

## GOD'S TOP TEN (Part 2)

### EXODUS 20:13-17

The Bible teaches us that after God spoke the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai, He wrote them on stone tablets. Exodus 31:18 tells us, “He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.” *But this may not have been the first time God had written the Ten Commandments...*

Some Bible scholars believe God wrote these *Ten Sayings* on the heart of Adam and Even when He created them in the Garden of Eden. God wrote His moral code within them – sort of a natural law.

We call it “**conscience.**”

Of course, when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit they broke almost all the Ten Commandments...

*To take something forbidden was stealing...*

*They believed Satan's lies and false witness...*

*They coveted God's wisdom...*

*Their sin led to death - murder of the human race...*

*They broke God's Sabbath rest...*

*And Adam and Eve's disobedience revealed their desire to worship other gods, namely themselves...*

After Adam's sin, the conscience of all humans became clouded. The moral code God implanted in man - his sense of right and wrong - became muddled.

The further succeeding generations plunged into wickedness the further the human race drifted from this internal compass. Man's conscience became seared.

This inbred, internal standard became defaced - until God came to Moses on Mount Sinai to restate and rewrite His moral code – *to literally, write it in stone!*

God wrote on stone tablets with His own finger what He had written on man's nature at creation. You could say that in the Ten Commandments, **God codified conscience**. He gave a universal standard that applied to all men, at all times - that all men would recognize.

And through the ages the Ten Commandments have served mankind well... Realize the Law of Moses was not the only set of ethics floating around the ancient world. There was the Code of Hammurabi and others.

But the Ten Commandments survived the test of time, and provided the foundation for the formation of Western Civilization. In the West, these Ten Sayings have become **“the fountainhead for common law.”**

And yet despite their historical significance, it needs to be stressed to every generation that the Ten Commandments are not just for *reading*, or *admiring*, or *posting*... First and foremost they're for **keeping!**

Once an ole country boy heard his pastor preach on the Ten Commandments. He was impressed with the message. After the sermon he said, **“Pastor, you sure preached a good message, today. In fact, I done made up my mind to keep them Ten Commandments. Each week for the next ten weeks, I'm going to keep a different commandment, until I get through all ten.”**

Of course, he missed the point. It's not for us to pick and choose which commands are convenient to obey.

All Ten are indispensable. It takes all Ten Commands to make a moral life, and a civilized society.

As you know, we live today in a permissive society. Our moral underpinnings have eroded. For most people, moral, ethical decisions are a guessing game.

I've heard it said, "[The pressing need in America is not for guided missiles, but for guided morals.](#)"

Too many people want a customized morality that serves their interests when and if it's needed – but God has given us absolutes! These are not the *Ten Suggestions*, but rather the **Ten Commandments**.

They come with no footnotes, or qualifying remarks. *God's Top Ten are for keeping, not debating!*

God etched these commands into two stone tablets.

The first tablet handed to Moses contained the first five commandments. We studied them last week, and noted how they dealt with man's relationship with God.

On the second tablet, the last five commandments, the focus is on man's relationship with his fellow man.

These second five "*sayings*" are the basis for human society - the glue that holds a civilization together.

They teach *respect for life, the importance of purity, the right of ownership, the principle of private property, the seriousness of speech, the value of contentment.*

Without these second five commandments all social order would break down overnight. Anarchy would rule.

We disregard this second tablet to our own peril.

Let's turn to Exodus 20, and read through these last five commandments, then take a look at each one...

Verse 13, "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, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."

Here's the Sixth Command: "You shall not murder."

The first chapters of Genesis teach us that man was created in the image and likeness of God. That truth has a multitude of implications, but it certainly means that man is unique. He is not just another animal.

Human life is sacred and holy - it's special to God.

When Noah exited the Ark, God established human government. In Genesis 9:6 He told Noah and his descendants, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man." Here God institutes capital punishment.

But His rationale is interesting - murder is not only a crime against man - it mars God's image in humanity.

That makes murder an assault on God.

Understand the difference between the terms "*murder*" and "kill." Obviously, all murder involves a killing, but not all killing is considered murder.

There were occasions in the OT when God ordered Israel to kill their enemies. A *just war, self-defense, capital punishment* involve killing another human - but in God's economy these are necessary forms of killing.

