

"The Breadth of the Commandments"
(Exodus 20:1-20)

Introduction: All of us here tonight are, to one degree or another, interested in how we might serve and honor the Lord. Well, our Lord Jesus has told us what we must do in order to show Him the sincerity of our commitment, namely, "IF YOU LOVE ME, KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS." And doubtless, many of us here tonight believe that we have kept the commandments. However, when we have convinced ourselves that we have done all our duty to God, I believe that the commandments have not yet impacted us as they should. If they had, we would all clearly see that we do not keep the commandments of God even for one moment. The commandments are much broader in their application than we realize. They command certain things and forbid others. They include not only the actions, but the thoughts and motives behind them. They are also the categories into which all sins of one kind or another are forbidden, or all duties of any kind are included. The Ten Commandments cover all of our moral duty both to God and man in summary form.

In the Gospel account of the Rich Young Ruler, Jesus gives to us an illustration of this breadth of the commandment. Matthew writes, "AND BEHOLD, ONE CAME TO HIM AND SAID, 'TEACHER, WHAT GOOD THING SHALL I DO THAT I MAY OBTAIN ETERNAL LIFE?' AND HE SAID TO HIM, 'WHY ARE YOU ASKING ME ABOUT WHAT IS GOOD? THERE IS ONLY ONE WHO IS GOOD; BUT IF YOU WISH TO ENTER INTO LIFE, KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS.' HE SAID TO HIM, 'WHICH ONES?' AND JESUS SAID, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER; AND YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' THE YOUNG MAN SAID TO HIM, 'ALL THESE THINGS I HAVE KEPT; WHAT AM I STILL LACKING?' JESUS SAID TO HIM, 'IF YOU WISH TO BE COMPLETE, GO AND SELL YOUR POSSESSIONS AND GIVE TO THE POOR, AND YOU SHALL HAVE TREASURE IN HEAVEN; AND COME, FOLLOW ME.' BUT WHEN THE YOUNG MAN HEARD THIS STATEMENT, HE WENT AWAY GRIEVED; FOR HE WAS ONE WHO OWNED MUCH PROPERTY" (Matthew 19:16-22). This man thought that he had kept the commandments even from his earliest days to the present. And yet when Jesus applied them to his life, in ways which he had not understood that they had applied, he realized his abysmal failure, was very grieved of heart, and departed. But where in the commandments does it say that you have to sell all of your possessions and give them to the poor in order to be saved? What the man had done in fact, was to break both the summary of the commandments to God and to man. He had not loved his neighbor as himself, or else he would have been as concerned for the poor as he was for his own well-being. He also did not love God as he should for he could not part with his riches, showing that they were really an idol in his heart which he loved more than God. The commandments are much more encompassing than we might first have imagined. As the psalmist wrote, "THY COMMANDMENT IS EXCEEDINGLY BROAD" (Ps. 119:96).

The *Westminster Larger Catechism* gives to us the principles by which we may understand the "exceeding breadth" of the Commandments. And it would be wise for us to learn these principles and to understand them before we systematically examine the commandments themselves to see what our duty to God is. And so what I want you to see in this evening's message is that,

The 10 Commandments of God are so encompassing that they include our whole moral duty to God in all areas of life.

First I want you to see that the entire moral Law of God is summarized in the Ten Commandments; and secondly, what the Scriptures teach us as to how we are to interpret them.

I. Our Whole Moral Duty to God in All of Our Relationships Is Given to Us in the Ten Commandments.

A. You May Never Have Understood How the Ten Commandments Could Encompass Every Moral Duty Which God Requires of Us.

1. But first of all realize that it does not give to us everything that is required of us, but every moral duty that is required of us.

