

"The Breadth of the Commandments, Part 2"
(Exodus 20:1-20)

Introduction: Last week we began to look at some of the principles which the Scriptures give us to help us to understand how the commandments of God apply to our lives today. First, we saw that our whole duty, both to God and our neighbors, has been summarized by God in the Ten Commandments. This means that everything that you need to know to glorify God in everything that you do is given to you in the commandments. You might think that this is impossible. There seem to be many areas which the commandments don't touch on. But remember, what I have been saying is that the commandments are much broader in their application than just what appears on the surface of them. The rich young ruler thought that he had kept the commandments, but he had missed their whole message. He thought that he had kept them all of his life. But when Jesus applied the spirit of the law to his heart, he found that he had fallen infinitely short. He did not love his neighbor as himself -- for he was not willing to part with his possessions and give them to his neighbor --, nor did he love God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength -- for he loved his riches more than God and would rather hold on to them than to give them up as the Lord had called him to. The psalmist wrote, "THY COMMANDMENT IS EXCEEDINGLY BROAD" (Ps. 119:96), because it includes our whole duty to God and to man, a duty which can be summarized in one word, "love."

But it is not enough for us to know that we must "love" God and our neighbor, we must also know how it is that we are to love them. Left to ourselves, we would probably define love in the way that suits us, rather than God. Our minds, being affected by sin, will always be apt to make all of our duties to suit our own comfort. This is why it is necessary for us to look at how the Scripture applies these commandments, to show us how we are to love God and man. And as we do so this evening, we will again see that,

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

Tonight, we will look at two of the ways that the Scriptures tell us to understand the commandments and to apply them. I will first give you the principle or rule, next I will show you where it is taught in the Scripture, then I will give to you some examples of it, and finally I will show you how it applies to us.

II. The Scripture, Through Example, Gives to Us Several Principles by Which We Might Understand How The Ten Commandments Are to Be Applied.

A. The First of These Principles, or Rules, for Understanding the Scriptures Is that the Law of God Is Absolutely Perfect and Binds Everyone to Perfect Obedience, While It Also Forbids the Least Degree of Sin.

- 1. Now I believe this to be fully true, and if you can understand this then you will be able to see why I believe it is necessary for us to let the Law search out the innermost recesses of our heart, and to not content ourselves with merely a superficial conformity to the holy requirements of God.*

2. First of all the Psalmist in Psalm 19:7 tells us, "THE LAW OF THE LORD IS PERFECT, RESTORING THE SOUL."

- a. There are no flaws in God's holy commandments, but they are absolutely perfect and they require of us moral perfection.*
- b. That is why Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:48, "THEREFORE YOU*

ARE TO BE PERFECT, AS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS PERFECT." The commandments of God require nothing less than absolute perfection in our obedience.

- c. This is also why no one, by their own works, will ever approach the righteousness of God. If God requires perfect obedience, an obedience which requires a flawless performance, with all of the heart, mind, soul and strength engaged fully in His service, then no one since the Fall has ever been able to do it.
3. We see an example of this required perfection in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:21-22.
 - a. Jesus said, "YOU HAVE HEARD THAT THE ANCIENTS WERE TOLD, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' AND 'WHOEVER COMMITS MURDER SHALL BE LIABLE TO THE COURT.' BUT I SAY TO YOU THAT EVERYONE WHO IS ANGRY WITH HIS BROTHER SHALL BE GUILTY BEFORE THE COURT; AND WHOEVER SHALL SAY TO HIS BROTHER, 'RACA,' SHALL BE GUILTY BEFORE THE SUPREME COURT; AND WHOEVER SHALL SAY, 'YOU FOOL,' SHALL BE GUILTY ENOUGH TO GO INTO THE FIERY HELL."
 - b. You can see that what is required in the sixth commandment is not only that we do not unrighteously take another's life -- I say unrighteously because there are certain circumstances in which we may righteously take another's life -- but Jesus also tells us that this commandment may be broken by the things which lead up to and contribute to murder. There are degrees by which this commandment may be broken.
 - c. Therefore, the sixth commandment is actually forbidding more than just murder.
 - (i) First it says that you may not be angry. That is one degree of sin.
 - (ii) Second, you may not get angry enough to speak out a harsh word, such as "ῥακά," which means "empty headed fool," which was a term of strong abuse. That is a more serious degree of sin.
 - (iii) Third, you may not become even more angry and call your brother "ἄωρε," which means "you worthless fool!" Or if Jesus was using the Hebrew word which would sound the same when pronounced in Greek, it means "apostate" (Nixon New 823). This would be an even greater infraction of the Law.
 - (iv) But of course, if you actually became angry enough to take the life of another individual, that would be the worst sin against this commandment, and your life may be justly required by the courts.
 - (v) In each of these cases, the sixth commandment was broken, but obviously in different degrees of severity which warranted different degrees of punishment.
 - (vi) Is it just as bad to hate someone in your heart as it is to kill them? No. But it is still to sin and to break the commandment of God.
 - (vii) We must never forget that there are degrees of sin. Each of these actions would be considered by God as sin on our part, and each is punishable by God. However, it would be worse to murder someone than simply to be angry with them, for

