

I Believe... The Ten Commandments (Part 1)

[Note: This material will be divided over two weeks in the course I am preparing for this fall. But in order to finish by the end of summer, I'm lumping my reflections on the Ten Commandments into one big blog post, just as we did with the Lord's Prayer last week. Stay tuned next week for the first installment of a new series on the resurrection, which will include conversations with N. T. Wright's new book, *Surprised by Hope*]

What do we do now? In light of where we have come from and where we are going, how should we then live? Though we have not ignored matters of practical living in this series, it is now high time to take these questions head on. In order to so, we will keep following the catechetical tradition by reflecting on the Ten Commandments. Memorizing the Ten Commandments is standard catechetical practice in most Christian communities, whether they call it "catechesis" or not. Seeking to understand them and live by them is near the heart of Christian living. So a little reflection on the "ten words" is a worthwhile endeavor.

By choosing to place the Decalogue at the end of our series, we have sided with a particular tradition of catechetical reflection. Not all catechesis moves in the order that we have chosen. Perhaps more famously, Martin Luther's Catechisms (both Large and Small [LINK](#)) place the Ten Commandments at the beginning. Now a lot can be said in favor of Luther's ordering, not the least of which is that teaching children to share instead of steal simply comes first as a matter of course. But we have chosen to treat the Decalogue at the end of our reflections in order to locate Christian behavior within its proper context. God's commands are not spoken to us in a vacuum, but within the context of his story with us. God does not say, "If you do these things, then I will be your God and you will be my people." Rather, God says, "I have made myself your God and you my people, *therefore* do these things." It is significant that the Decalogue is prefaced by God's revealing statement: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Ex 20:2). This reminds the hearers of God's past acts of covenant faithfulness and gestures at the promise of future acts of deliverance. **God's covenant is the context of God's commandment.** And so we accordingly began with our faith in God's covenantal history with us and our hope in God's purposive future for us before turning to our love of God and neighbor in obedience to God's concrete command to us.

By so contextualizing the command of God, we immediately run into a problem: if Jesus has fulfilled the covenant, then why do we who have faith in him have to bother with the commandments of the "old" covenant. Now I must concede that the relation between the laws of the nation of Israel and the ethical guidelines of the Christian community is notoriously complex. I cannot pretend to resolve it here. But I can offer this rather simple observation: if God's promises to bless the nations through Israel are not abolished but fulfilled in Jesus Christ, then the gentiles who follow Jesus are invited as guests in the house of Israel to learn from his people how to live. In other words, we may not have to obey the law, but we get to obey the law. What was once far off is now brought close to us in Christ by the Spirit.

The catechetical tradition of the church has concretized this positive relationship between the law and the gospel by coordinating the ten commandments with the so-called greatest commandment. When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus gave a twofold answer: love God with your all and love your neighbor as yourself. The twofold structure to Jesus' love command corresponds nicely with the apparent twofold structure of the ten commandments, traditionally referred to as the "two tables of the law." According to Exodus, the ten

commandments were inscribed by the finger of God on two tablets (cf. Ex 31:38 and pars). Although it is not clear which commands were on which tablet, later tradition identified the first four commands concerning worship of God as the "first table of the law," and the remaining six commands concerning relations with neighbors as the "second table of the law." We will follow the tradition in our division of the material. So, without further ado, let's turn to the first table of the law and so to the first commandment.

The First Table of the Law: Love of God

The First Commandment

You shall have no other gods before me

The first command is the most fundamental of all the commands. One might obey the rest with relative success and still betray God's covenant by having other gods. One might be a virtuous pagan, but at the end of the day a pagan is still a pagan. God requires singular loyalty from his people. God is faithful to his people and expects the same in return. The attribute of divine faithfulness is the theological presupposition of the first commandment. This Hebrew term for this attribute is *hesed* often translated "mercy" or "loving kindness," both of which are accurate but obscure the covenantal connotation of the term. For God to have *hesed* is for God to be faithful to the covenant he made with his people. The story and promise of God's faithfulness to his people provides the covenantal context of the command to be faithful to him in return.

