

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church,
10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 16

EXODUS

CHAPTER 20

INTRODUCTION

In the last lesson, we discuss the giving of the Ten Commandments by God to Israel. These commandments form the basis in which Israel might have a proper relationship with God. In further detailing the covenant that God made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He revealed specific laws which required Israel to obey to ensure the blessings God specifically mentioned to them, namely, Israel would be a treasured possession to God, Israel would be a kingdom of priests, and Israel would be a holy nation.

The outline is already given in the previous lesson. In the previous lesson, the first three commandments were discussed. In this lesson, we will look into the fourth commandment and the rest of the commandments.

COMMENTARY

The Fourth Word

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy (20:8). The keeping of the Sabbath has been interpreted variously by believers of different theological persuasions. In the days of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Pharisees criticised the Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples for breaking the Sabbath. The Seventh Day Adventists teach that no work should be done on the Sabbath, the seventh day, that is Saturday according to our calendar. Then there are some believers who considered the Lord's Day (Sunday) as the Sabbath, the day of rest, and they too would not work, and some would not even cook on that day for the family, nor buy food from food sellers. These people would cook an extra portion the day before the Sabbath, and on Sunday would only heat the food for their meals. A careful study of this commandment in the light of Scriptures would bring out the right principle of observing the Sabbath. One thing that needs to be said at the outset: in whatever way one believes to be the way that the Sabbath should be kept, one must not condemn others for not keeping the Sabbath as they do.

We are told to keep the Sabbath holy. Firstly, let us ascertain the meaning of "Sabbath". The word means "to rest". It has the basic thrust of putting an end to something, to sever.¹ It refers

¹ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., & Bruce K. Waltke, Theological Wordbook of the

to the seventh day of the week on which God rested after creating the heaven and the earth in six days. Of course, we know from Scriptures that God does not rest from working for God still works since then (John 5:19; 14:10).² Now the Sabbath was also used to refer to a sabbatical year in which the land would not be tilled and used for the whole year (Exodus 23:11; Leviticus 25:4).³

Secondly, the meaning of “holy” is “clean, pure, consecrated”⁴. Since it was the Sabbath of the Lord thy God, it teaches that the day in the week is to be consecrated to God, a day as belonging to God. God declared that He blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed (same word as ‘holy’) it. If God blessed the Sabbath, God blesses all His people who remember and keep the Sabbath unto the God. On every Sabbath day, the Israelites held a holy convocation (assembly) praised and sang songs to

Old Testament (TWOT), reference number 2323.

² John 5:19 Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.

John 14:10 Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.

³ Exodus 23:11 But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard.

Leviticus 25:4 But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard.

⁴ TWOT, 1990.

the Lord (Leviticus 23:3; Psalm 92:1).⁵ Many years later through the prophet Isaiah, God said to His people,

If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it (Isaiah 58:13, 14).

Thirdly, God took a very serious view to His people remembering and keeping the Sabbath. Anyone who broke the Sabbath was put to death (Exodus 31:14, 15).⁶

Through the years, the Jewish leaders had adulterated the Sabbath. They began to impose a lot of restrictions in observing the Sabbath.

⁵Leviticus 23:3 Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.

Psalm 92:1 {A Psalm or Song for the sabbath day.} It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High:

⁶ Exodus 31:14 Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. 15 Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.

This is evident in the earth ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ corrected them. The Pharisees condemned the disciples of Jesus Christ for plucking the ears of corn to eat (Matthew 12:1). Jesus Christ responded by charging them that they had a deficient insight of the Scripture: *“But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless* (Matthew 12:7). So the disciples were guiltless, and the Pharisees were scripturally immature. On another occasion, the Lord Jesus Christ was once more tested regarding the observance of the Sabbath, and was questioned: *Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days?* (Matthew 12:10). And the Lord resoundingly answered them and declared that “it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath day” (Matthew 12:12). The Lord Jesus Christ, being the Lord of the Sabbath, for He is the one who formulated the Sabbath law, gave the principle that it is lawful to do acts of kindness or mercy and necessity on the Sabbath day. That is our guiding principle and rule for keeping the Sabbath. It behoves upon every Christian to prepare his heart, mind and soul for gathering with other Christians on the Lord’s Day (Sunday), one day in the week, to worship Him and bring offerings of praise and thanksgiving. Moreover, the fact that the people of God were forbidden to work on the Sabbath, the fact that they were to let the land rest for a sabbatical year without tilling it, teaches the people of