- a. For instance, there were certain things which were required of the Israelites in the areas of sacrifice, diet, and personal hygiene that cannot be understood from the commandments.
- b. That is because those commandments were not moral duties.
- c. You might ask how anything which God requires could not be a moral law. Isn't it true that if it is commanded, then it is our moral duty to obey? Yes, we are bound to obey it because God has commanded it, and we are bound to obey Him. But what I am saying is that a law itself may not be moral in principle.
- d. There are many things which the Lord commanded which are not moral in nature. This is why we make the distinction between the moral, civil and ceremonial laws. Of the civil law, some related only to particular situations which His people faced at a given time, and these have passed away, such as the placing of a border on the edge of the roof so that no one would fall off of it. In that culture, much time was spent on the roof for that was a place to work or to entertain. If you did not have a border on your roof, someone may easily fall off and injure themselves, a situation which we do not have to face today.
- e. The law of not eating shell fish, or animals that did not split the hoof and chew the cud, as well as other laws of this kind were not of a moral nature in themselves. The reason for doing them or not doing them was not found in the act itself. No one would be able to determine what could be eaten and what not except by the direction of God.
- f. The same is true of the laws pertaining to ceremonial purity. They were not of a moral nature, but were meant to teach the Israelites certain lessons about the holiness of God.
- g. We are not saying with regard to the Ten Commandments that all of our duty in every area may be encompassed in them, but that our whole moral duty to God is.

2. The Ten Commandments give us the moral principles in general form which may be applied to any situation and circumstance.

- a. We often say that the Scripture contains everything pertaining to life and godliness, and so it does.
- b. But we do not mean by this that the Bible is a textbook on mathematics, or biology, or chemistry, or astronomy. It is not a comprehensive textbook on everything in the world.
- c. On the other hand we do not mean by this that what the Bible does contain in those areas is wrong, for the Scriptures are infallible in everything they teach.

- d. What we do mean to say is that the Bible does tell us how to do everything that we do to the glory of God.
- e. Some things by their nature are obviously wrong to do at any time, such as working in any place which promotes any form or appearance of evil. These things will be made more clear as we see the breadth of the commandments.
- f. But the Bible tells us all we need to know as to how we might glorify the Lord in any lawful vocation or employment. It does not tell us how to lay bricks, but it does tell us how to be a brick-layer to the glory of God. It does not tell us how to fix *our* car, but it does tell us how, while we are fixing it, to do so for God's glory.
- g. The Bible tells us all we need to know and glorify God in all areas of life, and the Ten Commandments tell us how to glorify Him in the area of morality.

B. And So We Believe that the Ten Commandments Summarize for Us Our Whole Moral Duty Both to God and Man. And We Also Believe for that Reason that They Are Forever Binding Upon All Men. This Is So for the Following Reasons:

1. It is the Ten Commandments which were originally incorporated into man as a part of his being made in the image of God. Paul says in Romans 2:14-15 that the Gentiles who do not have the law show the work of the law written on their hearts. It was written there by God for it reflects His moral nature.
2. When God appeared to Israel on Mount Sinai for the purpose of making His covenant with them, He spoke in their hearing only these Ten Commandments, which were the stipulations, or requirements of His covenant.
3. It was these Ten Commandments which were written in stone and given to Moses to give to the people (Ex. 31:18), and it was these same commandments which God wrote the second time on two more stone tablets after the first were destroyed in the rebellion of the golden calf. When Moses was recounting that event, he wrote, "AT THAT TIME THE LORD SAID TO ME, 'CUT FOR YOURSELF TWO TABLETS OF STONE LIKE THE FORMER ONES, AND COME UP TO ME ON THE MOUNTAIN, AND MAKE AN ARU OF WOOD FOR YOURSELF. AND I WILL WRITE ON THE TABLETS THE WORDS THAT WERE ON THE FORMER TABLETS WHICH YOU SHATTERED, AND YOU SHALL PUT THEM IN THE ARK.' SO I MADE AN ARU OF ACACIA WOOD AND CUT OUT TWO TABLETS OF STONE LIKE THE FORMER ONES, AND WENT UP ON THE MOUNTAIN WITH THE TWO TABLETS IN MY HAND. AND HE WROTE ON THE TABLETS, LIKE THE FORMER WRITING, THE TEN COMMANDMENTS WHICH THE LORD HAD SPOKEN TO YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN FROM THE MIDST OF THE FIRE ON THE DAY OF THE ASSEMBLY; AND THE LORD GAVE THEM TO ME. THEN I TURNED AND CAME DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN, AND PUT THE TABLETS IN THE ARK WHICH I HAD MADE; AND THERE THEY ARE, AS THE LORD COMMANDED ME" (Deu. 10:1-5).
4. We see from this that it was important that these Ten Commandments were given to the people above any others, for when the people committed idolatry, Moses smashed the tablets to signify that they had broken God's covenant. But when the covenant was renewed, the same commandments were restored to them. These were the stipulations of the covenant which the Lord made with them. Their blessedness or their cursing depended upon whether or not they kept those commandments.