In that same story, God's people are repeatedly shown to be unfaithful. It should be no surprise, then, this command takes a negative form: "you shall not." In fact, most of the ten commandments are negative in form. There is a reason for this, and it is not just to make us feel bad. God's commands are primarily negative because the positive conditions for following them have already been supplied unilaterally by him. God in his grace has established a covenant with an unlikely people. God is faithful to his people. That is the most important positive fulfillment of the law. His people are simply told not to drop the ball from their side.

However, the fact that God supplies the positive conditions of covenant faithfulness does not mean that there is not a positive form of this command. In Deuteronomy, the centerpiece of the law is God's positive command to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut 6:5). It is this commandment that Jesus identifies at the greatest. The positive form of the command reminds us that mere avoidance of paganism is not enough. One must also dedicate one's self wholly to God. In fact, it is the positive form of the command that helps us to discern its opposite. What does it mean to have other gods before the Lord your God? As Luther famously put it, to have a god is to have anything on which your heart depends entirely. Whatever you cling to, that is your god. And so we all of us -- pagans, agnostics and believers -- are susceptible to cling to people and things and ideas rather than the one true God. Nobody is free from this temptation, and nothing is free from acting as our god. Clinging to any such gods is ruled out by the first commandment. And, in its positive form, clinging to the one true God is called forth from God's people.

The Second Commandment

You shall not make for yourself an idol

It is arguable that by obeying the first commandment one necessarily obeys the remaining commandments of the first table of the law. Love the Lord your God and thereby fulfill all the law and the prophets. This is certainly true, but it is only true in a certain respect. It is true that

genuine love of God seeks to embody its love in proper worship. In that respect, sheer love of God is enough. But we must also consider that love is not just an internal feeling but always takes concrete form in external actions. We rightly doubt the integrity of one who says they love someone whom they treat poorly. To say "I love you" and not show it is meaningless. In a certain respect, love *is* the actions that communicate love. So to appeal to the certainly true statement that the law of love fulfills the whole law in order to skirt the concrete form of love is to undermine the point of the statement. Just as God's love of us is not just an amorphous feeling but a concrete action of covenant faithfulness, so too our love of God is a concrete action. Our *hesed* of God must correspond to God's *hesed* of us.

This is where the next three commandments come in. The first is the command to neither make nor worship idols. Given the necessity of concrete forms of love, it is no wonder that the first and second commandments are sometimes conflated in the Christian tradition. To this day, not all Christian traditions follow the same numbering of the decalogue. Some combine the first two, splitting the last two in half in order to still get the number ten. Some reformation traditions adjusted this numbering, both as a result of a renewed interest in the Hebrew language and in order to support protestant iconoclasm by highlighting the commandment against images. Scholarly consensus confirms the distinction between the command to have no other gods and the command to eschew idolatry, and so we have followed the traditions whose numbering reflects this distinction. This choice is doubly helpful. On the one hand, it frees one to exposit the first commandment in broad terms of covenant faithfulness to God, which can take a myriad of forms. On the other hand, it directs one's attention to the very specific sin of idolatry, which played such an important role in God's story with his people.

Idolatry means worshipping images, substituting a creature for the creator. We can of course speak of idolatry metaphorically, in the sense of anything that competes with the worship of the true God. In fact, we were doing just that in our exposition of the first commandment in terms of singular faithfulness to God. But the metaphorical widening of the concept of idolatry should not obscure its concrete meaning. This is especially important in light of the temptation to use images in the worship of the true God. One might intend to express their obedience to the first commandment through the worship of an image of the true God. Israel's first great sin in the wilderness was the fashioning of a golden calf, which they worshipped as the Lord who brought them out of Egypt. But God requires his people not only to forsake all other gods but also to forsake the use of idols even in their worship of him. Such extremity is not arbitrary but befits the character of God, who, as the commandment says, is a jealous God (vs. 5-6). Jealousy is an appropriate attribute for a God who acts in history by choosing a people. God's jealousy is the burning of his love for his people, the punishing and rewarding activity by which God displays his covenant faithfulness. Just as divine faithfulness is the theological presupposition of the first commandment, so divine jealousy is the theological presupposition of the second commandment.

