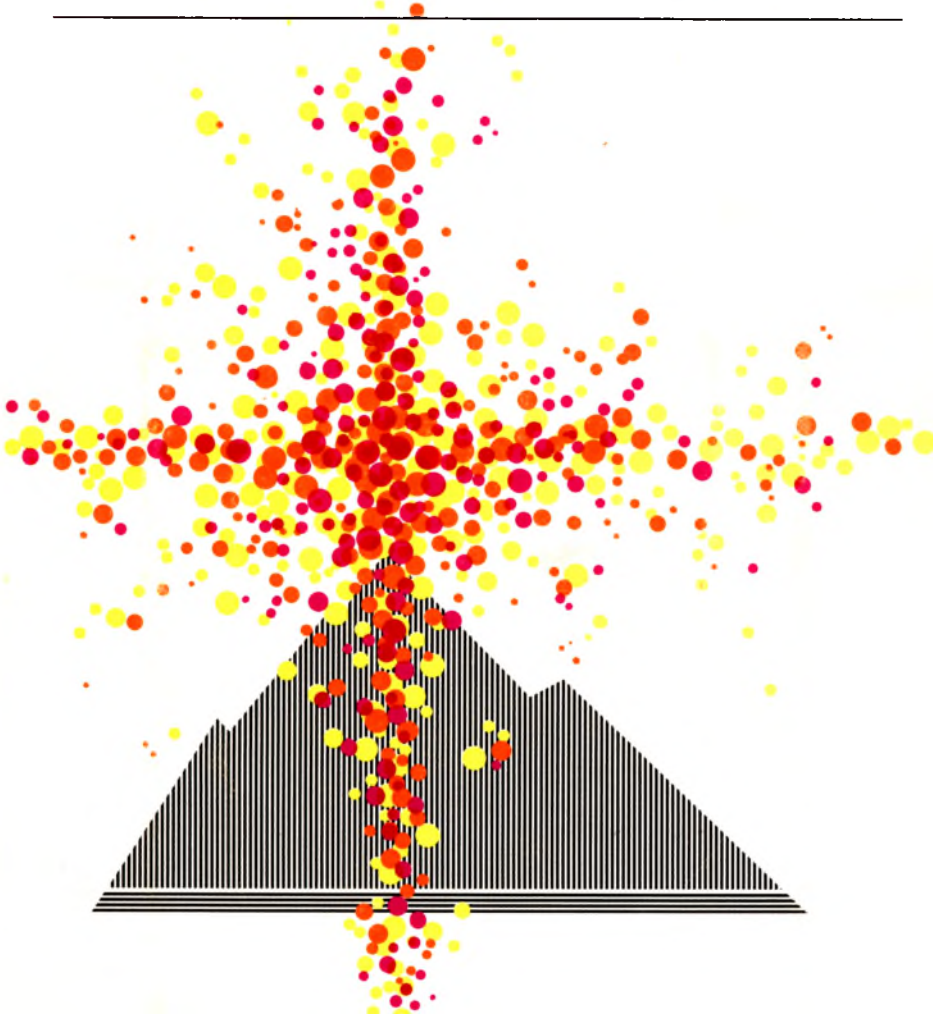


IL STRAIT

NEW DIMENSIONS IN LIFE

New thoughts from the Old Law (THE TEN
COMMANDMENTS)



New Dimensions in Life

New Thoughts from the Old Law
(The Ten Commandments)

by
C. Neil Strait



Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City
Kansas City, Missouri

Copyright, 1977
Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City

ISBN: 0-8341-0475-X

Printed in the
United States of America

Appreciation is expressed to the following publishers who have generously granted permission to quote from their copyrighted works as indicated in the reference notes: Abingdon Press, New York; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, Kansas City, Mo.; John Knox Press, Atlanta, Ga.; Fortress Press (Muhlenberg Press), Philadelphia; Fleming H. Revell Co., Old Tappan, N.J.; The Seabury Press, Inc., New York; Simon and Schuster, Inc., New York; Word Books, Waco, Tex. Also to the following magazines: *Guideposts*, *Herald of Holiness*, *Pulpit Digest*, *Sunshine*.

All scriptures quoted are from the *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, copyrighted 1946 and 1952.

Dedication

TO INA

. . . who shares with me the excitement
of life in a parsonage.
And, there, sometimes
life needs a new dimension.
We find it, together,
in Christ!

Contents

Foreword	8
Preface	9
Introduction	11
1. Who's in First Place?	15
2. Building Barriers	22
3. Checkup on Name Calling	30
4. The Other Six Days	36
5. The Generation Gap	42
6. New Ways to Destroy a Man	48
7. Mishandling God's Gift	54
8. A New Look at Thievery	62
9. The Color of the Mind	69
10. What Are You Thinking?	74
Conclusion	81
Reference Notes	85

Foreword

Here is a fascinating, in-depth presentation of the eternal truths found in the Ten Commandments. It is pertinent because it deals with the fundamental problem of modern man, namely, his "authority hang-up."

Designed primarily for laymen whose faith is tested daily in the workaday world, the book is highly readable—and extremely illuminating as well.

If you are looking for a repetition of the old clichés or even a catchy way of recasting old thoughts, these essays are not for you. While they deal with the enduring truths in these "Ten Words," they are incisive in their application to contemporary living.

No exposition of these timeless Old Testament teachings which reduces them to a mere external code is found here. Rather, the personal relationship which must be sustained between God and man, and man and men, is unfolded.

Each commandment is held up as a diamond and is turned in the hand of this young and exciting author so as to provide a multidimensional view for the reader.

The call to commitment is in every discussion. One is forced to face the consequences of living in the vacuum created where God is absent. But the quality of life that follows from inward harmony with God's laws is on every page exalted, drawing one to a life of fulfillment.

—JOHN A. KNIGHT
President, Bethany Nazarene College

Preface

Who am I to feel that I have something new to add concerning the Ten Commandments? Worry not as to whether I have asked this before undertaking this work; this question haunted me at every turn. And I am not really sure that I am satisfied with the answer. Naturally, I had hoped for a positive yes. But the little bit of humility that God allows even a writer, makes me hesitate.

But then I remember the scores of books I have read on a variety of subjects. Nearly all of them at least said something I had never thought of before. And my reading their works made me a better thinker and a better person.

I offer this book on the Ten Commandments because, for a few months of study and meditation, the Commandments absolutely fascinated me. I examined them closely and tried to pry any lid off, through research, that would let me see them differently. Not a few times did I open a lid that put my mind to spinning.

Writing is sharing. It is the sharing, hopefully, of something new. But not a few times it is the sharing of something exciting. And here I can qualify. For the study of the Ten Commandments and the writing of this book has been exciting.

Of one thing I am convinced. To read anything on the Ten Commandments is to be confronted with tremendous ideas, ideas that can add exciting dimensions to our living.

So I send these chapters forth, hoping some new dimension will present itself to help landscape your life with beauty and purpose. If this happens, it will be reason enough for another volume on the Ten Commandments.

—C. NEIL STRAIT

Introduction

The Ten Commandments have been poorly interpreted across the centuries. We have drawn a picture of them as being God's heavy stick over our lives. They stunt our freedom and interrupt our fun—we think.

A closer view of the Commandments shows how carelessly we have read God's Word. They are given to us as guidelines to head us in the right direction, and as a compass to keep us on course.

Another thing we have misread in our century is the idea of freedom. We have concluded that freedom is life with no strings attached. But this is not true. Freedom is only real when life has the right strings attached. Then it is free to pursue the best and accomplish the worthwhile. The freedom so many seek is only an enslavement—an enslavement to passions without purpose and life without objective. The Commandments seek to free us, but we read them as bondage.

We interpret freedom too much in terms of self. And this leads to trouble. Charles Kingsley has said: "When a man takes the wrong side, the side of self, he is not liberating himself; he is binding more tightly the fetters of his slavery to sin."¹

It is right at this point that the Ten Commandments make sense. They want for us freedom—a freedom from the things that would intrude and interrupt life; a freedom that would attach life to the best and would give it impetus to accomplish the best.

This becomes clear to us only when we realize that life needs authority. And how strange this must sound when we

are living in the very day when life seeks to break the bonds of authority. But this is the very point. Life without authority becomes life without purpose and without direction. Life gets out of balance when there is no authority at its center.

There is a song—"I Did It My Way"—which speaks to us at this point. In this song, speaking of life's activities, it says: "I did it my way." Then a stunning question—and a sobering answer—begins the next line: "Regrets? I've had a few . . ."

But another song of lesser renown speaks a wiser refrain. George Matheson, Scottish poet-preacher, was blind. But he was a man of spiritual insight. He wrote the hymn "O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go," for which he is best remembered. But another of his hymns gives a summary note to the real freedom men seek—and need. It reads: "Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free."

God, Creator of man, knows life fiber by fiber. He knows that life runs into trouble when there is no authority. So, through the Commandments, God seeks to establish a meaningful authority for life.

When sickness overtakes a loved one, we do not seek just anyone's advice. We invite the most capable and learned specialist to examine and to make a diagnosis. The modern predicament of man is not unlike a sick person. But instead of consulting God and bringing Him into our lives, we have dethroned Him. We seek other ways to solve our sickness. But the malady only worsens.

We are fast proving that life without authority never comes to solution. We have been poor students of history and of life. We have seen life set itself against authority. We have observed the outcome of a life that sets the rules and plays its own game. But what we have seen has been less than life-size. And it has all been a reminder that life without authority is life without direction.

All the great trails of thought that serve man recognize an authority of some kind. Medicine recognizes the authority of human nature. Any diagnosis or a prescription is made with due regard for the authority of the body. All competitive sports must have attending laws and an authority to make them meaningful and chaos-free. Who would consider a football game without a referee, or a baseball game without an umpire?

The pilot of any airplane recognizes an authority by which he must abide for successful flight. Or, consider driving. Who would tackle a city expressway without some law or authority controlling the traffic patterns? It would be suicide to attempt it.

Science recognizes an authority. Basic laws attend the experiments in the laboratory. He is a foolish scientist who tries to ignore any of the basic laws. An electrician respects the authority of electricity. He knows he cannot ignore its authority, so he operates in cooperation with it. And only in so doing does the current flow unabated.

Man's basic problem is ignoring authority. Life has not cooperated very well with the Divine. And, when man sets himself against the authority of God, life comes to crisis and chaos. T. Cecil Myers put it in these words: "Somewhere along the way we have lost something, the very something that gives directions, sets standards, and puts goals before us."²

This something—or Someone, really—that we have lost, or ignored, is the very ingredient life needs to live adequately.

The Ten Commandments invite man to consider the lost ingredient in his life. They invite man to consider his destination, in advance, then to book passage. But the authority hang-up of the modern mind has lopped off the God-factor in man's plans. And because this is true, we are in trouble.

A traveler on a train was asked for his ticket, but could not find it. The kind conductor said: "It's all right, send it to the company when you find it." The traveler answered with frustration, "That part's all right, but what bothers me is, where am I going?"³

These Ten Commandments are for the man who wants to know not only where he is going, but who wants to find the best way to get there.

Here, then, are 10 helps for meaningful living, 10 new dimensions to put life on the plus side. And where one of these is violated, meaning is drained and life's purpose gets blurred.

We inhabit a world made by God. It is a moral universe, and its heart is set on righteousness; and therefore we punish ourselves by our sins, as Charles Kingsley expressed it, "just as a wheel in a piece of machinery punishes itself when it gets out of gear."⁴

Another way of putting it is to say that man never breaks one of the Commandments—basically. Man is broken, finally. And it is a lesson slowly and seldom learned.

So we turn to the Ten Commandments to probe something of their depth, to perceive something of their direction, and to possess something of their discipline.

I

***I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of bondage.
You shall have no other gods before me.***

—Exod. 20:2-3

Who's in First Place?

“I am the Lord your God.” Sounds threatening, doesn’t it? It is. It threatens all that is shallow in life and all that is a hindrance.

The subject of the first commandment is *not* God, as we have so often supposed. It’s you! Your life. Your freedom. Your future. Your happiness. And this puts a whole new emphasis on this commandment. And it sheds new light on the remaining nine.