God gave us the gift of life - it's sacred and holy and should be respected - and only God should be allowed to take away His gift... *Murder is when man terminates another human life of his own initiative – without the sanction of God.* Murder occurs whenever man sets himself up as God to decide who lives and dies.

It reminds me of a Peanuts cartoon.

Charlie Brown says to Lucy, "*What's this I hear about you throwing Linus out of the house?*" *That's not legal.*"

Lucy answers, "*O, yes I can, and I did! Legally a big sister can throw out a younger brother because she's bigger than him, and because he bugs her all the time. And if you're smart, Charlie Brown, you won't get involved.*" Charlie Brown shies away, "I'm very smart."

Murder is never made legal by the privilege of power.

All human life is made in God's image - from the *pauper* to the *prince* - from the *most accomplished adult* to the *most innocent baby*. God forbids the person with the

power - with the upper hand – to use that power to take the life of another human being.

The old adage, “**might makes right,**” just isn't true!

*When Hitler's prejudice annihilated the Jews in his death camps... when Islamic governments slaughter Christians out of religious bigotry... when a criminal uses a gun on a person to take his wallet... or when society encourages the termination of a pregnancy because it will interfere with a woman's career... These are examples of murder, and they're forbidden by God.*

The Bible says humans are “**fearfully and wonderfully made.**” We bear the Creator's image, and it's a crime to mar that image for convenience or advancement.

In fact, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus ups the ante on the Sixth Commandment. He reveals *the spirit of the Law*. Murder is the blooming of a deeper evil.

In Matthew 5:21-22 He says, “**You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.**”

Jesus ties *the deed of murder* to *the seed of hatred*.

He knows actions grow out of attitudes, so He raises the plumb line... *What is it you harbor in your heart?*

There are people here today who've never shot a gun, or held a knife - *but you've fired verbal bullets at your spouse... you've assassinated the character of a coworker*

*under your breath... you've mowed down a motorist with a verbal tirade... In fact, some of you exit the freeway with a long line of victims in your wake.*

1 John 3:15 warns us, **“Whoever hates his brother is a murderer...”** There's more to keeping the Sixth Commandment than never pulling the trigger on a rifle.

**“You shall not murder”** requires respect for human life. You keep it by valuing the people around you - by treating people as *sacred and special* - by forgiving others, controlling your anger, and learning to love.

**The Sixth Commandment** protects *the sanctity of human life*, while the Seventh Commandment protects *the institution that propagates human life*, marriage.

In Exodus 20:14... **“You shall not commit adultery.”**

As a Sunday School class was learning the Ten Commandments, the teacher was worried that one of her first graders would want her to explain the seventh.

*What would she say? How do you explain “adultery” to kids?* Well, just as she feared, a student raised his hand. The little boy asked, **“What does it mean to commit agriculture?”** He'd gotten his words confused!

But after the teacher stopped laughing, she still needed an answer. After a long silence, another child in the class, bailed her out. He answered his friend, **“It means you shouldn't plough in another man's field.”**

That works for committing *agriculture* or *adultery*.

And this sums up the Seventh Commandment.

Marriage is society's basic building block. It's the central thread in the fabric of civilization. It's the incubator for the human race. Children are best loved and bred in



families where both a mother and a father have a stake in the welfare and future of that child.

History teaches us - *civilization after civilization* - that when the family crumbles, the society will crumble.

And the sexual relation is the focal point of trust in the marriage. Break that central trust, and the rest of the relationship will unravel and disintegrate.

Over the last month same-sex marriage has been in the media spotlight. And if you respect God's Word you grieve over our country's betrayal of biblical values.

But in this past month, I suppose a few hundred homosexual couples have married, whereas 75,000 heterosexual marriages have dissolved through divorce.

*And I'm sure a good number of those divorces were the result of sexual infidelity.* Marriage today is being attacked on all fronts. Adultery is also its archenemy.

Often we think of adultery as a sniper's fire. The only person harmed is the betrayed spouse... but not true!

Adultery is more like a pipe bomb blast - the damage is wide spread, indiscriminate... *Kids feel abandoned, friendships are sabotaged, extended families get double-crossed, a dark cloud is cast over the church, future generations are deprived of a legacy of trust and commitment* - nothing afterwards is ever the same.

Psyches get punctured. Some wounds never heal.