Obedience to this command comes to fullest expression in Israel's Temple: in the central room, precisely where one would expect a sculptured image of a god, there is an empty seat. God is present without the presence of idols. In fact, God is *only* present in the *absence* of idols, as the prophets continually remind the people. The prophets were thereby enforcing the bottom line of the second commandment: let nothing stand in the way your worship of the true God.

Now the Christian tradition rightly hits a snag here. Do we not worship Jesus as the only Son of God? And cannot he as the incarnate one be imaged? Debate over the use of images in worship, referred to as the iconoclastic controversy, raged in the early Byzantine period. In fact, the

seventh and final ecumenical council was convened to settle this very issue (Nicaea 787). This council should not be perceived as a break from the earlier, more "theological" councils. Rather, the question of icons was a continuation of the Christological debates and developments of the earlier centuries. The defenders of icons appealed to the two natures of Christ: Jesus as God is the proper object of worship; Jesus as human is capable of being imaged; therefore, images of Jesus may be used in worship. By these and other arguments, the defenders of icons won the debate at the council, though the controversy reemerged later both in the East and the West. The Western debate exploded during the reformation, which focused on images of saints. Whatever one's stance on the use of images generally, one ought to seriously consider affirming the Christological insight of the seventh ecumenical council. No one has ever seen God, except the the only begotten son of God, who is the full expression of God, the exact representation of his being. To bow down in worship before Jesus is *not* idolatry. Whether an image of Jesus is necessary or permissible can be debated in practice, but that Jesus is the image of God must never be denied by Christians. Such a denial would be blasphemous, which brings us to the third commandment.

The Third Commandment

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

We have already spoken of the name of God when we explicated the first petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Hallowed be thy name." So we need not linger here long. All we need to do here is lift up the scope of the negation and draw out the positive implication.

First, avoidance of curse words is necessary but not sufficient. Now it is true that the later Jewish tradition had chosen to avoid entirely speaking the revealed name of God. This is why YHWH was given alternative vowel points in the Masoretic Text and mispronounced "Jehovah" by English translators. Such absolute prohibition was the better part of wisdom, but as Jesus' teachings on oaths shows, sheer avoidance of the divine name will not do. Obedience to the third commandment requires that we eschew *all* misuse of the Lord's name. That means we must not appeal to religious language as a means to advance our own ends. Religious justification of back room deals, power grabs, and holy wars is a great affront to God and a bad witness to him before a watching world. But misuse of the name not only applies to the dragging God's name through the mud, but also to the presumption to attach God's name to even our best ideals and practices. Such presumption is essence of vanity. And before you interpret this exposition of the commandment merely in terms of a principled separation of church and state, remember that the Lord's name can be and regularly is misused in a religious context. Nowhere else are we more tempted to take the Lord's name in vain than in the church, where we loosely throw around God's name and hide behind pious reference to the Lord to get what we want.

Does this mean we should avoid God-talk entirely? Absolutely not. The positive implication of the third commandment is not disuse but proper use of the Lord's name. The love the Lord your God with your all means to use the name of the Lord your God with reverence and joy. We must revere the name, not by tip toeing around it but by reserving it for proclamation and prayer, speaking to others about the greatness of God and speaking to God with thanksgiving and petition. In other words, we should tell the story of God instead of co-opting God to advance our own plots. To call on the name of the Lord, both in times of blessing and in times of trouble, is the positive fulfillment of the third commandment. "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you will honor me" (Psalm 50:15).

The Fourth Commandment

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy

With the fourth commandment we turn from hallowing God's name to hallowing his day. Interestingly, this is the first of the two commandments that are phrased positively. Although the prohibition against work on the sabbath are also given, they do not get the first word. Rather, the positive imperatives to remember and to sanctify are given prominence. In this case, remembering means being conscientious enough to attend to the temporal rhythms God has given to his people. Sanctifying, as always, means to set apart, to make this day different than the others. Specifically, this day is made different through rest. Work defines the life and times of a community. Regular rest sets concrete limits one's work and its capacity to define the meaning of life. Sabbath-keeping identifies a community as God's people. It is no coincidence that the fourth commandment makes reference to the creation story. Busy people must be reminded that God the creator sustains his creation even when we cease our work. In other words, the world will not fall apart if you take a day off. You are not the creator; God is. Sabbath-keeping is an expression of trust in God and his provision for us beyond the fruit of our labors.