in so doing you deprive a man of life and deprive his family of their means of support. And it was for the actual taking of life that the death penalty was enacted, not merely for anger. God said to Noah, "AND SURELY I WILL REQUIRE YOUR LIFEBLOOD; FROM EVERY BEAST I WILL REQUIRE IT. AND FROM EVERY MAN, FROM EVERY MAN'S BROTHER I WILL REQUIRE THE LIFE OF MAN. WHOEVER SHEDS MAN'S BLOOD, BY MAN HIS BLOOD SHALL BE SHED, FOR IN THE IMAGE OF GOD HE MADE MAN" (Gen. 9:5-6).

(viii) But even though it is worse to kill, it is still a sin to be angry and to speak out against our brethren.

4. And so we must first of all understand that we may not allow ourselves any indulgence in any sin, even in the least degree. The Lord requires perfection from you.
 - a. Just because you don't commit the outward act does not mean that you have kept the Law.
 - b. The Law requires absolutely perfect obedience in every area.
 - c. But you and I are incapable of giving to God perfect obedience, and that is why the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ shines so brightly against the dark background of our sin. For His righteousness is perfect and satisfies fully the strictest demands of God's Law.
 - d. This is why you need Him so much, for apart from Him and His righteousness you will be judged on your own works which fall infinitely short of God's standard.
 - e. And you may only have His righteousness if you turn from all of your own works for your acceptance with God, and turn to Jesus in faith, trusting in Him and His righteousness to save you. And if you do by His grace, then Jesus opens His arms wide to receive you and to cleanse you and to give you a perfect acceptance with the Father.
 - f. And this is why you who have fled to Christ should love Him so much, for apart from Him salvation would be infinitely beyond your reach for all eternity. The grace of God in your heart brings with it a love to Christ, and that is why you come to Him and want to obey Him. But you should love Him all the more for what He has freed you from -- the curse of the Law and everlasting damnation -- and what He has saved you to -- everlasting life and eternal bliss in His presence.
 - g. But the fact that God has predestined you to become conformed to the image of His Son, and to grow in holiness, tells us that we cannot neglect our own personal growth in godliness.
 - (i) The Law of God is perfect and it requires perfection.
 - (ii) Though we are freed from its curse, yet we are not freed from it as a standard for life.
 - (iii) Christ's imputed righteousness does give you entrance into heaven by faith, but it does not absolve you from your responsibility to be holy. Peter writes, "AS OBEDIENT CHILDREN, DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THE FORMER LUSTS WHICH WERE YOURS IN YOUR IGNORANCE, BUT LIKE THE HOLY ONE WHO CALLED YOU, BE HOLY YOURSELVES ALSO IN ALL YOUR BEHAVIOR; BECAUSE IT IS WRITTEN, 'YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY'" (1 Pet. 1:15).
 - (iv) Holiness is the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new. It is that process of sanctification in which the perfect image of Christ is

being formed in you. It is the renewal of the whole man into that moral image of God which was lost in the Fall.