And even though God is willing to forgive, you'll never undo the fact that your betrayal broke His heart.



Most of us realize the dangers of adultery, but just recognizing doesn't immunize us from the temptation.

It happens so subtly....

*A chance encounter with an old friend... a late night at the office... a ride home from work or even a church function... a conversation by the water-cooler with someone who seems to care... you get sucked in. It starts out harmless, but the itch can rise at any time!*

Florence Littauer comments, "No good Christian man or woman gets up in the morning, looks out the window, and says, 'My, this is a lovely day! I guess I'll go out and commit adultery.' Yet many do it anyway."

Perhaps the best deterrent to adultery is to realize its spiritual connotations... Ephesians 5 tells us marriage is a picture of Christ's relationship with His Church...

Jesus is a faithful husband. We should be a committed bride. When you break the marriage vow you distort the picture God wants to paint to the world.

**Just as murder mars the image of God, adultery mars the image of Christ and His Church.**

It's like walking through a museum in Paris, pulling out a pocket knife, and ripping into the canvas of a masterpiece. It's a travesty of the highest order.

In the Sermon of the Mount, Jesus also raises the bar for sexual fidelity. In Matthew 5:27-28 He said to His disciples, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Just as He is with murder, God is as concerned with the *seed* as He is with the *deed*. It's true, "**Promiscuity begins in the head long before it ends in the bed.**"

It's a safe bet you'll never commit adultery if you never think a lustful thought. That's why the battle with sexual temptation begins in the mind. Guard your thoughts. Corral your imagination and fantasies, and bring every thought under the control of Jesus Christ.

Obedience to the Seventh Commandment begins with respect for purity, and the sanctity of marriage.

All too often people in our society find it easier to get a new spouse, than to work through a difficult marriage. "**Affairs**" have been called "**love for the lazy.**"

Marriage is like gardening – it takes a lot of planting and weeding and watering and watching. *Plow in your own field, and you'll yield a bumper crop of blessing.*

**The Eighth Commandment** is in verse 15, "**You shall not steal.**" The Sixth Command protects **the sanctity of human life**. The Seventh **the sanctity of marriage**. This command protects **the sanctity of private property**.

Actually **all property belongs to God!** There's a deed that says I own my home - *at least me and the bank* - but that's an illusion. Israel had it right. All land belonged to God. They lived on borrowed parcels.

Job 1:21 sums up the Bible's view on private property, "**Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.**" Everything you and I own belongs to God, and is on loan to us. That's why taking another person's possessions is not only a sin against man, but God.

There are three ways to accumulate property: **gift, toil, and theft.** God has established the first two principles for gathering wealth - through *love and labor*.

Both of these principles are articulated in Ephesians 4:28, “**Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.**”

Paul tells us we should *labor in order to love*.

But theft is the violation of both. When you rip off another person’s property you’re depriving them of the rewards of their honest toil - which is not a loving act.

Several years ago, Florida State suspended a star football player after he was charged for shoplifting.

The kid walked out of a store with over \$400 worth of clothing, after only spending 20 bucks. Reportedly, when he was interviewed the young man made the comment, “**It’s not like I’ve murdered the President.**”

But you could say that stealing is a form of murder.

Notice the progression in these commands... *the sanctity of life - the sanctity of the institution that propagates life - then the sanctity of private property that’s used to sustain life...* In a sense, to rob another person of their property is to kill them by a slow death.

When we think of robbery, we think of a masked man with a gun protruding from his pocket – but there are many different ways to violate the Eighth Command.

**Shoplifting** has become an American epidemic.

Here's a recent headline, "Shoplifting is America's biggest, fastest growing, most expensive crime. Ordinary people will steal everything from TVs to Bibles to Preparation H." *I understand the Preparation H in emergency cases... but we'll give you a free Bible!*

This is why buying gas is such a hassle. Stores got tired of people pulling up to the pump, filling up their tank, then driving off into the sunset without paying.

**Pilfering** is another form of theft.

Loading up on pads and pencils purchased by your employer is a form of thievery. It's been estimated 17% of business losses are the result of stealing from the company's own employees. Taking an 1.5 lunch hour - not working a full eight hour day - are forms of theft.

There are also some accepted business practices that are forms of burglary. *Exorbitant pricing - false advertising - unfair wages...* all are forms of stealing.