But sabbath-keeping is not only an expression of trust, but also an expression of love. By resting on the sabbath we join God in a shared time of rest. Not only can we rest because God still works, but also we are invited to rest with God. Thus is it not without reason that the Christian tradition connected sabbath-keeping to its own day of worship. The sabbath is the seventh day of the week, whereas Christians worship on the first day of the week to remember the resurrection of Jesus. So there is no strict equivalence between rest on the sabbath and worship on the Lord's Day. But the connection between the two is sensible and appropriate, provided one does not conflate the two and thereby create confusion, as so often happens. I can think of so many times when arguments over what was an appropriate activity on a Sunday afternoon suffered from the confusion of the mandate to rest and the invitation to worship. We may and must heed both, but how they are related and what that looks like can take many forms. So the church must learn to have an openness about the specifics of sabbath-keeping, even as it must re-learn to joyfully obey the fourth commandment.

Any thoughts?

What do you think is the proper function of Israelite law within the Christian community?

What advantage is there to coordinating the two tables of the law to the twofold love commandment of Jesus? What disadvantages does this traditional procedure bring with it?

What sorts of things, people, and ideas function as gods today? What does it look like to turn from them?

To what extent does the prohibition against idolatry apply to the use of images in worship? Should there be no images at all? Or just certain ones? Or may they only be used in certain ways? What do you think?

What contemporary examples of co-opting the Lord's name come to mind?

How do you practice sabbath-keeping in your life? What suggestions do you have for relating worship and rest? What unique challenges to ministers have relating sabbath-keeping to worship responsibilities?

I Believe... The Ten Commandments (Part 2)

With the fifth commandment we come to the second table of the law, and so turn our attention to love of neighbor. This shift in focus is not a separation. Just as love of God and love of neighbor are not separated in the ten commandments, so they remain united in Jesus' teaching. As Jesus puts it, "And the second is like the first..." The two go together. Love of God without love of neighbor is empty; love of neighbor without love of God is blind.

Nevertheless, there is a shift in focus from sustaining a proper covenantal relationship with God to sustaining the moral fabric of the community. God is not left behind, for all of these commands are followed out of obedience to God and for his glory. But explicit reference to God does disappear. In fact, parallels to these sorts of commands can be found in many if not most cultures. They certainly have parallels in the ancient near eastern cultures that surrounded Israel. So the second table of the law cannot be treated as though it contained absolutely unique legal insights.

However, Christian reflection on and obedience to the second table of the law is refracted through the unique lens of Jesus Christ. Although we certainly heed these prohibitions as would anyone who seeks the collective good of a society, we also hear in them the voice of our Lord to go the extra mile. We seek not only to avoid murder, adultery and theft, but seek to cultivate peace, faithfulness and generosity. In other words, we seek to love our neighbor as ourself. One could successfully heed the prohibitions by withdrawing one's self from the community, and thereby fall short of loving one's neighbor, which requires interaction and engagement. One could even heed these prohibitions in community, but limit the scope of application only to my community and therefore obey them only as an expression of self-love. One of the themes of Jesus' teaching is the re-definition of "neighbor" to include outsiders and even enemies. In fact, such inclusion of enemies is at the heart of the gospel, and so it should come as no surprise that the ethical life of the community created by the gospel would be shaped by enemy-love. This ever-widening scope of love comes out clearly by expositing the second table of the law not only in its negative form but also by drawing out the positive implication of each command. Such will be our procedure here.