- h. And so the Lord calls you to look intently into the Law, the Law of liberty, to see where the old man is yet remaining in you, where he is still affecting your life, and to put him off. James wrote, "BUT PROVE YOURSELVES DOERS OF THE WORD, AND NOT MERELY HEARERS WHO DELUDE THEMSELVES. FOR IF ANYONE IS A HEARER OF THE WORD AND NOT A DOER, HE IS LIKE A MAN WHO LOOKS AT HIS NATURAL FACE IN A MIRROR; FOR ONCE HE HAS LOOKED AT HIMSELF AND GONE AWAY, HE HAS IMMEDIATELY FORGOTTEN WHAT KIND OF PERSON HE WAS. BUT THE ONE WHO LOOKS INTENTLY AT THE PERFECT LAW, THE LAW OF LIBERTY, AND ABIDES BY IT, NOT HAVING BECOME A FORGETFUL HEARER BUT AN EFFECTUAL DOER, THIS MAN SHALL BE BLESSED IN WHAT HE DOES" (1:22-25).
 - i. Do you want the blessing of God in your life? Do you want to be filled with the Spirit and not quench out His operations? Then you are to be an effectual doer of the Word, even in all of its perfection. The Lord has even given to you His means of grace to strengthen you in your duties. He wants you to obey Him, and He has made every provision for you to do so.
 - j. But if you do not continually press forward after that goal, James says do not deceive yourselves into thinking that you have the grace of God in your hearts, when your hearts are really filled with the darkness of self love.
 - k. So we see here the first principle that we must apply to the commandments in order to understand how they apply to us, namely, that we must understand them in the most perfect conceivable way. In a word, they require absolute perfection from us.
- B. The Second of These Principles Is that the Law Is Spiritual, and So Applies to Our Minds, Our Wills, and Our Affections, as well as All of Our Words, Actions, and Gestures, Which Means Body Language.
- 1. This has already been seen in the following example. Not only is murder forbidden by the sixth commandment, but also the anger behind it is forbidden, and any expression of that anger.
 - 2. This rule is also very important for us to understand because we need to realize that even if we might keep the commandments outwardly in our actions, that we can still break them in our hearts and in our minds.
 - 3. Paul tells us in Romans 7:14, "FOR WE KNOW THAT THE LAW IS SPIRITUAL; BUT I AM OF FLESH, SOLD INTO BONDAGE TO SIN."
 - a. The Law has more than simply an application to what we actually do; it also regulates our inner man.
 - b. Remember, Jesus said, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH" (Mark 12:30).
 - (i) It is not enough to love the Lord with all of your might, in outward actions, even if you were to serve Him with every ounce of your strength.
 - (ii) You must also love Him with all of your heart. This means that your affections must be fully inclined toward doing His will. In your innermost being you must obey the commandments out of the purest love and

devotion to your Savior.

- (iii) And you must love Him with all of your mind. Nothing must proceed out of your mind except only the most holy thoughts. Your mind is the seat of your will, and you will will whatever it is that your heart desires. If you desire to do sexual sin in your heart, you will commit sexual sin in your actions. If you want purity in your heart, you will live a pure life. Your will must be fully yielded to a heart overflowing with love for Christ.
- (iv) But don't forget that your outward actions as well are regulated by the Law. Your words must be right, your gestures, that is, your expressions and movements, as well as your actual works.

4. Jesus gives to us several examples in the Sermon on the Mount. But let's look at one of the most familiar dealing with the seventh commandment.

