

"The Breadth of the Commandments, Part 3"
(Colossians 3:5)

Introduction: God's commandments reveal His holy nature. God is absolutely moral and upright. As James tells us, He is "THE FATHER OF LIGHTS, WITH WHOM THERE IS NO VARIATION, OR SHIFTING SHADOW" [James 1:18]. And that is why He so delights in moral uprightness and purity. Think of what it is that gives pleasure to your soul more than anything else. Perhaps it is a masterful work of art. Perhaps it is a classic piece of music. Maybe it is a well written piece of literature. That which delights God more than anything else is righteousness. David said, "FOR THE LORD IS RIGHTEOUS; HE LOVES RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Ps. 11:7). And because God is a God of righteousness, He takes pleasure as well when He see it in the hearts of His people. Again the psalmist writes, "I KNOW, O MY GOD, THAT THOU TRIEST THE HEART AND DELIGHTEST IN UPRIGHTNESS" (1 Chr. 29:17). He delights in it because it reflects His nature, His holy image, that for which He created man.

Since the Lord delights in righteousness, we, who have been recreated in His image, should delight in it as well. And that is why we have been looking at the Ten Commandments, because they reflect His righteousness. And this is also why we are seeking to understand the breadth and depth of the commandments. They are broader than the ocean and deeper than the seas. They encompass our whole moral duty both to God and man. What they are does not appear entirely on the surface of them. They are not like a book of only one page with a few shallow thoughts. Rather they are like chapter headings which give a summary of the contents of some very lengthy chapters. They shine the light in the darkness of sin to light the path of the righteous. Many today seem to believe that the road which leads to life has broadened. Maybe for many us here have a hard time telling where that path begins or ends. It has become so downtrodden that it is indistinguishable from the path of the world. But as the Lord has been opening our understanding to the meaning of the commandments, we see that the narrow path which leads to life is still very narrow. It hasn't changed since the day the Lord first revealed it. It is the straight and narrow path of true holiness. As Bunyon once put it, "I found that the narrow road which leads to life to be so narrow, that there was only room for body and soul, and not for body, and soul, and the world." Jesus said, "ENTER BY THE NARROW GATE; FOR THE GATE IS WIDE, AND THE WAY IS BROAD THAT LEADS TO DESTRUCTION, AND MANY ARE THOSE WHO ENTER BY IT. FOR THE GATE IS SMALL, AND THE WAY IS NARROW THAT LEADS TO LIFE, AND FEW ARE THOSE WHO FIND IT" [Matt. 7:13-14]. As we continue to reflect upon the biblical principles which light the path for us, you will see that the way will continue to become more and more narrow, so that only your soul and body will fit on it, without your sin.

We have seen thus far that the law is perfect. It requires absolutely perfect obedience down to the minutest details. We have also seen that it regulates not only the things we actually do, but also our thoughts and our motives. And it requires a perfect love both to God and man, both outwardly in our actions, and inwardly in our hearts. Tonight we will want to see that,

The root of all of our disobedience to God's holy Law can be traced to covetousness, or desire for some form of personal gain.

I. The Bible Tells Us that Covetousness Is in Some Way or Other at the Root of All Law Breaking.

A. Isn't It True that Behind Every Action There Must Be a Fountain from

Which Flows It Flows?