The Fifth Commandment

Shame vs. Honor

The first commandment of the second table of the law is to honor one's parents. That family comes first should come as no surprise, for the family is the basic unit of society. This does not mean the church ought to sentimentalize the family or that today's "family values" have some kind of revealed status. The very notion of a mobile nuclear family is quite foreign to the ancient tribal culture in which the fifth commandment was first spoken and obeyed. But the fact remains that families -- in the more stripped-down obvious sense of the word -- form the core web of relationships through which first participate in communal life. It is with one's parents, siblings and other household members that one learns to sustain community by eschewing violence, theft, lies, etc. So it fits that the first and most basic form of neighbor-love is to bring honor to one's family.

Now we mentioned earlier that we would exposit both the negative and positive aspects of each command. But unlike the remaining commands, the fifth command is already phrased positively. And also unlike the remaining commands, it is with reference to the negative aspect that

consideration of the gospel's ethical demands comes in. We are commanded to honor our parents and by implication we are prohibited from shaming our parents. Yet shame is precisely what Jesus repeatedly brings on his family and repeatedly calls others to do. He places the choice before would-be disciples: either follow him immediately and wholly or take care of your family and its needs and reputation. These are certainly "hard sayings" and ought not be used to abuse people. However, they do display how Christ relativizes family ties. The family is not dismantled by Jesus, but the absoluteness of its demands are. The relative good of sustaining good family relations and reputations can be sought, but to act solely out the interest of my blood relations comes into direct conflict with Jesus' radical redefinition of neighbor. We need not set out to bring shame on our family, but picking up our crosses and following Jesus will often do so. The end game, of course, is not that we would trade our family for him, but that all, including our own family members, would be incorporated into the new family formed in Christ. And so with this end in view, we can rest assured that the greatest honor one can give his or her family is to follow Jesus.

The Sixth Commandment

Violence vs. Shalom

Although the family is the basic unit of every society, the prohibition against murder is the basic *law* of every society. Historically, the move to civil life is signaled by the abandonment of vendetta cycle and the development of public means to settle disputes without recourse to privately executed violence. Only by eschewing murder can we live together, prosper, and grow as a community. Of course, civil societies remain quite violent, as the society itself is invested with the authority to take life. And so the distinction between killing and murder is operative here. The ancient Israelites knew of this distinction and could express it in the Hebrew language. The sixth commandment prohibits murder, not killing. This is not meant to excuse violence but to put it in its place.

The positive form of the sixth commandment is peace, in the full biblical sense of the word. The Hebrew word *shalom* means much more than the absence of violence. One could avoid armed conflict and still fall short of shalom. Shalom is abundant life, the fulfillment of the blessing promised in God's covenant with his people. Shalom is fulfilled in Jesus Christ and will be revealed when he returns in glory. In the meantime, shalom breaks in from time to time. Christians ought to be on the vanguard of shalom wherever and whenever it breaks in. In concrete terms, that means going the extra mile and turning the other cheek. Whether the non-violent practices Jesus calls from his disciples imply a negative prohibition on *all* violence is an age-old debate worthy of attention. All that needs to be said here is that God is ushering in a kingdom of peace and life, and so Christian reflection on the just use of force should take into account the where the story is heading, both in choosing whose side to take in a conflict and how one goes about defend their cause.

The Seventh Commandment

Adultery vs. Faithfulness

The prohibition against murder gets a civil society up and running, but the prohibition against adultery is crucial for sustaining economic life. I use the term "economy" both with reference to its root meaning "household" and for its current fiscal connotations. In societies both ancient and modern, adultery is expensive. It costs too much and is a drain on individual families and the

society at large. And I'm not just talking about the emotional costs. Adultery adds new relational bonds to already existing ones and therefore drains the resources from a family. Divorce as an apparent alternative to adultery either throws the woman into poverty and prostitution, as in ancient societies, or feeds the blackhole of legal beauracuries, as in modern societies. Adultery is too expensive to be worth it in the end. Most societies figure this out and prudently prohibit it. The loosening of such restraints is certainly *not* a sign of progress, but of regress.