“I am the Lord” are the only words of this initial commandment that many read. These four words form the picture in their minds of a stern, whip-carrying God. But this picture is a distortion of its meaning. Two beautiful words follow these first four—“your God.” And these two words make all the difference.

Think of it—a God for you and me. A personal God. A God interested in me and concerned about my well-being. That's what we have in this first commandment. And to think of the time we spend imagining God doesn't care about us.

Life needs a God like this—a real God. This need is built into the very nature of man. Augustine expressed the thought that "our hearts are restless until they rest in God." James W. Angell put it another way when he said: "Without hope, without God, without faith, life has a way of slipping into nothingness."⁵

You and I understand life to some degree, at least enough to understand that sometimes it is hard. And in those hard moments we reach out—or up—for something to cling to, something—or Someone—with which we can share the hardness. This commandment reminds us that we have a God who wants to share the hard things with us.

We are acquainted with life enough, also, to know that it is not without its moments that are past understanding. Times when reason is silent. Hours when the mind is fevered from trying to figure things out. In those moments we turn to something—or Someone—outside ourselves, hoping a ray of reason will shine through.

Our efforts to find help and meaning during the difficult moments of life is evidence that we have a nature that needs something—or Someone—higher than ourselves, to which we can turn and feel assured that life is worthwhile and that it all makes sense.

Now this first commandment is telling us, in essence, that if the Lord is not our God, then something or someone is going to take His place and serve as a god for our lives. Because life needs a god—and it will have one, or several.

Owen M. Weatherly, in his book, *The Ten Commandments in Modern Perspective*, says: "A man ought to be able to identify his gods. For man's choice is never between

the true God and no god, but between the true God and some lesser object which claims his ultimate devotion and thus becomes his god."⁶

This first commandment is God trying to tell us that whatever that something else is that takes the place of God in our lives, it will be less than the best that life can have. For this commandment is declaring that God is life's best. And where life settles for less than God, it is settling for second best.

Robert Louis Stevenson was seeking to find some answers to the questions posed by life. He found them in God. He wrote to his father and said: "No man can achieve success in life until he writes in the journal of his life the words, 'Enter God.'"

And so it is, if man is to have the best, God must enter life to become Counselor and Companion. Without Him, life is only a journey to dead ends and a coming to second best at each terminal.

Where one strives to exist without God, he runs the eventual risk of acting and living like an animal. The daily news log is proof of this. Why? Because it is only near God that man becomes human. God is Author and Finisher of the human traits in the better sense—love, trust, sharing, faith, and the like. The opposite of these—hate, mistrust, greed, and such—are subhuman traits. So, anywhere man tries to create living—outside of God—he is bordering on subhumanness. He is flirting with beastlike influences— influences which will eventually destroy life.

God is saying, in this first commandment, "Your mission is to become human; and to accomplish this, you need Me." Hence the phrase that begins this commandment, "I am the Lord *your* God."

God is saying that without Him life does not work out. It does not fit together. It does not come to meaning as it should. But we are slow to learn that truth.

Dale Evans Rogers, in her autobiography *The Woman at the Well*, tells of her running from God. She said: "Nothing was turning out right for me. As I look back at it now, I think of that great and profound truth in Francis Thompson's poem, 'The Hound of Heaven,' 'All things betrayeth thee who betrayest Me.'"⁷

It is the story told over and over by those who run from God and try something else in His place. They have a bitter chapter to add to their lives. It is a chapter that tells of meaningless existence and frustrated endurance. It is all a reminder of what Jozsef Farkas wrote: "He who loses the one true God, falls prey to strange gods."⁸

This is something we need to ponder more deeply than we do. Life is going to have a God or gods. Any god or gods other than the true God is a strange god because it does strange things to life. Strange gods corrupt life, ruin life, break life, and strand life on meaningless islands.

Strange gods can be any number of things—money, power, self, drugs, sex—anything that puts the real God second. And such a god is a god that will choke spiritual fountains off in your life.

It is unwise to invite strange gods into life because of what they do. It is reasonable to assume that a god should give something good to life—like peace, love, meaning, and faith. But do the strange gods of modern man give him these? Hardly. Instead, they give him war instead of peace, hatred rather than love, frustration in place of meaning, and doubt instead of faith.

One writer, referring to the gods in people's lives, points out something we seldom consider. "Old gods never die; they merely change their dress and adopt improved techniques of deception and allurements."⁹

But when it comes to a god in life, this is one place where we need the changeless. We might seek—and need—change in other areas, but we need the God who is "the same

yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb. 13:8). And life's crises are constant reminders that only a changeless God is safe for our spiritual pilgrimage.

So God is saying to us, in this first commandment: "You need Me to help you develop the best in your life." He is saying: "If you do not let Me develop the best in your life, another god will come along and establish second best." Is this what you and I want?

An author bragged: "I have no God." Critics wrote of his life: "He had three gods—self, sex, and drugs. And none of them made him a better man." Here is a commentary on twentieth-century man. He has plenty of gods, but they are not making him a better person.

Man has tried a multitude of solutions, but he has the same problems. He has consulted many theories, but he has the same unanswered questions. In fact, now the questions have increased. God is reminding us that the solutions evade man outside of Him, and the answers are meaningless apart from Him.

So this first commandment does not come to threaten our freedom. Rather, it comes to insure that our freedom will get for us the best. God comes to invite us on an excursion to the better things. And along with His invitation to journey toward the best, He guarantees that life will not be any worse. And this is a guarantee that no other god can match.

This commandment does not ignore the decision-making that is involved when man takes the Lord as his God. Man must choose God, alone, and no other—"You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:3). God demands complete allegiance, for if He did not, He would cease to be the God that man needs. We need a God with total authority, not only who is Master of life, but who is Master of the hard moments and Master of the silent hours.

This commandment appears restrictive. But a closer

look reveals the opposite. It is restrictive in the sense that it allows but one God. But this is for our freedom and our good. For God knows that we are never free, basically, until we are committed to something. We call it freedom. It is more like an enslavement. So God restricts us to one God—the real God—so we might have a greater and more meaningful freedom in the end.

God knows that life is either a no/yes cycle, where I am saying no to the better and yes—if even unconsciously—to the worst; or, it is a yes/no cycle, where I am saying yes to the good and no to the other. For one cannot say yes or no to anything, be it good or bad, unless he has also said yes or no to something its opposite.

Bishop Gerald Kennedy has put it like this:

The world is a place of limits, and ethics can never be a simple matter of saying Yes. For every time a man says Yes to one thing, he has to say No to something else. These limits are really laws, if I may put it that way, and the man who does not like law is the man who does not like facts. But whether he likes them or not is of minor importance, for he has to deal with them and live according to their rules.¹⁰

God knows the power strange gods can have over us. They can hold our great potentials captive, forbidding us to become the human God designed. Strange gods blind man to his best and block him from his possibilities. This is why God commands us to choose one God.

When Wolsey was prime minister of England, he sacrificed everything for that high office. But as he grew old, he was cast aside for a younger man. In his disappointment and disillusionment, Shakespeare has him cry out: "Oh, Cromwell, Cromwell, had I but served my God with half the zeal I served the king, He would not in mine old age have left me naked to mine enemies."

Wolsey is the flip side of the coin referred to by the

Psalmist, "O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in thee!" (Ps. 84:12).

God comes to us through this commandment and invites our trust. He holds the authority which life needs. He knows it, even if we are slow to understand it. He wills to share with us His authority and His resources.

But we are busy all the days of our lives serving other things and obeying other gods, only to find in the end that what we gained has no profit, and what we followed led us nowhere. We search the soul of modern man and find him bankrupt.

So this commandment confronts us with authority, with freedom, with choices, with our future. And because it confronts us in this manner, the threat of it is gone. It now comes as a welcome invitation—an invitation to take God on our journey to new dimensions in life.

As a means of advertising a series of religious services, a Scottish newspaper editor used an unusual approach. He printed a notice in large letters on the front page of his paper, asking the readers to refer to the back page. There in still larger letters this single question appeared: "Is this where you are putting God?"

This is the question of the first commandment.

2

***You shall not make yourself a graven 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.***

—Exod. 20:4

Building Barriers

This second commandment concerns mental idolatry. Sounds strange, does it not? But God is here confronting modern man with idolatry. We thought idolatry went out with the old pagan world. But it is still very much among us.

This commandment is an admonition from God to man, asking that man not mold a concept of God, then force God into it. Because He may not fit. Then we would be on our way to trouble.

We are great image makers. We form an image of a man and clothe him with it—often for life. Then, whatever he may become, he always wears our image.

Take the image of the minister, for an example. Why does nearly every cartoon picture him with a black suit, black tie, white shirt, black shoes, and the more refined

characteristics? It is the image we have created of the minister. We have formed the image, and the minister must now, hopefully, conform.

But consider what the image-making does to the minister. It robs him of his freedom, of his individuality. He becomes a puppet, a subject of another's mind, a person to be charted by others. And I, for one, prize my freedom and appreciate my individuality too much to care about such imagery.

Now we do the same with God. We picture Him as a stern, paddle-carrying God or as a whimsical old father. We picture Him in a variety of ways. But every picture we have of God is an injustice to Him. Why? Because images and pictures are not the real things. In fact, they can steer us away from the real things, and too often they do. A picture of a man's wife is a poor substitute for a lonesome husband 1,000 miles from home.

Your idea of God does not make God that kind of God, however you picture Him. God is never enslaved by our concepts, by our opinions, or by our pictures and images. God must not be enslaved by mental images because He must always be free to be God. And to be the God that our lives need, He must be sometimes more, and sometimes less, than our image of Him allows.

If God were only an image, it would be an empty one at the most. For He would then be the god of man, cut down to size, pruned down to man's standards, shaped as man would want. And, while such a god would be convenient for life, it would not be very constructive. For that kind of god would never build in man's life what God knows is best for man. That kind of god could never challenge man's concepts of right and wrong. If such a god were man's self-made god, every threat to man's freedom would be reason to change the image of his god and mold him a little differently. And, again, the change would be the change with which he

could live comfortably. But it would not necessarily be a change for the better in his life.

So it is our image-making that is challenged by this second commandment. God wants us to see how dangerous it is for us to cast images of Him or anyone. He wants us to see that, most of all, it hinders a would-be wonderful relationship between God and man. Furthermore, it hinders our freedom. And freedom is something to be protected. It is important.

When I make an image of a man, I trap him. And I always trap him in what he was yesterday or in what he is today. This closes off from the man—in my image—what he may become tomorrow. And it is always the tomorrow that is of importance for man. He lives for tomorrow. That's where all his hope is invested.

Many politicians are turned aside by their fellow citizens because of some mistake they made as a youth or because of some blunder they made in the beginning days of their political career. The image of their mistake lingers, while their experience and a changing, growing life is ignored.

One time a boy was taken before a judge to be examined on a charge of dishonesty. A man was called to testify. He said: "I knew his father. He was a liar, and the boy will be a liar, too." Here was an image that had closed the door to possibility in a young lad's life. It is a reminder of how dangerous an image can be. It takes from man his freedom and makes him a pawn of the mental.

This is why this second commandment is so important. It seeks to insure a man's freedom. It seeks to destroy images that trap him. It seeks to keep the doors of possibility forever open, for both man and God.

God is telling us, in this commandment, to forget the images of the past—the past years, the past weeks, or even

the past hours. Tear up the old pictures. Shatter the old concepts. God wants to be God of our lives—here and now.

This second commandment wrecks mental idolatry. I know people who would not tolerate physical idolatry—objects. But they have mental images that are just as bad and often worse.

Take the man who casts the Black in the image of the illiterate, low-class, vulgar, lazy type. He applies his image to every Black he meets. It is unjust and unkind. It closes the door on the Black and robs him of his personhood.

Or consider the man who brands every welfare recipient as lazy. What does he do? He shuts the door on human predicament with cold indifference. He closes the door on human tragedy without a twinge of conscience. And all because his image prompted the actions instead of truth.

How terrible our image-making can be! Do you see how our images can close windows in our lives—windows that give to us a false feedback of the real things, because they are blurred?

“You shall not make yourself a graven image” is another way of saying we should have no old image, opinion, or concept of God that is closed and final. For God may choose to reveal himself to us in a manner that does not fit our concepts, our opinions, or our images. And we could well miss His impact upon life by looking for Him in our way. God chooses to come in His way, in His time, with His resources. And He only comes to the open heart, the ready mind, the waiting soul.

