

"The Breadth of the Commandments, part 5"  
(Romans 3:8)

Introduction: When the Lord created all things that He was to create, the last thing that He created was man. Man was the crown of His creation. To him was given dominion over all that God had made. It was not an absolute dominion, for God is the Sovereign Ruler over His creation. But he was given authority as God's co-ruler. Even from the beginning of the creation, God established authority structures within His world. Authority is a necessary element in any kind of society. It is that which allows any city, state, or nation even to exist. Without it, every social structure would be greatly weakened and would eventually fall. Of course, the same is true of God's spiritual kingdom as well. There are necessary authority structures which He has set up which must be honored, or His kingdom will not stand. This may be illustrated as follows. The righteous king of a certain country was forced to go to war with a neighboring country. And so he sent out a command that all of his servants, the nobles, the barons, and the knights, should come to him that he might tell them his strategy and organize them for battle. When the king's messengers delivered their orders, some dropped everything and came immediately, some reluctantly straggled in late, and others did not come at all. When the neighboring army finally arrived and engaged the king in battle, they easily overwhelmed him and took much of his property, especially that of his nobles who, because they had not responded to the king's order, were not prepared for the battle. This story describes to a large extent, the kingdom of God in the world today. God has set His King on His throne, the Lord Jesus Christ, and given Him authority over all His kingdom. And this kingdom, which is the kingdom of light is constantly at war with a neighboring kingdom, the kingdom of darkness. We who are Christians are Christ's army, His nobles, barons, and knights. We are those whom He commands to engage the forces of the enemy. But like the nobles, barons, and knights in the story, we often fail to listen to our Lord, and respond immediately to what He commands. The result is that much valuable ground is lost to our King, especially that which is in the possession of those who stiffen their neck and refuse to obey. They end up being casualties in the war. Authority is very important. We must listen to the marching orders of our Lord and do them. These marching orders, as we have been saying, have been given to us in the 10 commandments. They tell us what it is that is going to advance not only ourselves in righteousness, but also the kingdom of God in the world, through soldiers who are fit for the battle.

Our passage this evening gives to us a still further principle for understanding the commandments and how they apply to us. In it, Paul is fighting back against the remarks which some have used to characterize his Christianity by saying that Paul's God uses evil for good purposes, Therefore, you should do evil that good may come of it. Paul says, if you understand what I am saying in that way, your condemnation will be just. It is never permitted to do something which is evil in order that good may come. The ends do not justify the means. You may not do something which you know to be evil in itself, in order to accomplish something which you think is good. For instance, you may not go and kill someone you know to be a murderer to accomplish the very good purpose of stopping him from murdering anyone else. You cannot kill an abortionist to stop him from murdering babies. The end contemplated may be good, which is the saving of children's lives, but the means you are using to accomplish this end are

evil. And so this gives to us another very important rule for interpreting and applying the Law of God, namely,

*God's Law always stands in force and is to be observed at all times, even if by breaking it you hope to accomplished some good end.*

*This is a very far reaching subject which we will only look at briefly this evening.*

- I. First I Want You to See That When God Forbids Something, It Must Never Be Done.
  - A. The Scriptures Bear This Out Very Strongly.
    1. Paul says that to turn his teaching into a system which uses evil for good purposes is to bring condemnation upon those who would do attempt it.
    2. Elihu says much the same thing to Job, "BE CAREFUL, DO NOT TURN TO EVIL; FOR YOU HAVE PREFERRED THIS TO AFFLICTION" (Job 36:21).
      - a. He is saying, "Job, rather than suffering affliction, you have carefully avoided it by turning to evil to escape it. Wouldn't it be much better for you if you turned from evil and suffered affliction for righteousness sake, rather than the affliction which evil brings?"
      - b. It is never right to turn to evil, even when you hope to escape some affliction by it.
      - c. Some of the Christians in the early church were willing to commit the very evil act of turning over the Scriptures and offering incense to Caesar as an act of worship in order to escape being thrown to the lions. While others faced the lions hoping to obtain a better resurrection.
    3. Again, the author to the Hebrews writes, concerning Moses, "BY FAITH MOSES, WHEN HE HAD GROWN UP, REFUSED TO BE CALLED THE SON OF PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER; CHOOSING RATHER TO ENDURE ILL-TREATMENT WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD, THAN TO ENJOY THE PASSING PLEASURES OF SIN; CONSIDERING THE REPROACH OF CHRIST GREATER RICHES THAN THE TREASURES OF EGYPT; FOR HE WAS LOOKING TO THE REWARD" (11:24-26).
      - a. Moses could have remained in the house of Pharaoh and been counted among his relatives and enjoyed his wealth.
      - b. But to do so would have been sin, for the Lord had called him to be the deliverer of His people and to suffer with them.
      - c. He might have done something which was evil, turning away from God, in order to gain something that he might have thought was good, the treasures of Egypt. But this he knew would be to turn from God.
    4. And the way in which the Lord inspired the language of the commandments of prohibition in the Ten Commandments is very emphatic. Literally translated, they would begin, "YOU SHALL NEVER" do this or that.
  - B. People of God, Evil Is Always Forbidden to You. You Must Never Do What Is Wrong in Itself to Accomplish Your Own Ends.
    1. How can you promote the truth of God if you lie?
    2. How can you honor the true God, if you worship false gods?
    3. How can you reverence the name of God, if you defame it through

dragging it through the mud?