God to trust the Lord their God. Similarly, New Testament saints keep the Sabbath and do no work (e.g. taking extra courses on Sunday to enhance one’s secular career is surely not showing their trust and faith in God for their well-being and advancement). So we have known of the Lord’s people who work on Sundays to gain extra money. Is that the right way for a Christian, who has been bought by the precious blood of Jesus Christ and who worships him as God, to behave? If God does not condemn him, the world condemns him — if that is the way that Christian honours his God, his God means nothing more than the extra “bucks”! One should thank the Lord God that He does not deal with us according to our sins, but that does not mean that He will bless us if we sin against Him — we reap what we sow. Let us not test the Lord our God.

The Fifth Word

Honour thy father and thy mother (20:12). This commandment regarding the relationship between children and parents touches the very foundation of human society. The family is the most basic and foundational unit of any community or country. If the fabric of the family is torn, the country will be weak and unstable. Therefore, it is imperative that young and adult children must never forget to honour their fathers and mothers.

It is apparent that the commandment places no distinction between the father and the mother. Both

parents must be honoured and respected equally. The word “honour” has a wide range of meaning.⁷ It is almost an open-ended commandment. This means that young and adult children ought to treat their parents in whatever way that honours them. In all their dealings with their parents, the children must show due respect, esteem, affection, concern, consideration and appreciation. This regard for parents must continue until the day the parents are taken away.

This is the first commandment with a promise, as commented by Paul, Apostle (Ephesians 6:2-3).⁸ Whether the promise of blessing is directed to the individual child or collectively to the people is difficult to resolve. Bible scholars are not fully in agreement. This writer would not argue that it does not apply to the individual child. But it is clear that the promise is directed more to the community as a whole rather than the individual. If the young and adult children respect and honour their parents and maintain the unity and peace within the family, God promised that there would a prolonged period of peace, prosperity and progress in the country. Even the word “honour” (Hebrew *kabad*) strongly suggests this — “heavy, rich, wealthy, glorious”. We can rightly apply this promise to the

⁷ The Hebrew (*kabad*) means “heavy,” “glorious,” “honourable.” It means to consider important, to honour>

⁸ Ephesians 6:2 Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) 3 That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

each family unit. If the children respect and honour their parents, the family will stand together. It will not be broken. A family that stands together will be strong for a long time. Even when their parents are long gone, where the siblings remain respectful one to another, and their children are taught the same, the promised longevity and prosperity ensues!

The Sixth Word

Thou shalt not kill (20:13). This commandment has more recently been referred to many times in discussions relating to war, capital punishment, euthanasia, suicide, self-defence and abortion. As can be seen, the commandment is a simple straightforward one. It does not make any distinctions. What we have is what it means.

The word “kill” is the Hebrew word *ratsach*, meaning “to take the life of a person”. The word is used to mean murder in the context of the premeditated killing of Naboth by the wife of king Ahab (1 Kings 21:18, 19).⁹ It is also used to refer to accidental or unintentional killing (Deuteronomy 4:41, 42).¹⁰ It is used to refer to the execution

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

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 4:41 Then Moses severed three cities on this side Jordan toward the sunrising; 42 That the slayer might flee thither, which should kill his neighbour unawares, and hated him not in times past; and that fleeing unto one of these cities he might live:

of a convicted murderer (Numbers 35:30)¹¹. Interestingly, the same word is not used in the context of war. Another word is more commonly used — Hebrew *charam*, which means “to destroy” (see Numbers 21:3; Joshua 6:21).¹²

These words teach us that the life of a human being belongs to God (Genesis 9:6). God only has the right to determine what shall be done with life. Life is not given to a man for him to do what he likes to do with it. Man has not such right for he is not God who gives man life. Man must respect the life of another man. If a man takes the life of another, he has violated God’s ordained order and must be punished as God declared in this commandment. However, God later did give specific laws pertaining to the violation of this commandment (Exodus 21:12-17; 22:18-20).