Our view of God should be more wholesome today than yesterday. Our concepts of Him should be more biblical today than last week. If they are not, we are getting bogged down with the images.

A daily walk with Him lifts our relationship out of the image world and into the realm of reality. Here He walks

with us through the hard moments and is Companion to us in the circumstances of living.

God wants to make every day of our lives a new possibility with Him. And we must be free from images that would hinder such possibility. Every today can be changed, with God, and every tomorrow can be bright with possibility, if we keep life open to God.

One writer has pictured for us the tragedy of closing life to God.

When a whole generation has a God-shaped blank at its center, something always comes along to fill it. It's no wonder, then, that this God-starved generation is so susceptible to marijuana and LSD and heroin and illegitimate sex and rioting and the lure of the militant, revolutionary causes that promise to fill that blank, gnawing emptiness at the core of so much contemporary living.¹¹

But it need not be like this. The image-making is ever a risk. When God is not given opportunity to establish a vital relationship with us, something takes His place. And whatever it is that takes the place of God, it is always second or third best.

A young girl hung a sign over her bed which said: "God is nowhere." She had formed an image. But a friend invited her to a church fellowship, and in the warmth of friendship and concern she opened her heart to God and committed her life to Christ. That night, with one stroke of her pen, she made this one change in the sign: "God is now/here."

The young girl kept her options open to God. She did not cast an image and let it set in her mind. And because she did not, she was open to possibility and open to the wonder of God's changing grace.

This is what this second commandment is calling for. It is God asking us to keep our options open. It is God asking us to keep the mind open to His invasion. For He is going

to come to every life. And the life that is open to what He can do, will journey into tomorrow with grace and wonder echoing in the heart.

The man who obeys this commandment will keep his eyes and mind and heart open to see how God will be dealing with life today, and tomorrow, and next week. That man who is alive spiritually does not settle for a mere image of God, for he knows that is not God. He settles for only a relationship.

Often the thing that defeats us is that we hold God to yesterday. "He didn't answer my prayers yesterday." "He didn't get that job for me." And all the things *we* thought He should have done but didn't, begin to etch an image. And then the doors begin to close. And the relationship wanes.

But God is concerned only about today—not yesterday or tomorrow. And so He comes to life today with the guidance life needs. He comes today with the strength life needs. He comes today with the resources life needs. And tomorrow, He says, will take care of itself. Because tomorrow God will give to life what it needs then.

But how many times have we gotten in God's way because we had mental blocks scattered throughout our minds, blocks that were images of God—some of them disappointing images; and they began to seal us off from God and from possibility.

It would be nice if there were some theological washing machine we could throw our minds into every once in a while and get the old images washed away. For they soil the mind and becloud faith.

Some hate the very thought of God and try to evade Him in every way they can. Olive Wyon, in her book on *Prayer*, tells of a man who wrote to Max Scheler these words: "Even if it could be proved by mathematics that God exists, I do not want Him to exist, because He would set limits to my greatness."¹²

Maybe that's our problem. Maybe we want the images more than we want God. No doubt at times we feel more comfortable with the images than we do with God. And so we settle for the images, convincing ourselves that we have God, when really all we have is a mental image of Him.

So this commandment calls us to check our images, lest we be deceived into thinking we have something when we have nothing. And the man who settles for an image, when he can have God, is a man with a warped sense of values who is headed for mental and spiritual bankruptcy.

It was H. G. Wells who said: "Until man has found God and has been found by God, he begins at no beginning and works to no end. Nothing in the universe or in man's life falls into place except with God."

So this commandment invites us to lay aside our images and to join God—in a vital relationship—for a journey into life.

This commandment cannot be duly considered without some serious thought being given to objects of worship—images of another kind from the thesis just stated.

Two thoughts creep through. One, anything that keeps us from worshiping God in a real way, is an image. It becomes an object of affection and undue sentiment. And if one is not careful, energies and affections that should be at the disposal of God are being bestowed on the objects or images.

Two, an object is impersonal. When an image becomes the worshiped, then life will come to its worship time and find its heavy burdens unlifted. It will come to worship with brokenness and leave unmended. It will come to worship with a bundle of needs, only to have them unmet. For the image has become the touchstone of a person's faith. And because an image is so impersonal, one will leave his moments of worship untouched, to return to life empty and

troubled. Such is the peril of the one who worships an image rather than God.

In his book *The Ten Commandments in Modern Perspective*, Owen Weatherly, speaking of the relationship of God to the Hebrew people, writes: "In the experience of this people, the evidence for the existence of God was too deep for doubt and too personal for proof."¹³

Only when our God becomes this real to us are we sure that images are not closing our hearts to God.

Only when God becomes personal to us and when we develop a deep, abiding relationship with Him will the image-making cease to be a problem. Then we can journey with God as Counselor and as Companion. And this is what the second commandment promises.

3

***You shall not take the name
of the Lord your God
in vain.***

—Exod. 20:7

Checkup on Name Calling

You probably think this commandment calls for a discourse on swearing and cursing. Well, that's involved in this third commandment, to be sure. But there's more. And it is this something more with which this chapter deals. We focus again on man's concept of God.

Jozsef Farkas reminds us that in Hebrew culture, names were important. And they still are. But the Hebrew parents would pour their faith and invest their hopes in a certain name. Thus, when a name was finally given a child, it was a token of his destiny. It was a summary of the hopes and dreams of his parents.¹⁴

It was not uncommon for Hebrew parents to change names. God changed some names. And usually a change of name meant that a man had been lifted out of his old

setting. A new name implied a new direction in life. The Hebrew people thus thought that a new name would bring new forces to bear upon a person's life.

So from Hebrew culture we learn that a name signified at least two things: possession and power. Thus to call one's name meant, in effect, calling upon his power or tapping his possessions.

This is true, because you cannot separate a *name* from *reality*. To speak a name is to involve a person. If I say, "John is a prude," I have not done damage to the name John. I have done damage to a person named John.

Now all of this helps us get a better interpretation of this third commandment. God wanted Israel to put His name upon their lives, not only as a blessing, but as *power* and as *possession*—as spiritual power and as spiritual possession.

God has declared, "I am the Lord your God." Now He adds: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." What does it all mean? It simply means that God wants to be absolute power in our lives, unchallenged by any other power. It means that God wants to be the total possession of our lives and wants our lives to be possessed by no other. And He wants it all for our good. This is the point we so often miss.

To take the name of God in vain, then, is to claim Him as God but to give allegiance to another power and to give place to other things.

We only correctly use the name of God when we both recognize His power and allow it to be channelled through our lives. We correctly use the name of God only when we both acknowledge His authority over all of our lives—His possession—and allow Him to sit at the controls of life.

What this third commandment is saying is: "Don't use God unworthily." "Don't use God improperly." There is in the name of God, and all that He really stands for, a fearful power. But it is a power to be used, not abused. So to

utter even His name in an improper way or to an inappropriate end is to trespass this commandment.

Some who vent their anger on the man who swears, violate this very commandment on occasion by their attitudes. Let us closely examine ways in which we are using the name of God incorrectly.

All who use God as a "get me off the hook" kind of God are using Him incorrectly. This does injustice to His power and to His possessions.

Such minds are using God for selfish ends. No one takes the name of God in vain more than the man who uses God—or tries to—for selfish ends. Such hearts are usurping God's power and authority and are trying to arrange it for their benefit.

The New Testament writer James has the answer for such vain attempts. He wrote: "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (4:3).

Men are often bankrupt of soul, not because God has forsaken them, but because they have tried to arrange the power and the possessions of God in their lives, in their way. But His power only flows effectively when He charts the flow, and His possessions become meaningful only when they are at the disposal of God.

A second way to use God in vain is through violence. For, too often, the violent acts are done in the name of God.

The racial injustices that have blemished our history have not a few times been done in the name of God and decency. But God has wanted nothing to do with such injustices. He does not loan His power to such acts of violence.

A violent attitude will destroy anything and anyone to accomplish its end. If life stands in the way, it will take life. If principles stand in the way, principles will be side-stepped. If morality is in the way, then it will be ignored.

It has its mind set on a purpose and ignores even the plan and purpose of God in quest for accomplishment.

In wars, we send our best men to the battle, often singing a Christian anthem, and with a smug feeling in our hearts that this is what God wants. So we go to battle in the name of God. We kill in the name of God. We enslave, impoverish, and banish in the name of God. But all of this is only a reminder of how vain man can be when he gets the power and possessions of God confused with himself.

There is another kind of violence that follows closely upon the violence just described. That is the violence that would commandeer the voice to God. That man is using God vainly, who says: "You are in my power, God. I know You. I'm holding Your promises in my hand. God, let *my* will be done. Now do what I'm asking You!"

Such an attitude challenges the authority of God. It lowers Him to an errand-boy status. And anything that makes God less than God, is a violation of this third commandment. It is a misuse of God's power and His possessions.

There is a third way man takes God's name in vain. That man does it who plays God. Such a man acts the aggressor in doing things and then taking credit for their getting done. The temptation is to eventually dethrone God. Then a person soon feels he can get along without God. Man has put another god on the throne and is relying on another power. He is using other possessions to create life. It is all in vain, for he is trying to do what only God can do.

Another way we use God's name in vain is when we try to bargain with God. We want our way, but He speaks to us of another way. Not often enough do we understand that God's way is the best. So we head out on our own, trying to strike a compromise with God.

We challenge His power and His authority when we

question His wisdom. And whatever it is that we try to replace God's will with, it is a claim by us that it is better than what God suggested. It is a direction away from the recognition of God's power and His possessions. And it is all in vain.

Another way we take God's name in vain is when we ask Him for what we can do ourselves. Because, in so doing, we are denying His power to work in us to accomplish good. God gives His power to us to create good. And where there is laziness, God's power has been mis-channeled and steered to dead ends. The man who prays, "God, help me to get out of bed and go to worship," is using God in vain. For man can get out of bed himself and get to worship.

This third commandment should not be concluded before we consider the aspects of swearing and cursing. This evil is too much a part of our culture. It is an indictment on our living and an indicator of how shallow and empty some lives are.

That man is taking God's name in vain who swears and who uses God's name in his cursing. It is vain because it lowers God to the ghetto of the perverted mind. For usually the curse word is used as a filler or, at best, as an adjective without meaning. Or, worse yet, it is used to emphasize something terrible or to react against some violent act or happening. So God is used here only to express the worst.

In all of these circumstances, man is using the highest to communicate the lowest. He is calling on God's power in an inappropriate way. He is dragging the sacred through the perverted mind that has no higher thought of God than to use Him as a vehicle for communication.

All of this is in vain, for it can only backfire in the life of the user. For, as his friends are offered up a diet of vulgar verbiage, it parades not a little of his ignorance and disrespect.

This third commandment is really asking us to examine our views of God. It searches our view of God to see if it is mature, to see if it is biblical and real. Too many have a bell-hop concept of God, where He becomes an errand boy for all our wants.

God is really asking us to bring our view of God back to His Word and back to His presence, and there to examine it. He asks us then to go forth and speak His name in accordance with His will and in keeping with the kind of God He really is.

Owen M. Weatherly spells out the transgression of this third commandment when he says:

We take the name of God in vain when we profess to live in subjection to Him as sovereign over our lives, then refuse to keep His commandments. We take God's name in vain when we call Him Father and fail to give Him the honor and obedience which a child owes to his parents. We take God's name in vain when we call Him our King, then forget or refuse to seek His Kingdom and His righteousness in the structuring and the operation of our social institutions. We take the name of God in vain when we say that we love Him, but refuse to yield our lives to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

Only where we use His power willingly and utilize His possessions wisely are we using God as He desires to be used. Where there is less than this, life is vain and is on the way to ruin.

As I finish this chapter from a hotel room in Cincinnati, chimes are announcing to this city that it is noon. I recall only a few words from the song that says, "Oh, how I love Him, Saviour and Friend!"

And it is a fitting summary to this third commandment. For where the love of God reigns supreme in the heart, the violation of this commandment is less a possibility. Where God is precious to life, so also are His possessions and His power.