4. How can you expect to bring about good for the glory of God, if by your actions you do what is evil in His sight?
5. Evil is that which fills the heart of the devil. It is a cesspool of filth, a cauldron of poison, it is leprosy to the soul.
6. It is like a red hot piece of iron which may only be removed from the fire without tongs and without gloves. It must be handled with the bare hands if it is to be handled at all, and it always inflicts serious wounds on the one who takes it up.

II. Second, When God Commands Something to Be Done, It Is Always Our Duty. And Yet It Is Also Clear That Each Particular Duty Cannot Be Done at all Times.

A. This Is Exactly the Opposite of What We Just Saw. If It Is Always Forbidden of Us that We Do Evil, It Is Just As Reasonable that God Requires of Us that We Always Do Good.

1. Moses said to the Israelites, "OR WHAT GREAT NATION IS THERE THAT HAS STATUTES AND JUDGMENTS AS RIGHTEOUS AS THIS WHOLE LAW WHICH I AM SETTING BEFORE YOU TODAY? ONLY GIVE HEED TO YOURSELF AND KEEP YOUR SOUL DILIGENTLY, LEST YOU FORGET THE THINGS WHICH YOUR EYES HAVE SEEN, AND LEST THEY DEPART FROM YOUR HEART ALL THE DAYS OF YOUR LIFE; BUT MAKE THEM KNOWN TO YOUR SONS AND YOUR GRANDSONS" (Deu. 4:8-9).

- a. The Israelites were to give heed to themselves. They were to keep themselves diligently, lest they forget what they have seen and lest these laws depart from their heart.
- b. They were to be careful, even as a tightrope walker is careful that he doesn't step too far to the right or to the left, lest he fall from the path of safety.
- c. And not only were they to never let them depart from their own understanding and practice, they were also to teach them to their sons, and their sons' sons.

2. People of God, it is not enough for you to abstain from evil, you must also do what is required of you in righteousness.
  - a. It would not be enough for the slave if he never spit in his master's face, or treated him with contempt. He must also do what his lord commands, or he is an unworthy slave.
  - b. Even so, God not only forbids evil to you at all times, He also commands righteousness at all times.
  - c. You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, and your neighbor as yourself, not only today, but also tomorrow; not only this week, but next week; not only this year, but next year.
  - d. You must do what He tells you to do at all times.

B. And Yet, It Is Also True that It Is Impossible to Do Everything that He Has Commanded At All Times.

1. There are many things which the Lord commands His people to do in the Scriptures, many of which require a good deal of time.
2. It is doubtful whether all of them could be accomplished if we devoted all our time to them, especially when we consider that the Lord also requires us to provide for our households.
3. For instance, you are commanded to read the Word thoughtfully and meditatively, to pray without ceasing, to work and earn a living

for your family, to bear witness to the Gospel, to minister your gifts to your brethren, as well as a host of other things. You wouldn't be able to do any two of them at all times.

4. Obviously then, you are not required to do all that is commanded at the same time. This goes without saying. But that doesn't mean that you can set any of the commandments permanently aside either. You may not be able to witness to everyone you see on the street because you have to get to work and then come home and spend time with your family. But that doesn't mean that if your schedule is very full that you can permanently neglect this commandment to bear testimony to the truth.
5. You must also realize that the commandments were given to the church as a community of believers. This means that it is the responsibility of the church as a whole to be about the business of doing what God commands. As a whole we may fulfill the work of the church, whereas as individuals we may not.
6. This does not mean, however, that we are not responsible as individuals to do the same things as well. For instance, we are to provide for the poor. This is done in some measure as a church through our diaconal ministry, and through our giving to the Union Rescue Mission. But that does not mean that you have done all that the Lord requires of you in the way of meeting the needs of the poor, after you have dropped a couple of dollars in the offering. The Lord may bring people to your door that He wants you to supply for.
7. But lastly, there is also a hierarchy that exists among the commandments. Jesus said in Matthew 12:7, to those Pharisees who condemned His disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath, "I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE."
  - a. The Pharisees were quick to give all of the necessary sacrifices which God had commanded, but they withheld that which was more important, namely mercy.
  - b. If you meet someone who is virtually starving from lack of food, you don't share the gospel with him and then send him on his way without meeting his needs.
  - c. You must first give to him that which is necessary to sustain his body, and then give him that which will feed his soul.
  - d. And so we see that we are always bound to do what God commands, and yet not all things may be done at the same time.

III. Lastly, I Want to Consider What May Be Some Very Important Exceptions to the Rules or Principles that We Have Seen. This Is Where We Tread On Difficult and Dangerous Ground For the Bible Seems to Make Allowances for the Breaking of Some of the Commandments, Under Certain Conditions.