The stakes are even higher for the people of God, who are called to be a light to the nations, bearing witness to God's faithfulness. Although the fifth and sixth commandments are basic for community life, the seventh commandment gets to the heart of Christian living before a watching world. The positive form of the seventh commandment is the call to faithfulness, which corresponds to the faithfulness of and to God with which the decalogue begins. A faithful spouse images God's faithfulness to his people. Throughout Scripture, God consistently uses the imagery of spousal faithfulness and adultery to reveal his covenant and character. This pattern is continued in the New Testament in terms of Christ and his church, of which marriage between a man and a woman is a great "mystery" or "sacrament." Christians are positively called to live lives of marital faithfulness as signs of God's faithfulness. And this call is extended to all Christians, as those who do enter into marriage covenant are equally responsible to bear witness to God's faithfulness by their chastity. Again, as with the sixth commandment, the positive form of the command is not necessarily absolute in character. So we can debate the appropriate conditions for separation and divorce. But all such discussion should take place within the context of the call to be faithful to one another as God has been faithful to us.

The Eighth Commandment

Theft vs. Generosity

Obviously, a society cannot function without respect for people's stuff. If you take my stuff, then I won't have what I need and will likely take someone else's stuff, and then before you know it a society spins out of control. From a certain point of view, the prohibition against stealing is just an extension of the logic of the prohibition against murder beyond the body to one's possessions. Although in some sense I am my body, in another sense I have my body. It is my most prized possession, and to murder me is to steal my body from me. This is reflected in our language: "He took her life." The rest of my possessions are extensions of my body: the food by which I sustain my life, the shelter by which I protect my body, etc. To steal my possessions is an affront to my bodily life, my existence in its spatial dimension. Ask anyone who has had their house robbed and they will tell you that they feel violated. Respecting one another's space and stuff is crucial for healthy communal life.

But respecting other's stuff and protecting mine is not enough. In fact, if only the negative aspect of this command is obeyed, one can easily become a vicious person: withdrawn, miserly, and possessive. The positive import of the eighth commandment is not "the right to private property," but the call to generosity. When children grab at other toys, we do not simply tell them to respect other kid's stuff, but to share. Jesus put this call to generosity bluntly. The rich young man who had obeyed all the commandments including this one was told by Jesus to sell all he had and give it to the poor. It is good not to steal; it is better to give. In fact, generosity is the most potent means of preventing theft. If we do all we can to support those in need, then we help to remove the conditions under which theft becomes necessary. These conditions will never be fully removed until the great shalom of the coming kingdom, but that it no reason to be conduits of grace and

peace in the meantime. Generosity is the concrete form of that grace and peace which we are called to give our neighbor.

The Ninth Commandment

Falsehood vs. Truthfulness

The civility sustained by the previous prohibitions is quickly undermined without a just public forum for settling disputes. Instead of reclaiming one's honor through revenge, one seeks the mediation of third parties. In the life and times of ancient Israel, disputes were settled by the elders of the community who sat at the gates of the cities. Hence the prophetic call to "establish justice in the gate." Prophets, priest and kings also participated in the ancient justice system. But the whole process of third-party mediation is spoiled by those who bear false witness. Justice that is bought is not true justice. The original judicial context of the ninth commandment cannot be ignored. Certainly a wider prohibition on lying can be teased out, but the focus here is the strict prohibition of perjury. Those who purger themselves undermine justice, which is the very means by which a civil society is sustained. Falsehood destroys community.

The positive aspect of this commandment is initially quite obvious: tell the truth. Both in the courts and in life in general, bear true witness. Tell the story the way it happened. Tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Be forthright with your friends and enemies. Let your yes be yes and your no, no. Cultivating the virtue of truthfulness and the art of speaking the truth in love enables all other communal virtues to flourish. This whole line of thinking is true and good, but this is one more twist that a Christian must introduce here. The language of "witness" in the New Testament and in Christian theology moves beyond the courtroom and becomes a rich metaphor for the word and deed of Christian ministry. "You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth." For Christians, the call to bear true witness brings with it not only the general virtue of truthfulness but also the particular task of telling the gospel story, of sharing one's testimony to the work of God in Christ. Without abandoning one's communal duties and virtues, the ultimate fulfillment of the ninth commandment is evangelism.