5. Furthermore, it was these commandments alone which were placed within the ark of God under the mercy seat. This showed both their comprehensiveness and their uniqueness.
 - a. The commandments in the ark represented their duty to the Lord, and the blood was applied to the seat to atone for their breaking of those commandments.
 - b. Furthermore, it showed their uniqueness and indestructibility in that they alone were included in the ark, whereas those ceremonial and civil laws were not. Once Christ fulfilled the ceremonial law by the offering up of Himself, and the nation state of Israel dissolved, the Ten Commandments were yet to remain in force, not as a covenant whereby they might be saved, but as a rule of life in which they were shown how to please God.
 - c. As a matter of fact, one of the blessings of the New Covenant is that these Laws would be written on the hearts of believers. The Lord says, "I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS" (Heb. 8:10).
6. They are also shown to be comprehensive in the fact that they may be reduced to love both to God and man.
 - a. Remember a lawyer asked Jesus what the greatest commandment in the law was. And Jesus replied, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' THIS IS THE GREAT AND FOREMOST COMMANDMENT. THE SECOND IS LIKE IT, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' ON THESE TWO COMMANDMENTS DEPEND THE WHOLE LAW AND PROPHETS" (Matt. 22:37-40).
 - b. The whole law depends on love as its fulfillment, but not on any kind of love. Rather a love which is defined by the Ten Commandments, the first four telling us how we are to love God, and the last six telling us how we are to love men.
 - c. Just as the apostle Paul said, "OWE NOTHING TO ANYONE EXCEPT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER; FOR HE WHO LOVES HIS NEIGHBOR HAS FULFILLED THE LAW. FOR THIS, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,' AND IF THERE IS ANY OTHER COMMANDMENT, IT IS SUMMED UP IN THIS SAYING, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' LOVE DOES NO WRONG TO A NEIGHBOR; LOVE THEREFORE IS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW" (Romans 13:8-10).
 - d. This shows us the first thing about the breadth of the moral law. It encompasses every moral duty which is required of us. The commandments show us how to love God and man, therefore love is that which fulfills it.
 - e. And if you love God and your neighbor in the way which the commandments prescribe, then you have fulfilled the Law.
 - f. How many of you think this way about your duty to God. Do you ever think of yourselves as under the obligation to love God with all of your heart, and your neighbors as yourself?
 - g. Sometimes we have the tendency to look at each of the commandments in isolation from the others, and we try to do our best to keep them, overlooking the fact that what they are really calling us to is devotion to God from the heart and a true care and concern about the well-being of others.
 - h. When was the last time you expressed your love to God in your private devotional time? Have you told Him lately that

you love Him? Not just that you are thankful for what He has done for you, but that you really love Him for what He is, and for who He is? Do you take delight in meditating on the greatness of God and on His unfathomable attributes? When was the last time you picked up a book on the attributes of God and read it? J.I. Packer's book, *Knowing God*, would be an excellent way to begin your study of the nature of God and it would really help you to see the majesty of His being.