1. Every river has a fountainhead, that beginning spring from which it begins to flow and becomes a torrent of water.
 2. Every plant when it germinates from a seed, first sends out its roots to form the foundation for the plant which is to follow.
 3. Even so every one of our actions has its root, or source, in something. The Bible says that it is our heart.
 - a. Solomon, that wise man of Israel, said, "WATCH OVER YOUR HEART WITH ALL DILIGENCE, FOR FROM IT FLOWS THE SPRINGS OF LIFE" (Prov. 4:23).
 - b. Every thought, every motive, every action comes from that very source, the heart of man, whether it is good or bad.
 - c. Jesus said, in speaking of the heart, "THE GOOD MAN OUT OF THE GOOD TREASURE OF HIS HEART BRINGS FORTH WHAT IS GOOD; AND THE EVIL MAN OUT OF THE EVIL TREASURE BRINGS FORTH WHAT IS EVIL" (Luke 6:45).
 - d. When something controls the heart, it controls the whole man. "A JOYFUL HEART MAUES A CHEERFUL FACE, BUT WHEN THE HEART IS SAID, THE SPIRIT IS BROKEN" (15:13).
 - e. And that is why it is so important for us to have our hearts controlled by the commandments of God. Again, Solomon writes to his son, "MY SON, LET YOUR HEART KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS; FOR LENGTH OF DAYS AND YEARS OF LIFE, AND PEACE THEY WILL ADD TO YOU" (3:1-2), "LET YOUR HEART HOLD FAST MY WORDS; KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS AND LIVE" (4:4), "MY SON, GIVE ATTENTION TO MY WORDS; INCLINE YOUR EAR TO MY SAYINGS. DO NOT LET THEM DEPART FROM YOUR SIGHT; KEEP THEM IN THE MIDST OF YOUR HEART. FOR THEY ARE LIFE TO THOSE WHO FIND THEM, AND HEALTH TO ALL THEIR WHOLE BODY" (4 20-22).
 - f. We must love God in the very depths of our soul. If we do then we will love His commandments for that is how we show our love to Him. If we let the Law guide us, then it will keep our feet on the path of righteousness. The Psalmist writes, "O HOW I LOVE THY LAW! IT IS MY MEDITATION ALL THE DAY." "THY WORD IS A LAMP TO MY FEET, AND A LIGHT TO MY PATH" (Ps. 119:97, 105).
 4. But our problem is that there is an evil force in our hearts which is seeking to distort our understanding of where that straight road leads. It is seeking to pull us out of the way and into the ditch.
 - a. Paul, in his wrestlings with his own sin, wrote, "I FIND THEN THE PRINCIPLE THAT EVIL IS PRESENT IN ME, THE ONE WHO WISHES TO DO GOOD" (Romans 7:21). There is an evil present with us. There is an evil which did not pass away with conversion.
 - b. The Lord tells us plainly what the problem is in Jeremiah 17:9, "THE HEART IS MORE DECEITFUL THAN ALL ELSE AND IS DESPERATELY SICK; WHO CAN UNDERSTAND IT?"
 - c. This evil principle, this black heart, which seeks to place a blind over our hearts to prevent us from seeing the light of God's righteousness, is nothing other than indwelling sin in our hearts.
- B. That the Bible Tells Us that There Is Remaining Sin in Our Hearts Is Clear. But What Is Often Not Clear Is How It Is Revealed. How It Shows Itself to Be There.

1. Actually, the Bible tells us very clearly what its chief characteristic is, how this serpent raises its ugly head in our lives.
2. In 1 Timothy 6:10, Paul writes to Timothy, "FOR THE LOVE OF MONEY IS A ROOT OF ALL SORTS OF EVIL, AND SOME BY LONGING FOR IT HAVE WANDERED AWAY FROM THE FAITH, AND PIERCED THEMSELVES WITH MANY A PANG."
 - a. Literally translated, it reads, "FOR A ROOT OF ALL THE EVILS IS THE LOVE OF MONEY." The word translated here "love of money" also means avarice, or covetousness, or love of gain.
 - b. Paul may be giving to us here a root of many evils, which is how it is commonly understood. Or he may be giving us the most common example of covetousness to summarize the real problem, which is that we must have things our own way. We must gain what we want.
3. When we desire to have things our own way, instead of God's, it amounts to a dethroning of God in order to sit on the throne ourselves. To exalt our own will over God's in this way is really idolatry, the putting up of another god in the place of the true God. Paul tells us as much in our passage this evening. "THEREFORE CONSIDER THE MEMBERS OF YOUR EARTHLY BODY AS DEAD TO . . . GREED [or covetousness], WHICH IS IDOLATRY" (Col. 3:5).
4. In a word, this covetousness, which is in reality idolatry, is the root of all the evils that we commit. And when you stop and consider for a moment what your reason might be in breaking any of God's commands, you will have to acknowledge that it is because you find your desires to be more desirable than God's. You want to do what you want, rather than what God wants. Let's consider a few examples.
 - a. Why would you or anyone want to have another God in the place of the true God?
 - (i) For the Israelites, the motivation may have been to insure good crops for himself just in case Baal turned out to be the true God.
 - (ii) You might decide that you don't like God's rules and so you try to reshape God into an image that suits your liking and worship that. Many people do this today and end up worshipping a false god.
 - b. What could possibly be your motive for worshipping God in a way that He has not commanded, or has actually forbidden?
 - (i) It might be that you don't like the way that God has commanded that He be worshiped.
 - (ii) You would rather put together a worship service which is to your liking.
 - (iii) You like a certain kind of music with a certain beat and rhythm, so you include that. You like strong and compelling drama, so you add that too.
 - (iv) Many people today shop around from church to church looking to find just exactly what they want. Most don't even consider what God requires.
 - c. What could possibly be the motive for using the Lord's name

in vain?