4

***Remember the sabbath day,
to keep it holy.***

—Exod. 20:8

The Other Six Days

Let's not kid ourselves: this commandment is one of the most ignored of all. With the commercial intrusion and the secular climate, the Sabbath hardly stands a chance.

And this is where the problem arises—because we have filled every day with self, the Sabbath has no meaning. Because we have isolated God from our living, we cannot enjoy the six days of labor, nor can we enjoy the one day of rest.

Two problems arise immediately in this commandment. One, how to labor in six days and get the work done; and two, how to rest on one day. Both are problems for us.¹⁶

Now we have tried, and are trying, a solution. We are working seven days, trying to get the work done. But the only results are larger work piles, growing heart attacks, and earlier deaths. These are hardly to be considered solutions.

So the real problem of this commandment is not the reserving of a day of rest. That's a problem, to be sure. The bigger problem is that we forget God six days, and so the seventh, whatever we might fill it with, is meaningless.

Now, there are other dimensions to this commandment, which we need to consider. It is necessary to learn to work well in order to rest well. So here it is. This commandment is inviting us, in a rather indirect way, to learn the stewardship of honest and effective work.

The Bible has something to say about work. It speaks out against idleness, wasting of time, laziness, and the very things that make for restlessness in our lives.

Alfred Montapert has written:

Nature has everywhere written her protest against idleness; everything which ceases to struggle, which remains inactive, rapidly deteriorates. It is the struggle toward an ideal, the constant effort to get higher and further, which develops manhood and character.¹⁷

So if rest is to mean what it should for our physical and mental parts, we must learn the art of work. And this is not a popular theme in an age where work has fallen into disrepute.

The other side of the coin is that work can be a temptation. Man sees what work can gain for him in terms of wages and things. Thus the eventual problem of working all the time—earning to gain. But such an attitude leaves God out altogether. Then the gain without God is meaningless, and it corrupts life.

So we must evaluate work and the fruits of work from the vantage point of faith. We must remember that all things are of God. The strength to earn is God-given. What we earn is to be used wisely. And all of these attitudes are exercises of faith and trust.

Thus the faithful man—the man of faith—takes one day of rest. It is his symbol of trust and acknowledgement.

Abraham Lincoln said: "As we keep or break the

Sabbath, we nobly save or meanly lose the last best hope by which man rises."

Leslie Weatherhead put it like this: "Sunday is a little park, an oasis in the desert of this noisy, hectic, rushing weekday life."¹⁸

The man of faith knows that he is inadequate for the tasks if he ignores the source of his strength. If he fails to find a retreat, a time to rest and regroup his energies, and to contemplate God's goodness, he assumes his task with the very ingredients that will create products without purpose.

Rest is not only a physical necessity, attested to by men of science and medicine; it is a spiritual necessity. "Therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it." (Exod. 20:11). And this, we must assume, for good purpose. And it is. For on the Sabbath, when man turns from his work to rest and to turn to God in trust and confidence, in search of His presence, then the other six days take on significance. What transpires on those days has meaning only insofar as we relate it to God. The fruit of our labors is dependent upon what happens on the Sabbath. It is an easily forgotten formula in life.

What happens to the man who uses the seventh day wisely? He is touched with rest and with spiritual things. Augustine put it well when he said: "God is not greater if you reverence Him, but you are greater if you serve Him." This is something we often fail to add into the picture.

Someone has said that we can live like humans for only six days. Then we must replenish our supply of spiritual matter, lest life turn animalistic and things go to ruin in our hands. J. A. Holmes said, "A man submerged in business all week had better come up for air on Sunday."

Ever wonder why life sours? Why it drains of meaning? Why it falls apart? Part of the reason is that we have tried to stretch life over too long a span without relaxing it in the presence of God.

A group of American explorers went to Africa and hired natives to guide them in quest of big game. For six days they pushed their way through the jungle rough, often up at dawn and on the trail all day. On the seventh day the American men were up early and ready to pursue their game. But they noticed their guides were still lying quietly in their places. "Come on," shouted the Americans, "we are in a hurry." One of the guides replied quietly, "We no go today. We rest. Let souls catch up with bodies."¹⁹

Not a small part of our chaotic style of living has resulted from our bodies being overtaxed and our souls underfed. We need a time to rest—to pause and let our souls catch up with our bodies.

Industry has realized that man can work only so long with himself—with his burdens, with his thoughts, with his anxieties. Then he needs a relaxing time when he can unburden his heart and share his thoughts with others. Thus industrial chaplains are playing a large part on the American scene.

Robert Schuler, in his book *Move Ahead with Possibility Thinking*, assessed the situation quite adequately when he wrote:

The rising tide of emotional problems in our country has escalated with the simultaneous rise in a breakdown of the practice of setting one day aside for quietness, rest and the refreshment of the spirit.

We must remember that "the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Sunday is a gift, not a getaway. Sunday is an opportunity, not a law. The Sabbath is God's invitation to come apart from the toil and recreate the energies of life.

Now when man chooses to ignore the Sabbath, as so many do, it is not God who gets hurt. Man gets hurt. Someone has said that the Ten Commandments were given to

men in tablet form, and by following directions, men could save a lot of other tablets from being used. It is very true.

This fourth commandment confronts us with work and with rest. But it also confronts us with the things that life demands. It invites us to examine our wants and to see if seven days a week is not too high a price to pay for them.

This commandment is not a popular one in a day when most families have working fathers and mothers, and where moonlighting is a way of life. But it speaks a word of caution and calls for serious thought. With all of our gains, we have not really gotten ahead. With all of our things, we are not really happier. With all of our advantages, we are not really making progress. With all the things that make us better off, we are not necessarily better.

So maybe we should examine our wants and readjust our priorities. *Newsweek* reported one time that the suicide rate for physicians is almost twice that of the general population, and that the suicide rate among psychiatrists is double that of other doctors. However you choose to read or interpret these statistics, you have to conclude that the reaching of goals without God just does not satisfy.

The Sabbath day of rest is the answer to some of the problems that plague us. It offers relief when one's life is smothered in meaninglessness. This is possible because, in the first place, a meaningful Sabbath will take us to God—and He is the first step to any solution.

Keith Miller, in his book *Habitation of Dragons*, relates something from the pen of F. B. Speakman which is worth pondering. Someone has imagined God first fashioning man, and one of the host of heaven, watching, exclaiming in alarm, "You are giving this creature freedom? He will never be wise enough or strong enough to handle it. He will think himself a god. He will boast in his own self-sufficiency. How can you gamble that he will ever return to you?" And God replies: "I have left him unfinished

within. I have left in him deep needs that only I can satisfy, that out of his desire, his homesickness of soul, he will remember to turn to me."²⁰

Because man is unfinished apart from the spiritual, he needs the Sabbath to bring him into contact with his Creator. All of the things that life might accumulate or make or earn, cannot finish life as it needs to be finished. Only God can finish man completely.

So the Sabbath is God's invitation to man to come apart from the rush hours of life, to be touched with spiritual things, and to be refreshed for life's tasks and assignments.

Perhaps a final summons will caution us as we set ourselves to considering the Sabbath. It is a poor preparation for one's first Sunday in eternity to have misspent one's last Sabbath on earth.

5

***Honor your father and your mother,
that your days may be long
in the land
which the Lord your God gives you.***

—Exod. 20:12

The Generation Gap

This commandment is not God telling children where to get off. Sometimes it's used for that. And with the breakdown of the parent-child relationship, maybe it needs to be echoed more than it is. But there is something more here.

Two things are implied in this fifth commandment. One, adults are to honor their elders. We overlook this, but it's there. Two, children should obey their parents. Central in both of these is *obedience*. And the focus of this obedience is *truth*.

God is always concerned with obedience and truth. In fact, these Ten Commandments concern themselves with some part of obedience and truth at every turn.

The word "honor" needs our understanding. It does not mean to bestow medals, but to honor with a life. Too

many times we feel we have honored someone by giving them something. But for a parent, the highest honor is the upright and faithful life of a child.

But more than an earthly life is implied here. We honor parents because through them we have the privilege of life. Thus parents are channels of the divine image. So the life parents give is God's life.

This affects the relationship of a child to his parent. He relates not alone as a physical offspring. He relates, in a higher sense, as a gift of God to its giver. So for the child to dishonor a parent is to dishonor God. And too seldom do we think of this aspect of this commandment.

This interpretation of the fifth commandment, while not doing injustice to its intent, also puts a new interpretation on child-bearing, on parenthood, on childhood—on this whole segment of life.

This commandment, we must understand, is not inviting us to honor just for the sake of honor. It asks us to consider honoring our parents as a means of gratitude and recognition. And, as you and I know, where gratitude becomes a part of anything, it lifts it to a higher level.

This honor spoken of in this commandment is the means whereby we acknowledge God's claim upon all of life. It is our means of recognizing that God has given life, through His chosen instruments, and this does not pass from us lightly. Thus we see all of life belonging to God, and, therefore, sacred. We best affirm the sacredness and meaning of life when we honor and obey those who have given us life.

This interpretation of the commandment teaches us something about honor from the child's viewpoint. But there is something for parents in this commandment also. And it is something we too often miss when we read it.

Herein is a reminder that we are representatives of God—in childbearing and in child-rearing. And, as such, we

are responsible to God. We are under His authority. The lives of parents, then, should be such as to command honor, respect, and obedience from children.

The life of a parent should be one of respect, not only for the sake of the children, but, more especially, so God can lend it authority and power, making it even more meaningful to the children. God does not add His power and His authority to lives unworthy of such. He does not add His blessing and favor on lives tainted with disrespect. It is something we are slow to learn.

The tendency of most children is to respect their parents if their parents are worthy of it. The breakdown too often between parents and children begins with a parent's loss of values, priorities, and respectability.

We have experienced in the mid-twentieth century a breakdown in the home, mostly in the area of authority. This has been due in no small way to the authority to which parents have relinquished their lives. The authority of things has played no small part. The authority of social status has been ever present. But we have forgotten that the only valid authority in life is the authority of God. So, because we have largely ignored the authority of God and allowed other authorities to control our lives, we have run into trouble.

The logic of authority is simply this: Parents must first obey God and order their living after His will before they can have the authority they need to command obedience from their children.

Children have a keen sensitivity to the authorities of life. They soon figure out what it is that parents are most concerned about. The values of a home, decisions, priorities, attitudes, displays of love—all of these tell what authorities are in control.

If parents want respect from their children, then their values must be worth respecting, their decisions must be

worthy, their attitudes must be attitudes that bear respect. In other words, parents must provide something to honor, and they must be someone to honor. And this can only be worked out where God is a definite authority in life.

A youth sat in my study and told me he had tried to respect his parents but was utterly frustrated in the trying. When I asked him why, he related to me some of their hang-ups. They were opposed to open housing in their neighborhood, they were critical and "cruel"—as he put it—toward those of unfortunate circumstances, the welfare class. They were materialistic and questioned his involvement with community "share" projects. He described them as lacking tolerance and understanding.

The tragic truth was the youth's appraisal of his parents was true. He was telling me that his parents were not giving him lives to respect.

For too long we have drawn a picture of rebellious children and let it go at that. Not enough times have we been willing to admit that sometimes parents are not worthy of respect. This word to parents is not always a comforting message. But it is certainly one we need to hear.

I cannot believe that this commandment is inviting blind obedience. It is not telling a child to look up to rebellious, wicked, ungodly parents. This would contradict God's character. So honor on occasion must be set aside or viewed from another perspective.

Honor has another side that is seldom realized. We usually think of honor as that which bestows great things upon life. But honor is first and foremost a respect for truth. And sometimes honor, to work within such a framework, must do the hard and the crushing things in order to let truth finally prevail.

I stopped to call one day at a home and was greeted by a small girl—less than eight years of age. Tears had swollen her eyes, and they were still moist upon her cheeks.

Her mother lay in a drunken stupor on the couch. Four or five little ones ran at will through the disheveled living room.

One of the hardest things I have ever done as a pastor was to help that little girl load her mother into a car and transport her for help. But as I look back upon that moment, I see how the only honor that girl could have shown in that moment was to commit her mother to an institution for help. It is not the kind of honor we like to read about, but it is a kind of honor nonetheless.

There is a promise included in this commandment—the only commandment to include a promise. “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you” (Exod. 20:12).