- i. But you should also spent time meditating on His moral attributes. It is really these which make Him the beautiful and glorious Being that He is. Can you imagine what a hateful and horrifying person God would be if He possessed all of His attributes of infinite power and presence, and yet was infinitely evil? A greater monster could not be imagined. But that is not the kind of God we serve. He is holy, He is righteous, He is infinitely pure. And because He is, He is also the most glorious and lovely Being in all the universe. A more beautiful Being would be impossible to imagine.
- j. If the first intent of the Law is that you love God in this way, then first of all you must spend time meditating on Him and expressing this love to Him vocally.
- k. But have you also shown Him that you love Him by keeping His commandments? Do you study the Scriptures to find out what it is that He requires of you? And when you find your duty do you express your love to Him by doing what He says? The Lord looks at your heart to see whether or not your works are really motivated by love to Him or not. But if He watches your life and you do not do all the things which He commands you, then He does not need to look at your heart. As a matter of fact, no one does, for it is evident to all that you do not love Him is you do not do what He says. "IF YOU LOVE ME," Jesus said, "YOU WILL KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS" (John 14:15).
- l. And when was the last time that you did a deed of kindness to your neighbors to show them the love of Christ and to show God that you love Him? We might have each other over for dinner, and that is a good thing to do. We may even return the love which our brethren here give to us. But Jesus says if you do something good to someone expecting that they will do something good for you, what good is that? Or if you love those who love you, what do you do more than others? Even the Gentiles do the same. Rather the Lord calls us to do good to those who cannot repay us. And to love those who hate us. That will issue in the true reward which the Lord will give to you at the resurrection of the righteous (Matt. 5:46-48; Luke 14:12-14).
- m. As you think on these things, you can begin to see how exceedingly broad the commandment is. It deals with your heart, as well as your actions.
- n. Actually, no one living in and of themselves can keep the law of love perfectly, or fulfill its righteousness. And herein is the importance of the new birth.
- o. Paul wrote, "FOR WHAT THE LAW COULD NOT DO, WEAK AS IT WAS THROUGH THE FLESH, GOD DID: SENDING HIS OWN SON IN THE LIKENESS OF SINFUL FLESH AND AS AN OFFERING FOR SIN, HE CONDEMNED SIN IN THE FLESH, IN ORDER THAT THE REQUIREMENT OF

- THE LAW MIGHT BE FULFILLED IN US, WHO DO NOT WALK ACCORDING TO THE FLESH, BUT ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT" (Rom. 8:3-4).
- p. Those who are outside of Christ can only walk in the flesh. Jesus said, "THAT WHICH IS BORN OF THE FLESH IS FLESH" (John 3:6a). The will of man can only bring forth that which is by nature of the flesh. And the Scripture tells us, "THE FLESH PROFITS NOTHING" (6:63b).
- q. But Jesus continued, "THAT WHICH IS BORN OF THE SPIRIT IS SPIRIT" (3:6b), and "IT IS THE SPIRIT WHO GIVES LIFE" (6:63a). When you are born of the Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ, then you will walk according to the Spirit. And to walk according to the Spirit is to walk in the commandments of God, "IN ORDER THAT THE REQUIREMENT OF THE LAW MIGHT BE FULFILLED IN US, WHO DO NOT WALK ACCORDING TO THE FLESH, BUT ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT" (Rom. 8:4).
- r. And so you must first of all be born of the Spirit before you may walk according to God's commandments, before you may have the faith which works by love (Gal. 5:6), which love is the fulfillment of the Law.
- s. And so if you find in your life that you are unable to walk according to the commandments of God, if you find that you really do not have a love for God which exceeds your love for anything else, a love which receives God for who He is and which finds in Him the greatest delight to your soul, if you do not love your neighbor as yourself, although imperfectly, then you need to come to Jesus in faith and repentance to embrace Him in love.
- t. But, if that love is present, both to God and man, then you may have the assurance of grace in your heart. However, I am sure that all of you will confess that you have not shown the Lord the love that you should through your thanksgivings and service, nor have you loved your neighbor as you ought. You need first of all to ask for the Lord's forgiveness of your sins. He is always willing to forgive you if you truly repent. And secondly you need to renew your obedience to Him. What is it that keeps you from doing more than you are? Isn't it your sinful desires which you give into rather than giving yourself over to those holy inclinations in your soul? You need to renew your obedience to God; stop yielding your members to unrighteousness, and start yielding your members as instruments unto Christ. You need simply to do what the Lord commands you to do whether you are inclined toward it at that time or not. Obedience is not only doing His will when you feel like it, but when you don't feel like it as well.
- u. And so first we see that the whole moral duty of man is summarized for us in the Ten Commandments, which can also be further summarized as love. May God grant to us to see just how all-encompassing this love really is. Next week, we will begin looking at the some biblical principles which will show us how we are to further understand the breadth of God's commandments. Amen.