There's one other form of stealing I'll mention.

In Malachi 3:8 God asks the question, "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed you? In tithes and offerings.'"

In ancient Israel the tithe (or "tenth") was not the people's to give. It belonged to God. All that Israel had belonged to God and He expected them to honor Him by their giving... *God has the same expectation of us...*

To hoard what we know to give is a form of stealing...

**The Ninth Commandment** is found in verse 16, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

Every society is held together by honest, reliable communication. If we can't trust what a person says, it's impossible for us to have a mutually-beneficial relationship. Business, marriage, the legal system - all social interactions - will ultimately break down.

And this kind of deterioration has already begun in our society. Sadly, a man's word is no longer his bond.

Contracts aren't worth the paper they're written on.

Our judicial system is circumvented by skilled lawyers who twist the truth to win a case... Today, the phrase "*politic promise*" is considered an oxymoron.

"*Bearing truthful witness*" strikes at the very heart of a person. This issue reveals a person's core character.

How important is it to you to be known as a man or woman of your word? Everyday your personal integrity is on the line. An honest society is built on honest people. And God wants us to be high fidelity folk.

The Ninth Commandment says specifically, "*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*" We should be truthful in our comments about other people.

That means if you don't have all the *information* there should be no *communication*... How many people have had their good reputation destroyed because another person with loose lips made an idle comment?

Here's a good way to define gossip, "*It's hearing something you like about someone you don't.*"

It's been observed, "A tongue three inches long can kill a man six feet tall." Gossip is nothing but *character assassination*. Oh, the trouble caused by the tongue.

James 3:6 says it best, "The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell."

The famous Greek poet, Homer, was quoted as saying, "The tongue of man is a twisty thing." Homer also said, "*That ball is way back... it's outta here!*"

It reminds me of the woman who got mad at her pastor. She spread vicious rumors all around town.

Her gossip severely damaged his reputation.

After several years the Lord convicted her of her sin. She went back to apologize to the pastor. The pastor told her, "I'll be happy to forgive you, but first go throughout our town and place a feather on the doorstep of every house." She agreed to the penance.

But when she returned the pastor told her, "Now go back and retrieve each of the feathers." The woman balked, "That's impossible. By now the wind has blown the feathers everywhere." That's when the pastor told her, "That's right. I gladly forgive you, but realize you can never undo the damage your untruths have done."

I've got a acrostic I hope you'll remember the next time you're tempted to speak of someone without all the facts. It's the word "*THINK*" - "**T-H-I-N-K...**"

First, think "**T**" - *is it True*.

Second, think "**H**" - *is it Helpful*. It may be true, but does telling it really accomplish anything constructive.



Third, think “I” - *is it Inspiring*. Does it offer anyone any hope or encouragement or insight.

Fourth, think “N” - *is it Necessary*. Is there a legitimate reason this needs to be said to this person.

And fifth, think “K” - *is it Kind*. Is this a loving, caring comment to make... Hey, **THINK** before you speak.

The Tenth and final Commandment is recorded in verse 17, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, (nor his Harley motorcycle, or new plasma TV, or swimming pool - or her new counter tops, or her new SUV...) nor anything that is your neighbor's."

One day Abraham Lincoln was walking down the street when he noticed a dad with two boys by his side.

The boys were screaming and pushing each other as the dad tried to maintain order. Lincoln asked the man if there was a problem. The dad replied, "Well, I've got three walnuts, and each of my sons wants two."

In a nutshell, this is the problem with the human race. We're never grateful. We never have enough. We always want more. Human beings are incurably selfish.

We're never satisfied with God's provision.

Rather than be thankful that God has blessed our neighbor - we want what he's got. Ours is the gimme' generation - *gimme', gimme', gimme'* - and that's the attitude that violates the Tenth Commandment.



Don't misunderstand, there's nothing wrong with wanting nice things – *with working hard, saving your money, purchasing amenities that will better your life.*

The Bible knows nothing of asceticism – or sacrifice for sacrifice sake. Austere living isn't a means to godliness. *Poverty doesn't equal piety.* Rather the Bible teaches us that God “*gives us richly all things to enjoy.*”

There's nothing wrong with wanting a house... as long as it's not your neighbor's house - *or lake house.*

If you're single, there's nothing wrong with desiring a wife. Proverb 18:22 tells us, “*He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD*”... just make sure the wife you find is not your neighbor's wife.