The Seventh Word

Thou shalt not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14). This commandment concerns men and women who are married. It also concerns sexual behaviour in general. The married man is forbidden to have sexual intercourse

with another person’s wife, and the married woman may not have intercourse with any man other than her husband¹³. The seriousness of breaking this commandment is seen in the punishment of the death penalty. Adultery is a sin against God and man. It is clearly obvious that the purpose is to protect the unity of the family and the integrity of marriage. We can see that sexuality is not a casual or promiscuous matter. A healthy and lively male and female relationship that is characterised by respect, honour and integrity, is envisaged.

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

¹¹ Numbers 35:30 Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die.

¹² Numbers 21:3 And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah.

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

¹³ Leviticus 20:10 And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

The Eighth Word

Thou shalt not steal (Exodus 20:15). This commandment forbids stealing of any kind. It concerns the matter of ownership. Stealing is to take or keep what does not belong to us. The quantity and value of the stolen goods is not the issue. The issue is more than that. The breaking of this commandment is a sin against man because it shows no concern for others. It is also a sin against God because it betrays the trust in Him.

We are familiar with the obvious ways of stealing, but there are more subtle ways. We steal from the government by not honestly declaring our income. We steal from our employer by not giving him a full day's work for the pay we receive or vice versa, employers steal by remunerating inadequate and improper wages and benefits. We steal by denying others of their proper dues. In addition, when we withhold our tithes and offerings to God, we rob God (Malachi 3:8-10).¹⁴

The Ninth Word

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour (Exodus 20:16). This commandment forbids the giving of

¹⁴ Malachi 3:8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. 9 Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. 10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

false testimony, that is, telling lies or untruths in legal proceedings and in ordinary situations. The commandment therefore protects a person's reputation and justice for anyone in the judicial system.

Man bears false witness in many ways. A malicious lie, idle gossip, half-truth, insincere flattery, remaining silent, even a raised eyebrow or shrugged shoulders can be a form of bearing false witness and can violate this commandment. Lying is not just deliberately deceiving others but also the more casual gossip and rumour.¹⁵

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

The Tenth Word

Thou shalt not covet (Exodus 20:17). This tenth commandment forbids the uncontrollable lusting and desire of a neighbour's possession, spouse, servants, animals, or any other thing. On the surface, it seems that this commandment concerns a sin of the heart and mind only and hardly known to man. However, it is common that such inordinate desires eventually lead to action. Hence, in obeying this commandment, it is not just avoiding the action of realising the thing coveted, but the suppressing of the attitude or intention of the lust or greed in our heart.

¹⁵ Dunnam, 267.

The scope of coveting is not limited to our neighbour's possessions. It should include the lust after position, money and opportunities. We often look at our peers and friends and crave for the things which they have, and declare that if we were given the same opportunity, we would do equally well. Such covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).¹⁶

The biblical way of overcoming this spirit of covetousness in our heart and mind is to be contented with what we have.¹⁷

relationship with his God, and liberates man from the bondage of his own depraved and sinful nature. Thank God for the moral laws.

SUMMARY

This study of the Ten Commandments has shown that God is not narrow-minded and even old fashioned. The commandments are the best laws man could ever have received for his spiritual, political, economic and social wellbeing. At the core of man's activities in all these fields of endeavour is his proper relationship with one another. The divine gift of these moral laws, if faithfully kept, put man on a right

¹⁶Colossians 3:5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

¹⁷Hebrews 13:5 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

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

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Matthew 6:24-34

TUESDAY: Ephesians 5:25-6:4

WEDNESDAY: Luke 18:18-30

THURSDAY: John 8:1-11

FRIDAY: John 5:1-18

Discussion Questions

1. Martin Luther says, "Whatever thy heart clings to and relies upon, that is properly thy God." What does Martin Luther mean by this?

2. What are the causes for the diminished respect and honour for parents in today's society?

3. It is said that it is impossible to keep all the Ten Commandments. Why keep them at all?

4. How would you explain the Lord Jesus Christ's refusal to stone the woman who committed adultery according to the Law?

5. What are the things that we can do today and not break the Sabbath?
