts as if God could not make him happy without the addition of something else. Thus the glutton makes a god of his dainties; the ambitious man of his honor; the incontinent man of his lust; the covetous man his wealth; and consequently esteems them as his chiefest good, and the most noble end to which he directs his thoughts... All men worship some golden calf, set up by education, custom, natural inclination and the like... When a general is taken, the army runs. [Even so] this [the main 'idol'] is the great stream, and other sins but rivulets which bring supply... this is the strongest chain wherein the devil holds the man, the main fort..."

— Stephen Charnock, The Existence and Attributes of God

"...that most basic question which God poses to each human heart: "Has something or someone besides Jesus the Christ taken title to your heart's functional trust, preoccupation, loyalty, service, fear and delight?" Questions... bring some of people's idol systems to the surface. 'To who or what do you look for life-sustaining stability, security and acceptance? ...What do you really want and expect [out of life]? What would [really] make you happy? What would make you an acceptable person? Where do you look for power and success?' These questions or similar ones tease out whether we serve God or idols, whether we look for salvation from Christ or from false saviors. [This bears] on the immediate motivation of my behavior, thoughts, feelings. In the Bible's conceptualization, the motivation question is the lordship question: who or what "rules my behavior, the Lord or an idol?" — David Powlison, "Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair"

B. THE EFFECTS OF IDOLS

1. Distorted thinking

Romans 1:21 tells us each idol creates **a delusional field**, a whole set of assumptions and false definitions of success and failure which are distortions of reality brought on by the idol (v.21 - their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened).

“[Your] idols define good and evil in ways contrary to God's definitions. [They spin out a whole false belief system.] They establish a locus of control that is earthbound: either in objects (e.g. lust for money), other people (e.g. ‘I need to please my father’), or myself (e.g. attainment of my personal goals). Such false gods create false laws, false definitions of success and failure, of values and stigma. Idols promise blessings and warn of curses for those who succeed or fail [their standards]. ‘If I [make enough money], I will be secure. If I can get these certain people to like and respect me, then my life will be valid.’...”

— David Powlison, “Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair”

2. Emotional bondage

Romans 1:25 tells us that each idol “darkens the heart” and enslaves us (v.25 worshipped and served created things). Whatever we worship we must serve. The way the idol enslaves is that it creates **over-desires, inordinate longings**.

“Idols of the heart are graphically portrayed in Ezekiel 14:1-8... If ‘idolatry’ is the characteristic and summary Old Testament word for our drift from God, then ‘lust’ [inordinate desires], **epithumiai** is the characteristic and summary New Testament word for that same drift. (See summary statements by Paul, Peter, John, and James as Gal.5:16ff; Eph.2:3, 4:22; I Pet.2:11, 4:2; I John 2:16; James 1:14ff, where **epithumiai** is the catch-all for what is wrong with us.) The tenth commandment [against ‘coveting,’ which is idolatrous, inordinate desire for something] also... makes sin ‘psychodynamic.’ It lays bare the grasping and demanding nature of the human heart, as Paul powerfully describes in Romans 7... the NT merges the concept of idolatry and the concept of inordinate, life-ruling desires... for lust, demandingness, craving and yearning are specifically termed ‘idolatry’ (Eph.5:5 and Colossians 3:5).”

— David Powlison, “Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair”

3. The sin under every sin

The Ten Commandments begin with two commandments against idolatry. Then comes commandments three to ten. Why this order? It is because the fundamental problem is always idolatry. In other words, **we never break commandments 3-10 without first breaking 1-2**.

“A careful reading of the Old and New Testaments shows that idolatry is nothing like the crude, simplistic picture that springs to mind of an idol sculpture in some distant country. As the **main category to describe** unbelief, the idea is highly psychology, the social environment, and also the unseen world. Idols are not just on pagan altars, but in well-educated human hearts and minds (Ezekiel 14). The apostle associates the dynamics

of human greed, lust, craving, and coveting with idolatry (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5). The Bible does not allow us to marginalize idolatry to the fringes of life... it is found on center stage.”