- A. The First One We Will Consider Is the Sixth Commandment, "YOU SHALL NOT MURDER" (Ex. 20:13).
  1. How is this to be understood? Does this mean that the taking of life is wrong under any circumstances? Didn't God Himself command the destruction of whole nations? Didn't He send the Israelites into the land of Canaan to utterly destroy every man, woman, and child?
  2. And what about those who are called to fight in a war? If you are a Christian, should you be a conscientious objector? Or should you go out on the battle field and let your

fellow-soldiers be killed and yourself as well by the enemy, while you don't even lift your finger to stop them?

3. And what about the death penalty? Did God command something which is morally wrong?
  4. We don't have time to consider this in detail, but let it suffice to say that no individual has the right to take another's life on his own authority. God has given the power of the sword to the government, so that it may execute justice. God has also given government the right to fight a just war, such as when threatened by another nation for unrighteous reasons.
  5. The government has the authority from God to take life, but the individual never has that right, except in self-defense.
- B. The Second Exception Is Found in the Fifth Commandment, "HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER" (Ex. 20:12), Which Is Broad Enough to Include the Submission of Everyone to the Proper Authorities.
1. The Scripture commands all men to "BE IN SUBJECTION TO THE GOVERNING AUTHORITIES" (Rom. 13:1). And so we must obey them in all that they command us to do.
  2. But does this mean that they can command us to break the Law of God, or to commit any act of sin? What about Paul who defied the high priest and the Sanhedrin who tried to stop him from preaching the Gospel? What about when the Council commanded Peter and John to speak no more in the name of Jesus? Should they have listened to them? Should they have stopped preaching the message of the cross?
  3. Peter and John answered, "WHETHER IT IS RIGHT IN THE SIGHT OF GOD TO GIVE HEED TO YOU RATHER THAN TO GOD, YOU BE THE JUDGE; FOR WE CANNOT STOP SPEAKING WHAT WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD" (Acts 4:19-20). And on a later occasion, Peter said, "WE MUST OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN" (5:29).
  4. There is a higher authority than those which are established by God; it is God Himself. When the authorities that be compel you to do something you know is against the Law of God, you must refuse.
  5. Ladies, if your husbands ever compel you to do anything which is sinful, you must refuse. People, if the state ever commands you to do something which is contrary to the will of God, you must die rather than compromise! You must obey God rather than men!
- C. The Last Exception I Would Like for Us to Look at Is that of the Ninth Commandment, Which Reads, "YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST YOUR NEIGHBOR" (Ex. 20:16), Which Calls Us to Speak the Truth at All Times.
1. Does this mean that there are never situations in which we may tell a lie? Anselm said that it would be better to let all of creation perish, than that you should tell even the slightest lie. Was he right? What if our country was invaded by a foreign power, and you were a key person who held vital information that could ruin our country, and you were asked a question concerning that information which you could not evade except by a lie? If you told them the truth, the United States would fall into enemy hands. If you lied, then you would bring their plans to absolute ruin. What should you do?
  2. If you said that you should not lie, but tell them the truth and let your country fall into death and destruction, then you need to consider a few examples from Scripture. Did Rahab sin when she

lied to the soldiers who had come to capture the spies she had hidden to preserve their lives (Joshua 2)? Did the Egyptian midwives sin when they told Pharaoh that the reason they did not kill the Hebrew babies was that the women delivered before they arrived (Exodus 1)? Did Samuel sin when he told the men of Saul that he came to Bethlehem to offer a sacrifice when he really came to anoint David as king over Israel (1 Sam. 16)? And to offer one non-biblical, but important example, did Corrie Ten Boom sin when she told the German soldiers that there were no Jews in her house?

3. The Bible says that Rahab and her whole household were saved because she hid the spies. The Lord blessed the Egyptian midwives and established households for them, because they feared Him. God was the One who told Samuel what to say in case anyone questioned him as to why he came to Bethlehem, because He knew that Samuel was afraid of Saul. And Corrie Ten Boom was preserved by God through the German concentration camps because she also feared the Lord and sought to do His will.
4. The Bible never commends lying for our own ends and purposes. But sometimes the Lord blesses those who have said what is false in order to preserve something which is more precious, such as human life. There is a hierarchy among the commands. Sometimes one of them must be suspended in order to accomplish a more righteous purpose. But only under these extreme situations.
5. And so people of God, we see that the Lord requires that you fear Him and keep His commandments. You are required to always keep away from evil, and to always do the good. But knowing this doesn't make it any easier; it only helps you to better understand your obligations before God. It forces you to daily throw yourself on the mercies of the Lord and to let Him carry you by His strength. It also causes you to lift your thanksgiving to the Lord that it is Christ's righteousness alone that will enable you to stand on that day. Trust in Him daily; believe on Him alone to save you from the coming wrath of God; and turn from all your sins to endeavor after renewed obedience to His will. And then you will have the hope that Christ will make up for all of your failures and weaknesses and bring you in the end to His glorious kingdom. Amen.