The Tenth Commandment

Covetousness vs. Contentment

With the tenth and final commandment we return to matters of the heart. The concrete forms of the command to love God in the first table of the law were preceded by the general command to have no other gods before him. The concrete forms of the command to love your neighbor in the second table of the law are completed by the general command not to covet. Just as unfaithfulness is the root of all failures to love the Lord your God with your all, so covetousness is the root of all failures to love your neighbor as yourself. When love of self triumphs over love of neighbor, there you have covetousness. We do not wish our neighbor well, but want what they have. And so we reach out to grab it, and thereby break one or more of the other commandments of the second table. The decalogue displays its deep wisdom in not only prohibiting violence, adultery, theft and falsehood, but also forbidding the root cause of these violations of community. The tenth commandment explicitly forbids the covetousness that leads to adultery (by referencing the neighbor's wife) and theft (by referencing the neighbor's house, servants, animals, etc.). But we all know that much murder comes from envious rage and that much false witness is a result of bribery. And so nearly all the commandments of the second table have their root cause in covetousness.

The focus on root causes is a theme in Jesus' own teaching and commentary on the law. In the so-called antitheses of the sermon on the mount, Jesus contrasts mere avoidance of sin with actively rooting out the causes of sin (Matthew 5). This trajectory within Jesus' teaching can be read as a re-interpretation of the whole law through the lens of the tenth commandment. It is not insignificant that the language of "neighbor" so dear to Jesus appears explicitly for the first time in the tenth commandment. For here we get to the heart of neighbor love. It is no coincidence that Jesus' taught more against worrying than any other topic, for contentment is the road to rooting out the destructive forces of covetousness. The opposite of covetousness is contentment: taking joy in what I do have rather than keeping up with the Joneses. Just as covetousness leads to the destruction of community, so contentment leads to the flourishing of community. If I am content and not worried about tomorrow, then I will not only avoid theft but generously give of my resources to others. If I am content with my relationships, then I will not only avoid adultery but also be faithful to my spouse with joy. If I am content with my status, I will not only not be tempted by bribery to perjure myself but also be forthright about who I am and what I have. If I am content with my life, I will not only quell the rage that leads to murder but also begin to experience shalom in my own life. Contentment roots out vice that destroys community and implants virtue that sustains community. And so contentment is the heart of neighbor love.

Conclusion:

"And the Greatest of these is Love."

We have chosen to end this series of catechetical reflections with our love of God and neighbor as it comes to expression in our joyful obedience to the ten commandments. Such a choice is not meant to merely "tack on" some practical, ethical implications onto the work of theology. Rather, we have ended here because this is the end for which God made us. God made us to love him and love one another. Love is where the whole story is headed. The positive picture of community painted in the ten commandments is a foretaste of the kingdom of God. The coming kingdom will be a time and place of worship, rest, honor, shalom, fellowship, grace, truth and joy. We are called to live in light of where we are going. The just shall live by faith: on the basis of what God has done for us in Christ. And we are justified in hope: praying for and waiting on the hope set before us. Between faith and hope is love, by which we have fellowship with God and each other. Faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love. For when the kingdom comes, faith will become sight and hope will be satisfied. But love remains. Love never fails. Begin to live a life of love, joyfully obeying the law of law and thereby fulfill all the law and prophets. Become now who you will be revealed to be in Christ when he returns. Love the Lord your God with your all and love your neighbor as yourself, and thereby become a foretaste and sign of the coming kingdom of God.

Any thoughts?

What is the relationship between the general laws of a civil society and the particular ethical guidelines of the Christian community?

What does it look like to bring honor to your family? In what sense does this entail obedience to parents?

How can we spread shalom today? What does that look like?

Do you agree that marital faithfulness is a central sign of divine faithfulness? Is this a sufficient theological reason for avoid adultery? What does this imply for divorce?

What are some concrete expressions of generosity and truthfulness that going the extra mile beyond avoidance of theft and lying?

Although they are matters of the heart, what concrete steps can one take to root out covetousness and cultivate contentment?

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