NOTES

— R. Keyes, “The Idol Factory” in No God but God

This means then, that *idolatry is always the reason we ever do anything wrong*. Why do we ever lie, or fail to love or keep promises or live unselfishly? Of course, the general answer is “because we are weak and sinful,” but the specific answer is always that there is something besides Jesus Christ that you feel you must have to be happy, something that is more important to your heart than God, something that is spinning out a delusional field and enslaving the heart through inordinate desires. So the secret to change is always to identify the idols of the heart. The Bible does not consider idolatry to be one sin among many (and thus now a very rare sin only among primitive people). Rather, *the only alternative to true, full faith in the living God is idolatry*. All our failures to trust God wholly or to live rightly are due at root to idolatry — something we make more important than God. There is always a reason for a sin. Under our sins are idolatrous desires.

C. IDENTIFYING OUR IDOLS

1. Every self exists in relation to values perceived as making life worth living. A value is anything good in the created order — any idea, relation, object or person in which one has an interest, from which one derives significance...

2. These values compete... In time, one is prone to choose a *center of value* by which other values are judged... [which] comes to exercise power or preeminence over other values.

3. When a finite value has been elevated to centrality and imagined as a final source of meaning, then one has chosen... a god... *One has a god when a finite value is... viewed as that without which one cannot receive life joyfully*. (To be worshipped as a god, something must be sufficiently good... Were my daughter not a source of exceptional affection and delight, she would not be a potential idolatry for me, but I am tempted to adore her in a way... disproportional.)

4. Anxiety [Idolatry and the future]

Anxiety becomes neurotically intensified to the degree that I have idolized finite values... Suppose my god is sex or my physical health or the Democratic Party. If I experience any of these under genuine threat, then I feel myself shaken to the depths.

5. Guilt/Bitterness [Idolatry and the past]

Guilt becomes neurotically intensified to the degree that I have idolized finite values... Suppose I value my ability to teach and communicate clearly... If clear communication has

become an absolute value for me, a center of value that makes all my other values valuable... then if I [fail in teaching well] I am stricken with neurotic guilt.

6. Bitterness becomes neurotically intensified when someone or something stands between me and something that is my ultimate value.]

7. Boredom/Emptiness [Idolatry and the present]

To be bored is to feel empty, [meaningless.] Boredom is an anticipatory form of being dead. To the extent to which limited values are exalted to idolatries... [when any of those values are lost], boredom becomes pathological and compulsive... My subjectively experienced boredom may then become infinitely projected toward the whole cosmos... This picture of the self is called despair [The milder forms are disappointment, disillusionment, cynicism.] — Thomas C. Oden, *Two Worlds: Notes on the Death of Modernity in America and Russia* Chap. 6

Answer the following:

a. If you are angry. Ask: “Is there something too important to me? Something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am angry, because I am being blocked from having something I think is a necessity when it is not?” Write down what that might be:

b. If you are *fearful or badly worried*. Ask: “Is there something too important to me? Something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am so scared, because something is being threatened which I think is a necessity when it is not?” Write down what that might be:

c. If you are *despondent or hating yourself*. Ask: “Is there something too important to me? Something I am telling myself I *have* to have? Is that why I am so ‘down,’ because I have lost or failed at something which I think is a necessity when it is not?” Write down what that might be:

Circle the thoughts that are lodged in your heart:

Power idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — I have power and influence over others.”

Approval idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — I am loved and respected by _____”

Comfort idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — I have this kind of pleasure experience, a particular quality of life.”

Image idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — I have a particular kind of look or body image.”

Control idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — I am able to get mastery over my life in the area of _____.”

Helping idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — people are dependent on me and need me.”

Dependence idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — someone is there to protect me and keep me safe.”

Independence idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — I am completely free from obligations or responsibilities to take care of someone.”

Work idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — I am highly productive getting a lot done.”

Achievement idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — I am being recognized for my accomplishments, if I am excelling in my career.”

Materialism idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — I have a certain level of wealth, financial freedom, and very nice possessions.”

Religion idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — I am adhering to my religion’s moral codes and accomplished in its activities.”

Individual person idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — this one person is in my life and happy there and/or happy with me.”

Irreligion idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — I feel I am totally independent of organized religion and with a self-made morality.”

Racial/cultural idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — my race and culture is ascendant and recognized as superior.”

Inner ring idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — a particular social grouping or professional grouping or other group lets me in.”

Family idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — my children and/or my parents are happy and happy with me.”

Relationship idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — Mr. or Ms. ‘Right’ is in love with me.”

Suffering idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — I am hurting, in a problem — only then do I feel noble or worthy of love or am able to deal with guilt.”