May I approach this with some personal comments and let you choose for yourself if there is any truth in them. One, obedience naturally creates good health. It is when a person sets himself against the grain of God that he runs into trouble. So obedience to parents is not going to shorten life. It will in all probability lengthen it.

Second, I have a strong feeling that the phrase “long life” could well mean “full life.” Life lived in obedience is one lived in gratitude. Therefore, it is a full, meaningful, complete life. And while it is true that “long life” to most of us means long in terms of years, it could, in an even more significant way, mean long in terms of the joyful experiences, the things shared, the people helped.

I see no merit in long years as such. I know some who have lived long in terms of years but did very little creative, meaningful living in that period of time. It could better be termed an existence. But I know others, my brother-in-law among them, who have lived fewer years but have lived to the full those few years they had. The question that lingers: Who *really* lived?

My brother-in-law was just 40 when he passed from

this life. He was completing work on his Ph.D. and was entering psychiatry. His Christian philosophy and his love for people would have made him a help in our hurting world. But it is a story that will never be told, for death interrupted his encounter with life.

But as I look back upon Joe's life, I know he lived to the full those short 40 years. He approached life with such excitement and filled his few years with so much that I can honestly say that not many men twice his age in years would have experienced what he experienced, nor accomplished what he accomplished, in terms of personal involvement and creative adventure.

This brings us to the real truth of this commandment—it is really about our serving God. It has to do with our respect for truth and for obedience. It is really about our devotion to life and its opportunities, and especially our devotion to God. It has something to say about our respect for others, especially our parents.

There is in this fifth commandment an acknowledgment of the Divine Father—His claim upon every life and every part of life. When man learns obedience at home, he can accept it at the altar of God.

So for this commandment we can say, "For inasmuch as we do this to parents, we do it to God."

6

You shall not kill.

—Exod. 20:13

New Ways to Destroy a Man

We are acquainted with murder. Certainly no one should have to be convinced that it is wrong. However, when it is exercised in wholesale manner, as in our age, then we must stop to ask where our minds have taken us. The reality and results of murder are all around us.

Murder is among the worst of acts because it lays claim to that which belongs to another—and to God. And it turns the acts of a man into the actions of an animal.

In murder, a man is more beastlike than at any other time. He has laid the power of reason aside, and allows another power—a deadly power—to rule him. The deadly power not only rules him, it ruins him—and others, too.

But this commandment is not dealing with murder in the physical sense alone. It is also dealing with *attitudes*.

The first stages of murder are established in the area of attitudes. If anger is the attitude of the heart, it is the first step toward murder. Listen to the words of Christ: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment" (Matt. 5:21-22).

Anger sets a man up for a letdown. Anger forces a man to the lowest level of human behavior. Anger silences reason. Anger charges the emotions and heads them in dangerous directions. Anger lays the good on the line and reaps only evil in return. Anger reaps only the broken pieces of a faded dream, the wasted parts of a life.

When anger has blown itself through life, death is sought as a final solution. But the death that will solve the problem is not the death of another, but only the death of the angered—his death to Christ. In anger, death is the ultimate outcome. But it is not the death we so often suppose. It is the death of the angry one—his death to Christ and to life that heads him towards a solution.

A man's killing another solves nothing. Indeed, it creates quite a few problems, not the least of which is the forfeiting of life. For where a murderer is brought to justice, the state assumes control over his life and punishes his act with either death or imprisonment. Both are forfeitures of the privileges and the opportunities of life. This forfeiting of life, among other reasons, is what makes murder such a foolish route to travel.

The angered man needs to be reminded of what Dr. E. Stanley Jones has said, that while "we are free to choose, we are not free to choose the results of our choosing."

So the death that we need to consider here is not the death of another, but the death of a man to self. This is creative death, not destructive death. It makes him alive unto Christ.

This death to self does a number of things. First, of course, is the change it brings to life. The processes of conversion create newness and hope. These very things lift a man out of any state that might breed murder, and sets him on a better course.

But there is another advantage to a man's death to self. When a man becomes a new creature in Christ, he discovers a brother in his enemy. Then, instead of trying to take his life, man begins to respect and value that life. It is a change and a miracle that only the power of God can bring.

Yet a third factor lingers which should not be passed by. A man's death to self allows him to create the atmosphere of love in his world, to erode the hatreds and to defuse the angers. This becomes a deterrent to murder.

There are other interesting dimensions to this sixth commandment.

Every man's life is God's life. It matters, then, how I treat life and how I react to others. If I violate another's life, I have trespassed against God. We need reminding ever and again that anything that lessens our respect for human life, or God, has the seed of murder in it. While it might be small and uncultivated, nonetheless the potential is there. It only needs to be fanned with anger and nurtured with emotion to grow into a brutish and brutal act.

Another dimension of this commandment is the death you and I impose on ourselves—and, consequently, on others. What about the man who takes his car down the road at an excessive rate of speed and kills himself and probably another? What about the man who overeats and shortens his life span? Or the overdrugged person who limps through life on pills and pot? Yes, even a man can overwork and shorten his life. Stress and worry can subtract years from our existence. Body- and mind-destroying habits can bring decline and death. Excessive drinking and smoking have been proved hindrances to life. We are safe in saying that

anything that injures or places life in jeopardy is next door to murder.

These various life-styles are taken too casually by modern man. But life is involved in all of them. Paul reminds us in 1 Cor. 6:19-20, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

Popular singing star Johnny Cash relates how he dissipated his body and nearly ruined his life through the use of drugs. One day he was reminded of the fact that his body was the temple of the Holy Spirit and his talents were endowed by God. It put him to thinking. He awakened his inner resources and, with God's help, sought a way out of his drug dilemma. He walked the long road from dependency upon drugs to freedom.

Johnny Cash, since his deliverance from drugs, has had numerous occasions to meet with and counsel youth who are hooked on drugs and dope. His advice to those who ask how to kick the habit is: "Give God's temple back to Him. The alternative is death."²¹

There is still another dimension to this concept of murder. When we withhold our lives from God and His will, something dies inside of us. The divine image is snuffed out, temporarily at least. And we are inviting tragedy. Cut off spiritual resources in your life, and you are committing a kind of suicide.

This commandment also asks us to consider the various forms of murder. We are acquainted with the physical forms. But what about the form of mental murder? Sometimes this is the worst and most vicious kind. Character assassination is a terrible form of murder. To gossip and to slander, to spread suspicion and rumor, is to slay the life possibilities of another. It is as deadly and dreary as murder in the physical sense. For, while life still breathes and

functions, it breathes under a shroud of suspicion and tries to function with barriers that often prove insurmountable.

Randal Denny tells the story of a teenage boy who got into trouble and had to appear in court. The judge released the boy on probation and into the custody of his parents. The lad began going to Sunday school in the small town where he lived. But some parents of the other boys in the class did not like the probationary teen in the same class with their sons. So they complained to the teacher. They said, to the surprise of the teacher, "If this boy continues to be in your class, we will take our sons out." No amount of reasoning could change their minds.

The teacher, seeking to relieve the crisis, told the boy what happened. He never returned to Sunday school again.

Within 20 years that unwanted boy was the nation's "most wanted criminal." One day he was gunned down by police bullets. John Dillinger was his name.²²

Before Dillinger lay on the street, dead from gun blasts, he had been murdered in a different way years before. Someone—or several—had slammed the door of opportunity in his face. Is it fair to ask who really killed Dillinger?

The fact of depriving a person the opportunities and privileges of life is too often overlooked in relation to murder. It should engage our thoughts more.

There is a final dimension that this commandment exposes. What about the Christian supporting the things that create murder? Wars, injustices, power structures, crowded prisons, the rhetoric of politics, to name just a few. Too often we have passed over these areas without giving due regard for the lives that are involved. We feel a good thing justifies any way of obtaining it. But this commandment has something to say about that. It says, "You shall not kill." And that's pretty plain.

Abortion must be considered, too, when we survey the interpretations of murder. If an abortion is just a convenient

and easy way out of trouble and of responsibility, then it both kills life and cheapens life at the same time. Where an abortion is sought on medical or emotional grounds, then probably the means is a preserving of life rather than a perverting of life. Whatever the circumstances, the abortion is not to be taken lightly.

This commandment is asking us to take a look at life—a hard, personal look. It is asking us to consider its origin and its intent, its value and its sacredness. And the lesson that it would have us learn is that God has given life, and only God can take it. It is the one lesson, among others, that our world needs to learn if it is to survive.

If a person learns nothing from this sixth commandment, save a deep respect for life, then he has learned the one thing that will serve him well. He has learned the one thing he must know before the other commandments can fall into place.

7

You shall not commit adultery.

—Exod. 20:14

Mishandling God's Gift

Sex is a popular subject—in the press, in entertainment, and even in the pulpit. It is an important subject, too. And one, perhaps, that more Christians should be dealing with more realistically. For too long we have had only the soundings of men who use sex for gain. Too often we are silent, within the church, on subjects of concern to human life. We let the wrong minds fill the ear with trash when we know men need the truth.

This commandment is a guide to help man wisely use his humanness. Within the context of this commandment God implies the basic laws of human life—especially where marriage and extramarital sex are concerned. God is not unacquainted with the fundamental problems of being

human—the temptations, the struggles. This is why He gives us these commandments.

The first four of the Ten Commandments relate to God. But the final six are related to man—his life, his problems, his destiny. They all confront us with the reality of life. Man is truly human only when his relationship to God is right. Anything less than a right relationship with God invites subhuman traits.

This seventh commandment deals with the integrity of a person. It is not merely concerned with the sex act. It is more concerned by what goes before that act and by what follows. This is the part we so often forget in our discussion of sex.

God created man and woman, and gave to each a purpose or a functional role in life. Now the abuse of this purpose or of this function is a violation of the Giver, God. And here we should understand that God has ordained marriage and has established that the highest purpose of sexual relationship is found within the marriage circle.

I am not unaware that the new morality, situation ethics, and the creeping secular change would disagree with this. But the proponents of these modern ideas have not written the first—nor the last—chapter on meaningful sex, either. And just because they are saying something new is not to imply that they are saying something true. And I have a feeling that not a small segment of modern society is realizing this.

What, then, does the Bible and God teach us about sex? Sex is a gift from God. And, as any of His gifts, it is to be used wisely. Gifts have ways of becoming corrupt and spoiled in the hands of humans. And no gift seems victim of this possibility like the gift of sex.

We have seen the gift of sex become the god of Madison Avenue. We have seen the gift of sex become the goal of the new morality group. We have seen the gift of sex become the

stumbling block for numerous life relationships. And all because God's gift has been mishandled and has, in time, been corrupted. The peril of perverted minds is that they take great possibilities and potentials and turn them into problems.

Let us notice how sex has been corrupted. Outside the church it has been corrupted through *exploitation*. While the body is the temple of God, men have elected to use it for the benefit and profit of men. While the body is a vessel for divine intent, men have chosen to use it to pursue physical and selfish desires. No one needs to be told how this exploitation has exploded into one of the most lucrative pornographic businesses the world has ever known.

This exploitation has polluted nearly every publication on the secular market and has made inroads into every corner of the American scene.

The President's Commission on Pornography left a bad taste in many mouths because of its evasive and permissive attitudes. One editor, commenting on this, summarized:

A nation that goes into orbit over the one-in-a-million chance of cancer induced by cranberry spray or cyclamates was advised to ignore the ever growing stream of moral sewage spewed out across the printed page, the stage, and the screen by those whose obvious interest is nothing in the world more than a "fast buck."²³

Inside the church, or within the more traditional Christian influence, sex has been corrupted through *fear*. Sex has been wrapped in shame and cloaked with silence. It has been cheapened through suspicion. This fear, or an ignorance of God's gift, has done injustice to it.

There is no way to determine the number of marriages wrecked with mental—and sexual—chaos, simply because the facts of physical sexuality were not known. And they were not known because of this shield of silence that has rested over the church in the area of sex.

So both the world and the church have mishandled God's gift of sex. But consider this: The world does its mishandling with a sinful heart, while the church, supposedly, with redeemed hearts. Is it fair to ask which is committing the greater sin?