- (i) You notice in our society that the two most popular curse words are the name of Jesus Christ, and God.
 - (ii) This is nothing more than using their names irreverently, dragging their character through the mud for the sake of their flippant and misdirected anger.
 - (iii) God's name may also be brought into misuse through using it in oaths, such as "with God as my witness" or the cruder way of putting it, "I swear to God!"
 - (iv) You might believe that you can get away with something by calling God to witness your lie.
- d. Why might you want to work on the Sabbath, or cause others to work?
- (i) The Israelites didn't care for the Sabbath because they wanted to sell their wares and goods.
 - (ii) Those Jews at the time of Amos who were willing to cast God's law aside for their own purposes would say, "WHEN WILL THE NEW MOON BE OVER, SO THAT WE MAY BUY GRAIN, AND THE SABBATH, THAT WE MAY OPEN THE WHEAT MARKET" (Amos 8:5).
 - (iii) You might not refrain from working on Sundays because you might lose your job, or because your competitor might get an edge in your business. Or maybe you like to eat out on the Sabbath and don't care that you are causing your neighbor to break God's holy Law.
- e. For what possible reason would anyone want to rebel against authority, be angry with or murder someone, lust after another or commit sexual sin, steal something that belongs to another, lie about the truth of something, or desire something that is your neighbors, if it is not for some personal gain?
- f. I think that you will find that in every area where you deviate from the straight and narrow path of God's Law, there is something that you are hoping to gain for yourself by so doing.

II. Uses. In keeping them there is great reward.

A. People of God, This Calls Us to an Examination of Our Motives This Evening.

1. Seeing that covetousness, or greediness, or self-will, which is the enthroning of ourselves in God's place is the way in which our sin affects our hearts and minds, where is it affecting you? How is that poison in your soul working its way out in the things you do?
2. Are you conveniently forgetting or putting aside the Law of God for your own personal gain? Have any of the examples that I have cited in our breaking of the commandments applied also to you?
3. Have you decided to be the king of your own castle? Do you sit on your judgment seat passing judgment on the holy commandments of God, deciding which you will do and which not? Or do you submit to God as your Sovereign Lord?
4. Has anything taken the place of God in your affections and become your god, as the young ruler's riches took God's place

in his heart?

5. Realize that self-will is what was at the heart of Satan's rebellion. Satan said, "I WILL ASCEND TO HEAVEN; I WILL RAISE MY THRONE ABOVE THE STARS OF GOD, AND I WILL SIT ON THE MOUNT OF ASSEMBLY IN THE RECESSES OF THE NORTH. I WILL ASCEND ABOVE THE HEIGHTS OF THE CLOUDS; I WILL MAKE MYSELF LIKE THE MOST HIGH" (Isa. 14:13-14). This self-will is also at the heart of all of your sins.
6. Don't be deceived; your soul is not absolutely pure. It will never be on this side of heaven. To think that you are not laboring under a tremendous temptation to set aside any of God's requirements to make life easier for you to live is a foolish principle of life. The Lord has plainly told us that we are prone to idolatry. He has told us that our hearts are dark, and deceived and desperately sick. There is only a drop of grace in an ocean of corruption. We need a chart, a map to take us where we are going. Left to ourselves, we will certainly run aground on the many rocks in the oceans of our hearts. Even a few degree deviation at the beginning of our journey can put us miles off course. We need the certain direction of the Law of God to bring us safely there. And we need the grace of Christ to remove the storms and fog and allow us to clearly see the destination and to desire to get there.
7. If you don't sense the grace of God at work in your life this evening, if you find that you are more often than not setting the Law of God aside to do what you want, if you are reigning on the throne of your life rather than God, then you need to rise up off that throne and cast yourself to the ground in His presence. You need to abdicate your rulership in your life and hand over the kingdom to Christ. Christ cannot be Lord, if you are. And Christ cannot be your Savior, if He is not your Lord. Turn from your self-will this evening and throw yourself at the feet of Jesus, and call upon Him to save you.
8. But for those of you who are the Lord's, you must recognize that you still compromise your obedience to the Lord. But remember, every time you turn aside from His will to do your own, you lose in the end. The psalmist said, "THE LAW OF THE LORD IS PERFECT, RESTORING THE SOUL; THE TESTIMONY OF THE LORD IS SURE, MAKING WISE THE SIMPLE. THE PRECEPTS OF THE LORD ARE RIGHT, REJOICING THE HEART; THE COMMANDMENT OF THE LORD IS PURE, ENLIGHTENING THE EYES. THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS CLEAN, ENDURING FOREVER; THE JUDGMENTS OF THE LORD ARE TRUE; THEY ARE RIGHTEOUS ALL TOGETHER. THEY ARE MORE DESIRABLE THAN GOLD, YES, THAN MUCH FINE GOLD; SWEETER ALSO THAN HONEY AND THE DRIPPINGS OF THE HONEYCOMB. MOREOVER, BY THEM THY SERVANT IS WARNED; IN KEEPING THEM THERE IS GREAT REWARD" (Ps. 19:7-11).
9. People of God, you will never lose out when you obey the Lord. Whatever you have to give up now will be more than fully paid back in this life and in the life to come. Put aside therefore your desire for personal gain and be willing to spend and be spent for the glory of Christ on earth, that He may give to you a full reward on that great day. May the Lord grant us all the grace to do so. Amen.