Ideology idolatry: “Life only has meaning / I only have worth if — my political or social cause or party is making progress and ascending in influence or power.”

Answer these diagnostic questions:

- a. What is my greatest nightmare? What do I worry about most?

- b. What, if I failed or lost it, would cause me to feel that I did not even want to live? What keeps me going?

- c. What do I rely on or comfort myself with when things go bad or get difficult?

- d. What do I think most easily about? What does my mind go to when I am free? What preoccupies me?

- e. What unanswered prayer would make me seriously think about turning away from God?

- f. What makes me feel the most self-worth? What am I the proudest of?

- g. What do I really want and expect out of life? What would really make me happy?

Summary: Now that you’ve answered the questions above, look for common themes. Write below what you think are your functional masters? What things tend to be too important to you?

E. Healing Idolatry with the Gospel

1- Avoid the “Moralizing” approach

A very typical approach to personal change among orthodox and conservative Christians can best be called the “moralizing” approach. Basic analysis: **Your problem is that you are doing wrong. Repent!** This focuses on behavior but doesn't go deep enough. We must find out the “why” of our behavior. Why do I find I want to do the wrong things? What inordinate desires are drawing me to do so? What are the idols and false beliefs behind them? To simply tell an unhappy person (or yourself) to repent and change their behavior is insufficient, because the lack of self-control is coming from a belief that says, “Even if you live up to moral standards but don't have this, then you are still a failure.” You must replace this belief through repentance for the one sin under it all your particular idolatry.

2. Avoid the “Psychologizing” Approach.

A very typical approach to personal change among more liberal religious groups can best be called the “psychologizing” approach. Basic analysis: **Your problem is that you don't see that God loves you as you are. Rejoice!** This focuses on feelings, which seem to be deeper than behavior but it also fails to go deep enough. We must also find out the why of our feelings. Why do I have such strong feelings of despair (or fear, or anger) when this or that happens? What are the inordinate desires that are being frustrated? What are the idols and false beliefs behind them? To simply tell an unhappy person (or yourself), “God loves you — rejoice!” is insufficient. The unhappiness is coming from a belief that says, “Even if God loves you, but you don't have this, then you are still a failure.” You must replace this belief through repentance for the one sin under it all — your particular idolatry.

3. Adopt the “Gospel” Approach.

Basic Analysis: **Your problem is that you are looking to something besides Christ for your happiness. Repent and rejoice!** This confronts a person with the real sin under the sins and behind the bad feelings. Our problem is that we have given ourselves over to idols. Every idol-system is a way of our-works-salvation, and thus it keeps us “under the law.” Paul tells us that the bondage of sin is broken when we come out from under the law — when we begin to believe the gospel of Christ's-work-salvation. Only when we realize in a new way that we are righteous in Christ will the idol's power over us be broken. “Sin shall not be your master for you are not under law, but under grace” (Rom.6:14). You will only be “under grace” and free from the controlling effects of idols to the degree that you have both repented for your idols and rested and rejoiced in the saving work and love of Christ instead.

“The faith that... is able to warm itself at the fire of God's love, instead of having to steal love and self-acceptance from other sources, is actually the root of holiness... It is often said today, in circles which blend popular psychology with Christianity, that we must love ourselves before we can be set free to love others... But no realistic human beings find it

easy to love or forgive themselves, and hence their self-acceptance must be grounded in their awareness that God accepts them in Christ. There is a sense in which the strongest self-love that we can have... is merely the mirror image of the lively conviction we have that God loves us.

Moralism, whether it takes the form of either denunciation or “pep talks,” can ultimately only create an awareness of sin and guilt or manufactured virtues built on will power... We all automatically gravitate toward the assumption that we are justified by our level of sanctification, and when this posture is adopted, it inevitably focuses our attention not on Christ but on the adequacy of our own obedience. We start each day with our personal security not resting on the accepting love of God and the sacrifice of Christ but on our present feelings or recent achievements in the Christians life. Since these arguments will not quiet the human conscience, we are inevitably moved either to discouragement and apathy or to a self-righteousness [some form of idolatry] which falsifies the record to achieve a sense of peace...”

— Richard Lovelace, The Dynamics of Spiritual Life

Discussion questions:

1. What helped you most?

2. What questions were raised?



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