A *Look* reporter, J. Robert Moskin, wrote an article, "Morality U.S.A.," in which he reviewed the moral climate of America. His review dealt with the secular attitudes of morality and also the attitudes of the church. When, in summary, he explained the failure of both the world and the church, he said, "Because the church's responsibility is the greatest, her failure is the worst."²⁴

Sometimes I hear churchmen bragging about their high code of morality. Now I'm certainly for morality and goodness. But while we cast our judgment at the world for its exploitation of sex, let us remember that our fear and our ignorance of it can be as bad.

If you could sit in a doctor's office, a psychiatrist's chair, or a minister's study for a while, you would know what I mean. Or read "Dear Abby" or "Ann Landers" and get a picture of marriages haunted with ignorance over sex. It is cause for some serious thought. It is cause for some action within the church.

The very fact that some feared my including the seventh commandment in a series of sermons which I preached is cause for some concern within the conservative evangelical framework.

While we have developed a high degree of moral living within the Christian community, let us not ignore the fact that along with these there are not a few neurotics, a few pietistic snobs, and not a few wrecked marriages, not to name the distorted concepts and views of sex, yet to be unleashed upon children growing up in the church fellowship. Somewhere along the line, the church crowd got hung

up on its piety and forgot that more practical matters attend life.

There are some other thoughts that creep through in this commandment. First, the *person* is the real concern of this commandment. Putting the brakes on adultery is really putting the brakes on the use of a person in the wrong way. There is a hint of meaningful relationships here. For my relationship to a person is, in reality, a relationship to God. How I act toward a person is really a reflection of an attitude of life and an attitude toward God. That's why the right things morally are always the right things physically and emotionally. And this commandment confronts us with the person-to-person relationship with this in mind.

A second thought apparent in this commandment is the concept of love—real love. For this is the concern of God at every turn with His people. This commandment is not given to prohibit the love relationship, but to protect it—to protect it within the home and within the marriage; to protect it from the very things that would damage it and carry it to ruin; to protect it and let it grow as God knows it can, and wills that it should.

God wants us to know that anything less than real, genuine love upsets the levels of life. And we have plenty of evidence of this. Love outside the marriage relationship—cheap and cold—has carved its scars across the modern scene. Man tries to pick his way out of the webbing of his warped love relationships, only to find that he plows his way into more trouble.

Only real love, within a valid union, brings to life the happiness that is enduring and the affection that is meaningful.

E. Stanley Jones tells of a Hindu man who related a life of sin to him. The Hindu said: "I went up the hill after committing adultery with a woman—I went up trembling." Then Jones asked why he did not go up the hill singing.

Jones answered his own question by saying: "Sin and sadness are one and the same thing. The body is for the Lord and when you do the Lord's will you do the body's will, its deepest destiny."²⁵

Real, genuine love is the body's destiny and the Father's will. Anything less invites disaster and breeds discontent.

A young lady doctor in India, after a life of adultery, was converted. She called a friend and said: "I feel so clean."

Why so clean? A pure love had entered her life, taking away the guilt and filth of a lesser love. It is a truth that only a valid, genuine love can show to us. So this commandment reminds us that only a pure love brings to life deep and abiding meaning. Other attempts of the love relationship only land life on the ash heap of wasted effort and broken dreams.

A third thought showing through the context of this commandment is that God's gift and its attending responsibilities is the concern of this seventh law. It warns against yielding to the dictatorship of the body, for it speaks only of the physical. But man cannot live only on the physical. There are the mental, spiritual, and emotional sides to life that must be attended also. Thus God's gift of sex carries with it responsibility. Where life caters only to the physical, it is soon in trouble. There must be something more to life, and only a responsible life will see that something more is added and cared for.

This is why Christ pointed the woman taken in adultery to the Kingdom. He was saying to her, Find the Kingdom and you find meaning. Find the Kingdom, and you find something more than the physical. You find the spiritual, the mental, the emotional—all the ingredients to make for complete and meaningful life.

This commandment reminds us that when only the physical is attended, other vital parts of life are left unattended, to deteriorate and to diminish in importance.

It is then that life sets itself on a collision course with trouble.

Hugh Martin has made a very fitting observation:

The humanist has derived his standards of value from a faith which he has discarded. A slip coach goes on running after it has become detached from the train, and cut flowers remain beautiful. You will find men who have repudiated Christian belief who are shining examples of Christian conduct. But if you want a continuous supply of flowers you must look to the garden, and carriages without engines don't go far. If the Christian God is denied, Christian moral standards will not long survive.²⁶

Here is another way of saying that the physical side of life cannot survive for long without the spiritual part. We are slow to learn it in the twentieth century.

The soaring divorce rate plaguing our nation is a sad commentary on neglected responsibilities—not only in sex, but a number of other areas as well. It is proof that we have failed to mix life with the proper spiritual, mental, and physical ingredients. We have vacated our responsibilities in too many of these areas. And the facts are beginning to tell on us.

Sex is one of the more important areas of life, but we must arrange our priorities, our values, and our responsibilities so as to give it proper place and purpose in our lives. To neglect the responsibility of sex, or to ignore the consequences involved in the mishandling of sex, is to discount the authority of God over life. And when we discount God's authority and fail to add Him into the sum, we are in trouble. Where this happens, our relationship with others—and, eventually, with God—will be affected.

This commandment, then, is a look at sex through the eyes of God. He sees the total structure of life—the choices and the consequences of those choices. Wisely, then, has He uttered this commandment. And wise is the man or the

woman who can accept and account for sex as a gift from God.

This seventh commandment is a caution flag for life. It asks us to consider God and life and others before we write some chapters of our existence. It asks us to treasure the gifts of God and to handle them wisely, so there will be no regrets.

We need to view all the Commandments, and especially this one, as God's attempt to deal with potential regrets before they become reality.

8

You shall not steal.

—Exod. 20:15

A New Look at Thievery

You would naturally expect me to give it to the thieves in this chapter. But before you relax and get set to enjoy such a scolding, let me shock you—this chapter, while it speaks to the thief, speaks to all of us.

This commandment is related to the previous two—that of killing, or murder, and that of adultery. For both have to do with stealing. When a man kills, he steals a man's life. When a man commits adultery, he steals another's integrity.

The essence of stealing is that a man gets something at the expense of another. So, more than just the outright thief is encountered in this commandment.

Here God is asking us to consider His claim in all things—His claim on others and His claim on us. And until we have a clear perspective of God's claim on all of life

and on all things, we will never learn from this commandment its intended message.

Two things seem to stand out here. This commandment asks us to handle things with a *respect* and with a *regard*—with a respect for why and by whom they were made; with a regard for whom they belong to. When battle lines are drawn in life—and, especially, between God and man—it is usually in one of these two areas.

Modern man has a tragic history in the areas of respect for others and regard for another's possessions. This is seen in the injustices that still exist and in the philosophy that pervades much of our culture. Anything is up for grabs if I can get it without being caught.

This commandment is God's way of trying to get across to us the fact that the only things that mean anything to us are self-created or God-given. When we put our claim upon anything outside this realm, we are trespassing on the property of another and inviting trouble. How slow we are to learn this.

Things which are not self-created—by the help of God—or God-given are not a part of our lives. And when we try to make them so at the expense of others, it is we who suffer the greater hurt.

Now, we need to understand that our desire for more is not wrong. The very fact that ambition and drive are wholesome characteristics tell us this. For too long we have played down wealth in the church and in the life of the Christian as something to be viewed with suspicion. Who can count the lost opportunities to use would-be wealth for the glory of God because such views were voiced? And, of course, we have now come full cycle, until we are in danger of putting the money-boys on the throne and crediting them with spiritual superiority because of their means.

The desire for things is not wrong. It is only when that desire is fulfilled at the expense of another that wrong

becomes the fact. It is only when that desire trespasses the property of another and trespasses the principles laid down by a Holy God that desire is evil.

This commandment is a constant reminder that what we gain we are to gain by honorable and legitimate means. What we gain we are to earn and to create, and that not at the expense of another.

With this background to this commandment, let us notice some of the deeper dimensions involved.

The stealing of time is not to be overlooked. Someone has some time on his hands, so he wastes the time of another. In an age when time is at a premium in our lives, especially those creatively involved, the intrusion of another could well be a barrier to purpose and a hindrance to the doing of better and more meaningful things. We are far too careless in letting life be drained away with meaningless conversations and monotonous activity.

The stealing of another's honor and integrity is not to be passed by in this commandment either. The great pastime of too many—gossiping—is the stealing of another's honor and the eroding of his character. How is it to be explained, except to say that something of another person has been stolen and trespassed with unkind and untrue words.

We must realize that stealing has to do with more than putting the hand to something and taking it. It has also to do with words and motive and actions. The wider and deeper dimensions of this commandment need to filter through our thoughts.

This commandment also deals with the things we withhold from others that might bring hope and healing to their lives. Is this not a robbery of sorts? Are we not withholding something that would make life better? And, in the Christian community, what right do we have to block the channels of good things to another's life?

A scientist or a medical man discovers a drug which his

laboratory tests determine to be a cure for a dreaded disease. But because he feels he will not be sufficiently paid for it, he keeps it to himself. He allows only a controlled use—the controlled use determined by money, not by mercy. Is such a man not robbing people of the possibility of healing? Has he not exerted a claim to a part of life that belongs to God? Will his withholding of his valued drug make him a better man? Materially, perhaps, but not morally.

These are questions we need to ask concerning many of life's issues. For more than the breaking of a law is at stake. Often the creating of a better person is at stake, and this we too often fail to figure in the outcome. The Ten Commandments are not merely laws concerning the forbidden areas of life. They are also invitations to meaningful life.

Another dimension of this commandment is illustrated by the man who gives himself only partially to his task but implies that it is his best effort. He is withholding something. He is giving less than what he is being credited for on his paycheck. It takes no stretch of the imagination to conclude that he is stealing from his employer. But a greater damage is also taking place. That man is settling in his own life for something less than the best. He is becoming content with second best. Wherever a man does this, he comes out on the short end when the final ledgers are tallied.

That man is always better off, mentally if not materially, who gives his best at whatever task he sets himself to doing. Again we see the logic of these Commandments at work—that where a man sets himself against the grain of God, he does not break a commandment; he only breaks himself.

A man's paycheck may show continued increases and his job may hint of security, but these are not the final thermometers of life. The untold story is the story written on the conscience and on the guilt ledgers of life.

We could never pass through a study of the Ten Com-

mandments without giving some thought to a man's stewardship of the things God has loaned to him. And this commandment confronts us with the question "Will man rob God?" (Mal. 3:8).

Not intentionally, perhaps, will man rob God. But that's just it. These Commandments hold us responsible for the things we should not do, but they also hold us responsible for the things we should do. This is often the forgotten side.

The stewardship of things, and of life, is among the most important responsibilities of life. For when a man is out of balance in the area of responsibility, it affects all of life and all of his relationships. So God invites us to share our talents, our treasures, our time, with Him and with others. The biblical logic seems to read that whoever has something with which he might do good, or something which he might share with another, but shares it not, is breaking this commandment and robbing God and life and others of things that they could use.

Let us remember that "God is the owner of all creation and whatever part of it man may hold at any time, he holds not as an absolute owner but as responsible steward."²⁷

Another area to be considered is the area of witnessing. Any person to whom God has granted so many good things—forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, health, and a host of other things—but is too much of a coward to bear witness of these things to others, is transgressing this commandment in a different sort of way. He is ungrateful. And ungratefulness is thievery. It not only takes something, it takes it without acknowledgment of the giver.

All of the good things of life are given to us, not alone that we might be better, but that we might be better for someone else. So these good things pass through our hands and through our lives that we might, in turn, pass them to

others. We are made better that we might help make others better.

The attitude of an ungrateful heart spoils the gifts. Something that is planned for good becomes short-circuited and lost. This happens when a man keeps good things to himself.

This commandment also asks us the important question, "Who owns us?" The logical answer is God. Too often we have stolen ourselves from God's claim and are using our lives for our own ends. We keep to ourselves the gifts and things that God has given to us. We forget that God has deposited these treasures with us for His glory. We forget that life is endowed by God for God. And when we use for ourselves what belongs to God, it is a trespassing of this commandment. 1 Cor. 10:31 reminds us, "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

One final thought remains for our consideration, namely, the robbery of ourselves. We do it every day. We do it to our peril. When a man declines God's gift of eternal life, he is robbing himself of life's best Friend, of life's greatest purpose, and of life's grandest relationship.