- a. Jesus said, "YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; BUT I SAY TO YOU, THAT EVERYONE WHO LOOKS ON A WOMAN TO LUST FOR HER HAS COMMITTED ADULTERY WITH HER ALREADY IN HIS HEART" (Matt. 5:27-28).
- b. Here it is clear that the commandment does not only apply to the action itself, but also to the motives of the heart.
 - (i) You may not commit the actual act of sexual intercourse with someone other than your spouse, but you can still break the seventh commandment.
 - (ii) Thinking evil sexual thoughts about another person is a breaking of this commandment.
 - (iii) Desiring to have sexual relations with another person other than your spouse is forbidden.
 - (iv) Looking at another person with lustful intentions is also prohibited.
 - (v) And though it is not expressly mentioned here, we may also infer that any words which are spoken which have sexual connotations to another are also forbidden.
- c. And it is the same here as it was previously, there are various degrees in which the commandments may be broken, and the more severe the degree, the more severe is the penalty.
 - (i) In the case of adultery, those who commit the act have evil thoughts in their minds and evil affections in their hearts before they ever fall into that sin.
 - (ii) But committing the act of adultery is far worse than anything leading up to it. So bad is it that to commit such an act is to give the innocent party the option to dissolve that marriage through divorce. Jesus said, "EVERYONE WHO DIVORCES HIS WIFE, EXCEPT FOR THE CAUSE OF UNCHASTITY, MAKES HER COMMIT ADULTERY; AND WHOEVER MARRIES A DIVORCED WOMAN COMMITS ADULTERY" (Matt. 5:32).
 - (iii) Committing adultery is the shattering of the marriage covenant, which is a mutual agreement between a man and woman before God to keep themselves only for the other. This is probably why our Lord allows divorce on the grounds of adultery for it is the most severe violation of that covenant.

- (iv) It is interesting to note that the word which Jesus uses as the exception is one that refers to an actual sexual act. In this case, it seems that one must actually commit some unlawful sexual act before there are proper grounds for a divorce. It is not only adultery, but also Sodomy and homosexuality that constitute the proper ground of the dissolution of the marriage.
- (v) And so the greater degree of sin brings with it severer consequences, not to mention severer degrees of punishment in hell, if that person who commits these sins does not truly repent and flee to Christ.

4. This Biblical principle exhorts us second of all, to examine our hearts, our minds, and even such things as our gestures to see where we are falling short of God's glory.
 - a. Are you aware that the commandments may be broken in your mind, heart, will, words and gestures, as well as in your actions?
 - b. Just think through a couple of the commandments with me to see how they apply.
 - c. Think about the first commandment of having no other gods before the true God. Is there anything in your heart that you have elevated above God? It could be another person, or some object that you love more than Him. It could be anything that you are willing to sacrifice your obedience to God in order to have.
 - d. Anything that you give more allegiance to in your affections than to God is an idol and all idolatry is a gross abomination in the sight of God. He wants all of your heart, all of your affections. He wants you to glorify Him with all of your mind and maintain holy thoughts concerning Him. He wants you to express this outwardly as well in treating Him as holy and speaking about Him as holy.
 - e. Think also about the seventh commandment, which we have already considered. How often do you let your eyes stray after the opposite sex? Do you allow any unholy thoughts to remain in your mind? Do you have any sinful affections in your heart towards any other person? Do you speak any lude or unclean words about others? Or tell dirty jokes? Or speak of things which are not proper for a Christian to speak of?
 - f. Let us also consider another commandment which is not as obvious. The fourth commandment forbids us to work or to enjoy worldly recreations on the Lord's Day Sabbath. Are you keeping that aspect of it, first of all? Do you work on the Lord's Day when God has commanded you not to work? Do you cause others to work by soliciting them? Do you go out to eat and cause others to break this commandment? Do you watch television, or any other worldly recreation, or actually participate in them on the Sabbath?
 - g. But knowing that this applies to your thoughts and words as well, do you think about your worldly employment on the Sabbath, just for the pleasure of it? I'm not saying that we may not discuss problems at work for the purpose of counsel and prayer, but do you just like to talk about it, to shoot the breeze? And what about your recreations? Do you

talk to others about them just for the pleasure of reliving them, or telling someone else how much you enjoyed it? Are you filling your mind and heart with the things of the world on the Sabbath, and the minds of others, when the Lord has commanded you to set aside those things -- which on other days are lawful, but not on His holy day -- to set your mind completely on Him?

- h. People of God, these principles call us to a close examination of our lives this evening to see if we are living in a way which is pleasing to God. May the Lord grant that each of our eyes may be opened to see His holiness and to pursue it with all of our might, for holiness is that which adorns those making a claim to godliness. May God help us not to be so dull to holiness and to quicken us to whole hearted obedience, so that we might adorn the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.