There's nothing wrong with desiring a new car, or a new laptop, or new golf clubs, or a new smartphone.

But here's what happens... We're not even thinking about a new smartphone. We're happy with our old one, until we see someone else's new smartphone. It's razor thin, and voice activated, and has more pixels!

And rather than be happy for our friend who got the new phone - we're upset her phone is better than ours.

*This is the attitude of covetousness.* It's a desire born of prideful selfishness. And it's a sin before God.

Author Mark Buchanan wrote an article for Christianity Today. It read, “*I belong to the Cult of the Next Thing... It has its own doctrines: charge it, instant credit, no down-payment, no interest for three months.*

*It has pastors, evangelists, and celebrity sponsors.*

It has, of course, its own chapels, and temples: *malls, superstores, and club warehouses*. Its own sacraments: *credit and debit cards*. Its own ecstatic experience: *the spending spree*. The Cult of the Next Thing proclaims, “*The Kingdom of Stuff is at hand.*”

I’m sure you’ve heard the story of the tycoon who was asked, “*How much money do you need to be satisfied?*” The rich man answered, “*One more dollar.*”

Here’s a truth we should take to heart, “*Contentment is not the result of getting more, but of wanting less.*”

Jesus said in Matthew 5, “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.*” The person who lives a happy life is the man or woman who hungers after God. Our real need is spiritual, and you can’t meet a *spiritual need with a physical thing*. Only God can satisfy the human heart.

Realize, the first nine Commandments deal primarily with human conduct, but this last commandment deals exclusively with the heart. It cuts to the core of our problem. We’re self-centered and greedy by nature.

In Romans 7 Paul tells us it was this commandment that convinced him of his need for Jesus. He says in verse 7, “*For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.”*”

Paul could measure up to the first nine commands, but not this final commandment. Here he stumbled.

The tenth commandment exposed his sinful, selfish heart. Paul knew he needed help - someone who could change his heart. This command, “*You shall not covet*” is what ultimately led Rabbi Saul to faith in Christ.

As we've looked at God's Top Ten, I have to admit there've been times when I've stumbled at all ten.

I've made idols out of possessions or people.

I've worshipped God only in ways convenient for me.

There have been times when I've confessed God's name without really wanting to do His will.

I've been guilty of putting personal advancement ahead of rest with God and relationships with others.

I've neglected my parents.

When you raise the bar from action to attitude...

I've been guilty of murder and adultery. I've stolen, and lied, and coveted what belonged to my neighbor.

It reminds me of the mom who sent her son to college. She wanted to be certain he had God's Word, so she went to a Post Office and mail a Bible to him.

As she handed the package to the clerk, he asked her, "Is there anything breakable in your package?"

The mom replied, "*Only the Ten Commandments.*"

And any honest attempt at keeping these *ten sayings* will ultimately reveal our insufficiency. We can't do it on our own. We need outside help - a change of heart.

John MacArthur has a wonderful version of God's Top Ten. It's based on the truth that all Ten Commands are really about love. Follow with me through the list...

The First Commandment... Love is loyal.  
The Second... Love is faithful.  
The Third Commandment... Love is reverent.  
The Fourth... Love is intimate.  
The Fifth... Love is respectful.  
The Sixth.... Love is harmless.  
The Seventh... Love is pure.  
The Eighth... Love is unselfish.  
The Ninth Command... Love is truthful.  
And the Tenth... Love is content.  
God's Top Ten are a portrait of a life of love!

There was a pastor who wrote a weekly column for a local newspaper. One week he ran out of time - had nothing to print. Instead of rehashing an old editorial he printed Exodus 20:1-17, the Ten Commandments.

The next week the newspaper received a letter from a reader. She wrote, **“Please cancel my subscription to your paper. Your editorials are getting too personal.”**

The Ten Commandments do get personal. They expose all our buried blemishes and hidden hangups.

Yet, if we confess that we've fallen short. If we ask God to uproot our selfishness, and give us a loving heart. If we aspire to this higher, nobler life - God will grant it. What God calls us to do, He equips us to do.

This morning, if you let Him God wants to do a work in your heart. He wants to fill you with love for Him and love for others. Love is what Christianity is all about.

And here's what love looks like... *God's Top Ten.*