We see this self-robbery, further, in the way a man will rob his conscience. A conductor does not ask for our fare, so we do not pay. And when we do this, we rob our conscience of the pleasure and satisfaction of having done the right. And no amount of rationalizing can get around the fact that there is genuine satisfaction in doing the right. Something is built into the fiber of man's emotional life that responds to right but reacts to wrong. And we need to consider it more in the daily relationships and opportunities of life.

Whatever else might be said about this commandment, at the least it is God encountering us with His claim on life and on things. Where we have a proper view of God's claim, we will in all probability meet life's choices and opportunities with integrity and with purpose.

While this eighth commandment has a word for the thief and the robber who takes things, it speaks a word about thievery on broader fronts. It cautions us in the important areas of life. And from the caution comes challenge to meet life with faithful stewardship and meaningful involvement.

9

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

—Exod. 20:16

The Color of the Mind

This commandment has to do with the tongue, the heart, and the mind. Someone has observed: "If you wish to know what kind of water is in a cistern, work the pump handle. If you wish to know what is in a man's heart, get his tongue to working." It is true, isn't it?

In some respects, this commandment is the most important of the entire 10. For consider how much transgression begins, first, with the tongue—or breeds in the heart and is acted upon in the mind. In a real sense, life goes wrong right here—when a man bears false witness, either to others or, more importantly, to himself.

This commandment deals with the "witness" aspect of life. Now you can only bear witness to something seen or something experienced. You "pass along" something heard.

You are not a "witness" in the transaction of hearing. You are only a channel over which it is passed on to others.

It is at this point, especially, that this commandment affects us. It asks us to be "bearers of the truth," not "bearers of rumor."

Our concern here, then, is truth. As we handle truth in our conversations, is it set in the proper context, or is it cast in the color of the false?

The greatest transgression of this ninth commandment is gossip. We return to it again in this chapter. All the Commandments are concerned with a man's honor, his integrity, and his character. So any study of the Commandments must return ever and again to gossip and what it does to life.

It is a strange bit of logic, but true, that we can be very concerned about our own honor, integrity, and character, but be quite careless about the honor or the character of another. We are up in arms at what others may say about us, but are not cautious about what we say about others. We need to be reminded that to lie is to lower another—for a while. But really, it is to eventually lower oneself. For if we must cut another down to our size, then it is proof that we are not as big as they are.

Wisdom literature tells us: "There are six things which the Lord hates, seven which are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and a man who sows discord among brothers" (Prov. 6:16-19).

Randal Denny, in his book *Tables of Stone for Modern Living*, tells of the woman who talked too much, spreading scandal and gossip everywhere. Feeling a deep sense of guilt, she went to her priest to confess her weakness and her deeds. The priest prescribed a strange penance. He gave the lady a ripe thistle whose seeds were ready to fly at the

slightest touch. The priest ordered the woman to go throughout the streets of the village, scattering the seeds as she went.

The lady followed the instructions of the priest and returned. Then the priest said to her: "Go back now and gather up all the scattered seeds."

She was shocked. "That's impossible," she explained.

Then the priest clearly explained how it would be even more difficult to gather up and destroy all the evil reports, scandal, and gossip she had circulated.²⁸

This commandment not only deals with gossip, but nudges us on to a consideration of reputation. To realize that a reputation can hinge on words is frightening. And not a few times have we seen men ruined with words. The scandal sheets of the news media have often destroyed a man's career with piercing words.

We have here also a reminder that God is interested in a man's reputation. God will always be on the side of the right and truth. Thus, when a man is defending a good reputation, God is at his side. And we need to remember that God will set himself against those who set out to ruin someone's good reputation.

When a man takes a good reputation into his hands and drains from it its goodness in the eyes of others, he is doing damage to his own character. For there is a bit of logic at work in the relationships of life that says another is not hurt so much as he who inflicts the wound.

The instruction of the Apostle Paul was: "Let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another" (Eph. 4:25).

This commandment concerns gossip and reputation, but it also concerns God—as all the Commandments do. We cannot stand in a right relationship with God unless we stand in a right relationship with our fellowmen.

Our handling of truth among our brothers is often less

than what it is between ourselves and God. But God puts no difference between the two. We are slow to learn this. False witnessing not only mars the man-to-man relationship, but it does damage to the God-to-man and man-to-God relationship. It is all bound together in the final tally.

This commandment teaches us also that rights are never merely human rights. Rights, in the final essence, are all of God. So we do not have the right to take facts and people into our own hands and handle them at will. For always when we do, we are taking on God. We are usurping something that is His.

To be a bearer of the false is to defend the false, which is a tall order. It means, at the very outset, that one must set himself against the truth. And there are few winners in such a battle.

The admonition of Ps. 31:18 rings with meaning: "Let the lying lips be dumb, which speak insolently against the righteous in pride and contempt."

This commandment forces us to examine the consequences of lying or the bearing of false witness. Lying about another is really a violation against *what* and *who* the person is. Since God is available to preserve the integrity of an individual, we must consider the individual before we utter false witness against him. For what he is and who he is, is of importance to God, even if it matters not to us.

So when anyone pulls another down by false witnessing, he is really challenging the resources of God. For to utter anything but the truth is to question what the person is—as made by God—and to disparage who he is—as the creation of God. It is risky, then, to be involved in lying.

We cannot leave a study of this ninth commandment without noting a caution against the personal loss of integrity. We have hinted at it in several ways, but it needs amplification.

When God says, "Thou shalt not kill," He is not alone

thinking of the one who would be killed; but, more especially, He is considering what it does to the man who murders. And it is so with all the Commandments.

So when a person is less than truthful, something is effected in his heart. Conscience is smitten, peace is disturbed. The relationship with God is estranged. The satisfaction of having done right is deprived.

In short, something dies in the person every time he ignores the truth. His sensitivity to truth dies. His appreciation for truth is silenced. His values are rearranged.

After a while, in the life that constantly bears witness to the false, the standard of life is no longer the true but the false. The value of anything or anyone is not the real but the false. And all of us know the consequences of such living. Where such is the case, we are witness again to the truth that a man never really breaks one of these Commandments—he only breaks himself.

This commandment is really inviting us to be truth-bearers, knowing that only when we are truth-bearers are we in any position to receive God's help. For God is interested in righteousness and truth. And when a man sets himself to go in the opposite direction, he must travel alone and face his own risks. Such a man is inviting disaster. In a real sense he has turned away from the only One who can help. He has turned from God.

There lingers this thought from the Psalms as we conclude this chapter. "Him who slanders his neighbor secretly I will destroy. The man of haughty looks and arrogant heart, I will not endure" (Ps. 101:5).

The message of this ninth commandment is especially significant in an age when truth is not characteristic of the contemporary scene. A sincere obedience to its caution could take our society a long way on the journey to peace—peace among men, and peace with God.

10

***You shall not covet your neighbor's house;
you shall not covet your neighbor's wife,
or his manservant, or his maidservant, or
his ox, or his ass, or anything that is
your neighbor's.***

—Exod. 20:17

What Are You Thinking?

This final commandment is not the least of the 10. It probes at our lives like none of the others. It takes us from the outward life of acts and words, crimes and punishments, into the secret place where all good and all evil begin—the heart.

This commandment forces us inward to examine, to explore, to expose. It is a reminder that, really, if life goes either right or wrong, it begins in the heart. If there is not the right quality of life there, it will not be found anywhere. We are reminded in 1 Sam. 16:7 that “the Lord looks on the heart.”

In his heart man must be right, or all of life will be wrong. Whatever man might have going for him by way of personal appearance, wealth, or talent, if he is not right in

his heart, it will count against him. Too slow are we to realize that it matters not how well a man is educated, endowed, or engaged if his inner life is not in harmony with rightness.

This commandment was given, as they all were, for the cleaning up of the inner life. This we might call the first attempt at "slum clearance." For how often do we realize life to be nothing but a breeding ground for the worst—a slum area of wasted values, corrupted visions, and neglected virtues. The real ghettos are the ghettos of the mind and of the heart.

But God is ever approaching man with a better way and with a bigger life. He who has created life and envisioned great things for it, knows the potential of life when it is set right—within. And so our God continues to speak to us in the midst of our slummish living, inviting us to something better.

We should not need another reminder that a man's inner thoughts determine his destiny. But it is a message that has gone unheeded across the centuries. Man is still trying to beat the game. He is still trying to be one up on God.

Here in this commandment God forces the question of our thought life upon us. And this for a good reason. It is not what another thinks of us, as we too often suppose. It is what I think and what I do that determines destiny.

Flip Wilson has renewed the old phrase, used as an excuse when life goes wrong, "The devil made me to it." Really what happens is that our thought patterns catch up with us, evil snowballs, and the eventual consequences evolve.

So what we wish to call a conspiracy of evil forces is, in reality, the revealing of the way we think and the way we live—within.

It can best be summarized by saying, "Religion is in

essence the keeping of good company in one's inner life." It is a simple rule of logic. Entertain spiritual or wholesome thoughts, and life moves toward the better. Entertain evil thoughts, and life moves toward the worst. But it is all a process from within. And we need to learn it.

There is a very important side issue to our decision-making that we seldom calculate. While we are decision-making individuals, we are not consequence-controlling individuals. We are free to choose, but we are not free to choose the consequences of our choosing. So once our thoughts have set the stage for our decisions, and they are put into action, we are no more free to change them or to control the consequences. At that stage we forfeit control.

With this background let us examine the word "covet." It means an inappropriate desire or longing for something with such intensity that principles fall in the path of getting it. It means seeking to obtain something at all costs.

This latter thought can be illustrated by a marriage "triangle," where one partner wants another—a third party—regardless of what it is going to cost the existing marriage. The children, the home, the friends, and character are ignored. The individual has willed a person and sets out at all costs to get him or her, as the case may be.

This action not only trespasses the tenth commandment, it also violates others—the seventh, to name one.

But this illustrates how the mental thoughts and decisions have far-reaching effects upon life. The word translated "covet" means "To indulge in thoughts which tend to lead to the actions named in these Ten Commandments."²⁹

To hate long enough is to spring the trap for murder. To lust long enough is to set the stage for adultery. To covet long enough is to clear the way for actions unbecoming to life.

To covet means to fix one's heart on something. And when the heart is fixed, it blocks out all reasoning and plans in only one direction with only one object in mind.

So to covet means to dwell on something so long that it finally becomes a must. Then the forces and resources of life are harnessed for the pursuing of the coveted. And while this is taking place, the rest of life deteriorates and decays.

Notice that the evil of coveting is not so much what one covets. It is more important the attitudes and desires that coveting creates. They are not good for life. They create an unsafe scale of values for living. Esau is an example of this. Esau lost his tomorrows, not because he coveted something to eat—that was a natural desire—but because it became the only thing that mattered to him. He was willing to sacrifice everything for it. The wrong thing, then, mattered too much for Esau.

And this is the real danger of coveting. Soon the wrong things matter in life. And soon everything is sacrificed to obtain them. The coveting can trigger crimes in a life.

In 1 Kings 21 we have the tragic consequences of coveting spelled out in bold acts. Ahab covets the vineyard of Naboth but cannot bargain for it. But Jezebel devises a scheme to obtain it. To carry the scheme out involves a lie and, eventually, a death. And, most tragic of all, when the vineyard is obtained—at the slaying of principle after principle—Ahab's end is too near to enjoy it, as if he could anyway.

Here is a sobering lesson in the swift-moving consequences of covetousness. One thing leads to another, until the true meaning of everything is eroded. But it is all a panoramic view of the predicaments our thoughts can get us into.

There is another facet to the attitudes, desires, and actions which coveting creates. Jozsef Farkas reminds us that before the scheme of a coveting mind can be carried to

its full, the "neighbor"—spoken of in this commandment—must be destroyed.³⁰

To destroy Christ, Caiphas presented Him as a liar before the people. To carry out his desires, he had to attack the character of Christ.

What paths a coveting mind will lead a man over! A path of wrecked morals; a journey of wasted hopes; a road of warped principles—all of these are here in the coveting mind. But, tragedy of all tragedies, these paths lead a man nowhere—to oblivion.

The coveting thoughts of a man's mind only lead him to a dead end where, having gained his desires, he has forfeited the Father's presence. James reminds us of this when he writes: "Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death" (Jas. 1:15).

This aspect of death and banishment from the Father's presence should not be taken lightly, for it is an ever present possibility. William H. Creevey, writing on such a death says:

Wherever one man's prosperity depends on the exclusion of another, wherever one's need is not the opportunity of another, there death is working. Whenever one derives his strength and sense of worth from deriding and demeaning others, wherever one's desire to be right destroys a relationship of acceptance and love, there death prevails. Wherever ideas or profits or institutions come before people, there death does its work.³¹

Death is at work in the coveting heart, because it is ruling out reason, and love, and concern, and justice—all the things that life needs to be healthy and to survive. Where these are cut off in the heart, then only those lesser qualities attend life—and they soon bring death.

There is another factor of death involved in this commandment. It is the truth of the old saying, "Give a man

enough rope and he will hang himself." The coveting mind tends to overreach in its desires. Thus man eventually destroys himself.

This is one of the reasons for Hitler's downfall. Had Hitler been content with a little, he might still be living and ruling. But his covetous mind could not be satisfied. His insatiable greed brought destruction.

Along with the self-destruction so closely related to a greedy heart is the perversion that comes to life. Such a perversion does something to a person's ability to care properly for whatever they might obtain in their coveting.

Robert Farrar Capon, in his book *Bed and Board*, puts it like this:

Covetousness, greed, the lust for ownership, is only—is precisely—the perversion of care. It is the love not of things or people, but of *having*. It makes a good, not of goods, but of *gain*; and, in the long run, it makes a man quite unable to care for the real goods at all.³²

From this perversion we get a glimpse, again, of the consequences of coveting. With the healthful attitudes cut off in life, the perverting influences are free to blow the mind. But when they have done their thing in the life of an individual—in his mind and in his heart—he is less a man and less adequate to cope with responsibility. His ability to care has been affected, and his assignment as a steward is erratic. Such are the consequences of the life that transgresses this tenth commandment. The commandment remains, only life is broken.

A discussion of covetousness comes to grips with a basic dilemma in life—how to recognize what are its real wants and its real needs. There is a difference. It cautions us to put the brakes on the wants, lest we ramble through life leaving wrecked principles and warped values in their wake.

It is a point to ponder, that when a person gives atten-

tion to the *needs* of others and less to his own *wants*, he is on the way to wholesome living. The ingredients of fulfillment in life are sharing, caring, helping, loving, and the like. These are the stepping-stones to meaningful living. And meaningful living is what the commandments are all about.

These steps cannot be found in a greedy or covetous mind. J. Eugene White in his book, *The Drama of the Cross*, expresses this well when he says:

Greed is a powerful motive. It is questionable if anything else causes so many ill deeds. Greed puts the weapon into the hand of the murderer. Greed can turn the ordinary business of buying and selling into a cess-pool of lies in order to gain a few dollars more. The bodies of women and the lives of men have been sold for gold.³³

This tenth commandment asks men to consider his thoughts and his wants—and to control them. Wise is that man who heeds this admonition. Wise is that man who disciplines life in order to reach for the worthwhile, the good, the spiritual things. That man is making life meaningful and worthwhile.

Conclusion

The Ten Commandments are God's attempt to get man to look at life with perspective and from the long-range view. When man looks at life with any degree of seriousness, he finds that it is too big to be handled with human hands and with finite intellect. He needs a God to guide him.

Here lies man's real problem. Too many have no God helping them through life. Norman Vincent Peale put it well when he said: "The solution of America's problems is not in terms of big government, but it is in big men over whom nobody stands in control but God."

A multitude of causes and philosophies invite themselves in to fill the void in men's hearts. And we have seen how futile most of them are. They complicate the problem because they neither begin with God nor suggest Him as a traveler at any point.

What life needs, first, is a deep commitment to God. Without this beginning, no journey is safe. The multitude of people who have crash-landed on drugs, sex, and a myriad of other sins, give evidence of this. Only that journey is safe which begins with God and with commitment. Only through Jesus does one find meaning and reality.

In his book *Put Your Arms Around the City*, James W.

Angell quotes William Golding's words concerning a Mr. Mountjoy.

There is no health in you, Mr. Mountjoy. You do not believe in anything enough to suffer for it or be glad. There is no point at which something has knocked on your door and taken possession of you. You possess yourself. Intellectual ideas, even the idea of loyalty to your country sits on you loosely. You wait in a dusty waiting room on no particular line for no particular train.³⁴

This pictures the contemporary confusion engulfing man. The "God-shaped place" in man (to use H. G. Wells's phrase)—created for purpose and spiritual mission—has been left unattended. No deep, meaningful belief stirs the embers of the soul. Man has not allowed God to possess him. So he possesses himself. And all it gets him is a long wait in a dusty waiting room on no particular line for no particular train. Purpose passes him by and great causes are never realized.

It is at this point that the Commandments speak to us. They speak of the possibilities of life, when God is given priority and when God's laws are respected and obeyed.

A prophet of long ago, Zechariah, asked why men transgress the laws of God: "Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper?" (2 Chron. 24:20). Here is linked together the transgression of the law and the withholding of prosperity. It is a fact we need to consider deeply.

These Commandments confront man with life's important things. They speak to man's problems and point a way to a solution of them. They utter caution and beg attention. These Commandments invite us to become believers—believers in God so the great and important and eternal things can possess our souls.

God, the Giver of the Commandments, knows that if life does not find such a belief and such a commitment, it

will fall prey to selfish possession and will eventually sit life out on the sidelines, going nowhere, following nothing.

W. T. Purkiser reminds us:

To run contrary to the law of God—expressed both in His word in the Bible and in our own natures—is to end up in personal chaos as the slave to circumstances, to habit, or subject to the most bitter bondage of all, bondage to the desires of the moment.³⁴

These Ten Commandments, then, need to unfold before us anew, for they attempt to relate us to vital living. They invite us to set our sights on the eternal and not to settle for the temporary.

The Commandments invite us to take seriously the moral climate of our souls. They invite us to lift the levels of living and to act like sons of God. While it is a tall order, it is possible through Calvary.

There is always a reason for a law, especially when God makes it. These Ten Commandments are right not only because God gave them; God gave them because He knew life needed them to find the right way.

Life needs a spiritual base and a spiritual influence. The Ten Commandments give to man reasonable spiritual boundaries in which to operate. And by being faithful to them, he can journey in companionship with God and let life unfold in wider, more wonderful dimensions. As Jacques Ellul has observed, "It is when we obey the Commandments of Jesus that we discover the reality of God as Father, and that we have the unapproachable freedom of saying, 'our Father.'"³⁵

These Commandments are right for life, now and eternally. These Commandments help man develop companionship with God and create wonderful possibilities in relationship to others. These Commandments introduce man to the highest and lift him to the best. He ignores them to his own peril.

A bishop once said that some people would put the Ten Commandments up at a local option election to see if the majority approved. And the bishop was probably right. The fact is, some people seem to operate on the assumption that they have been repealed. But these Commandments are still very much a part of God's eternal truth. Where man desires a valid and genuine relationship with God, he must deal with God's design for life. This design is found, in large part, in the Ten Commandments.

T. Cecil Myers says: "These laws are still valid, and when interpreted in the light of the mind of Christ and obeyed, they provide one channel through which man finds happiness, creativity, and a sense of worth."³⁶

Man is looking for a sense of worth. He is searching for happiness. He is trying to find something—or Someone—to fill the empty void in his life. He will find the handles to meaningful living in the Ten Commandments.

Just at a time when some thought the Commandments a buried issue and outdated, they rise with new meaning and invite us to look again at the wisdom and guidance they contain.

Wise is that person who makes a place for God and His laws in his life—amidst all the clamor of contemporary change. Such a life will experience new and exciting dimensions. And into that life God will channel rich treasures of blessing and possibility.

Reference Notes

INTRODUCTION:

1. R. Earl Allen, *Bible Paradoxes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1963), p. 46.
2. T. Cecil Myers, *Thunder on the Mountain* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 13.
3. Randal Earl Denny, *Tables of Stone for Modern Living* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1970), p. 15.
4. Charles Kingsley, quoted by James Stewart, *The Life of Christ* (New York: Abingdon Press, n.d.), p. 83.

CHAPTER 1:

5. James W. Angell, *Put Your Arms Around the City* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1970), p. 162.
6. Owen M. Weatherly, *The Ten Commandments in Modern Perspective* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1961), p. 16.
7. Dale Evans Rogers, *The Woman at the Well* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1970), p. 35.
8. Jozsef Farkas, *Bench Marks*, trans. by John Bodo (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1969), p. 31.
9. Weatherly, *Ten Commandments*, p. 16.
10. Bishop Gerald Kennedy, quoted by W. T. Purkiser, "The Moral Law We Try to Ignore," *Herald of Holiness*, Jan. 13, 1971, p. 10.

CHAPTER 2:

11. C. William Fisher, "Your God Is Too Soft," *Herald of Holiness*, Jan. 20, 1971, pp. 6-7.

12. Olive Wyon, *Prayer* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 19.

13. Weatherly, *Ten Commandments*, p. 12.

CHAPTER 3:

14. Farkas, *Bench Marks*, p. 43.

15. Weatherly, *Ten Commandments*, p. 48.

CHAPTER 4:

16. Farkas, *Bench Marks*, p. 52.

17. *Sunshine Magazine*, Sept., 1970, p. 32.

18. Leslie Weatherhead, *Time for God* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1967), p. 51.

19. Myers, *Thunder on the Mountain*, p. 65.

20. F. B. Speakman, *The Salty Tang*, quoted by Keith Miller in *Habitation of Dragons* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1970), pp. 115-16.

CHAPTER 6:

21. Johnny Cash, "I'm a Free Man Now," *Guideposts*, Nov., 1970, p. 6.

22. Denny, *Tables of Stone*, pp. 68-69.

CHAPTER 7:

23. W. T. Purkiser, "Read the Fine Print," *Herald of Holiness*, Feb. 10, 1971, p. 10.

24. Myers, *Thunder on the Mountain*, p. 16.

25. E. Stanley Jones, *The Reconstruction of the Church: On What Pattern?* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1970), p. 184.

26. Hugh Martin, *Christian Clippings*, Feb., 1971, pp. 18-19.

CHAPTER 8:

27. Weatherly, *Ten Commandments*, p. 119.

CHAPTER 9:

28. Denny, *Tables of Stone*, p. 101.

CHAPTER 10:

29. J. Edgar Park, *The Interpreter's Bible*, George Arthur Buttrick, ed. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), 1:989.

30. Farkas, *Bench Marks*, pp. 107-8.

31. William H. Creevey, "Resurrection—Here and Now," *Pulpit Digest*, March, 1971, p. 30.

32. Robert Farrar Capon, *Bed and Board* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 114.

33. J. Eugene White, *The Drama of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1968), p. 17.

CONCLUSION:

34. W. T. Purkiser, "Freedom Without Anarchy," *Herald of Holiness*, Sept. 1, 1971, p. 9.

35. Jacques Ellul, *Prayer and Modern Man*, trans. by L. Edward Hopkin (New York: The Seabury Press, Inc. 1970), p. 121.

36. Myers, *Thunder on the Mountain*, p. 53.



FROM THE FOREWORD...

“Here is a fascinating, in-depth presentation of the eternal truths found in the Ten Commandments. It is pertinent because it deals with the fundamental problem of modern man, namely, his ‘authority hang-up.’ . . .

“If you are looking for a repetition of the old cliches, or even a catchy way of recasting old thoughts, these essays are not for you. While they deal with the enduring truths in these ‘Ten Words,’ they are incisive in their application to contemporary living. . . .”

—John A. Knight
President, Bethany Nazarene College

C. Neil Strait, a graduate of Olivet Nazarene College and Nazarene Theological Seminary, is pastor of First Church of the Nazarene in Lansing, Mich. He is the author of several books and has written standing features in magazines, including “Strait Lines” in *Quote Digest* and “Pastor to Pastor” in *Pulpit Digest*.

