

## Lesson 26: Deuteronomy 5:17-21 Ten Commandments - Love your neighbor

### Introduction

In our last lesson we covered a large section of Deuteronomy, the 8 chapters of Deuteronomy 4-11. It is the first of two theological exhortation sections in the book. And as an overarching theme is a call to covenant obedience. Listen and love. Obey from your heart for this is life.

In this lesson, we are zooming in to consider only 5 verses. In this context of covenant obedience, we are focusing in on the ten commandments, actually we are focusing on the second half of the ten commandments in this lesson and the first half of the ten commandments in our next lesson.

We have already recognized in Torah law that at times the bar seems to be set quite low. That's true of the ten commandments. Taking this list as the bar for moral perfection, you might be doing pretty well. Now, let me ask you, "When was the last time you murdered somebody? Was it any time in the last week or have you made it through an entire month?" Have you ever heard anyone argue for their own good character this way, "Well, I've never killed anybody?"

"Really, you think that is the bar? God is so pleased with you because you have managed to make it through life so far without killing anybody? That's God's standard for good behavior?"

I can imagine applying that with the next command. "Hey, honey, I'm home. And guess what? You will be really pleased with me. I did not commit adultery one time today." Is that the bar my wife sets on our marriage?

"On a scale from 1-10, as long as he does not commit adultery, I guess we are at a 10. We're doing good."

No. Of course the bar is higher. We have already talked about two significantly different functions of Torah law. The Mosaic Covenant defines the people of God as a geo-political entity. Israel is to function as a nation. Therefore, Israel needs a civil code. God gives them a code based on his moral character, but the objective of the code is not to demand God's full moral will. As a civil code, Torah operates as a low bar to minimize the effects of sin and to bring about order in society. The penal code does not apply at all to those who fail to do good. Failure to do good is not criminally punished. The penal code is for those who choose to do bad. As long as you are a decent person, you manage to fulfill this civil function of the Torah pretty well.

But the Torah is not merely a civil code. Torah law also functions as a call to a much higher standard. We see this in other commands, such as do not covet, that's not so easy; love your God with all you're your heart, soul, and might; love your neighbor; love the foreigner among you; be holy as God is holy.

The ten commandments serve as a moral paradigm for the whole covenant law. And yet, the ten commandments are mostly expressed in the extreme negative form. It is designed to be enforceable. The civil function to minimize sin and bring about order is most apparent in the ten commandments. We have to look closer to understand how these ten general commandments also serve in calling us to the highest of moral standards.

We are going to take our cue from Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 5-7, Jesus provides us with an interpretative approach for understanding the ten commandments as a moral continuum. There is a lot in the Sermon on the Mount. I get excited about the thought of investigating these chapters more deeply, but I am going to hold myself back and limit myself to points that I believe will help us to rightly interpret how the ten commandments operate as a paradigm for all moral command.

Jesus specifically addresses Torah commands in 5:21-48. He begins with the commands against murder and adultery. Which is why we are starting with those commands of murder and adultery. If we back out a little and look at both sides of this section, we pick up on the fact that Jesus is framing his message in opposition to the morality of the pharisees. Let's back up to Matthew 5:13-16.

That is where Jesus says, you need to be salt and light. People should see you and see a difference. We encountered the same idea in our last lesson in Deuteronomy 4:6-8. Pursue righteousness as a witness to God. This means your righteousness should be visible for others to see, a light on a hill.

How are we salt? How are we light? What does that look like? Well, Jesus says in Matthew 5:17,

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

We are going to come back to what Jesus means by fulfilling the law. But he set this conversation in terms of the law. And for now, let's move on to what he says about the pharisees three verses later in 5:20,

For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

That is a hard saying for the Jews listening to Jesus, because the pharisees are known and respected as the religious party that advocates serious religious observance and real moral obedience. How can anybody hope to gain entry into the kingdom of heaven if that requires being even more righteous than the pharisees?

What's going on here is that Jesus is using the pharisees, the most prominent example of religious legalism, as a contrast to the moral vision he is teaching. Their moral vision is a legalistic vision by which a person enters the kingdom of God by attaining a high righteous standard. Later, in chapter 6, Jesus is going to come back to the morality of the pharisees by targeting their hypocrisy. A person who buys into a legalistic vision of morality loves to be recognized for long, spiritual prayers, for giving to the poor, for fasting, for whatever practices are recognized by others as honorable and spiritual.

Jesus creates a contrast here with his words about salt and light. Earlier, he said be seen. You are to be a light. You are to be visible. Now in chapter 6, he says, do it in secret. Healthy morality becomes apparent in the way people live and treat each other. Legalism uses ritual and morality as a way to build up the self. In providing a way by which human beings attain their own righteousness, legalism promotes pride and boasting. You have done it. You have achieved it. You are good by your own works. Hypocrisy becomes a huge temptation in the legalistic system because your identity and sense of importance is based on your own attainment of righteousness, and it is affirmed when others recognize how righteous you are. There is a contrast between the works of righteousness done by the legalist whose hope is to earn recognition from God and recognition from man, and the works of righteousness promoted by Jesus which bring honor to God who is working through his people. That kind of morality is supposed to be seen as a light. It is attractive.

Jesus has a high vision of righteousness, but it is not based on human achievement. Jesus began his Sermon on the Mount with the beatitudes. This is the first thing he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit..." Is the legalist poor in spirit? No, in his eyes he is rich in spirit. He does not love much because he does not believe he needs to be forgiven of much. Jesus next says, "Blessed are those who mourn..." Over what do they mourn? They mourn over their poverty of spirit. They recognize they are poor in spirit, so they mourn. The woman who came into the house of the pharisee weeping and washing Jesus' feet with her tears, she mourned at the poverty of her own soul, at the awareness of her own sinfulness. She washed Jesus' feet. She felt dirty. She was cleaned by Jesus. She was forgiven much, so she loved much. We do not feel the need for a savior, and we do not feel the need for grace, until we realize the poverty of our own spirit to the degree that we begin to mourn over our sinful state. If you are satisfied in your religiosity, you do not need grace.

Jesus goes on, "Blessed are the meek." And that is not the same thing as weak. It is better understood as humble. Those who recognize their poverty and mourn, they are the ones who bow down humbly before their king. The woman who washed his feet with her tears was meek. She was humble. She was not standing on her own pride. That is in contrast to the legalist who boasts of their

righteousness. Next Jesus says, “blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.” The humble vision of faith that recognizes a need for a savior hunger and craves, the righteous vision of God. This is not desiring righteousness for self-satisfaction or to build up one’s own identity. This is a hunger after God. This is a hungering to be like God, to walk with God, to live for God. It begins with recognizing how poor you are in spirit, by mourning over that poverty, by becoming meek and humble enough to receive grace, and from that there becomes a desire, a craving for righteousness.

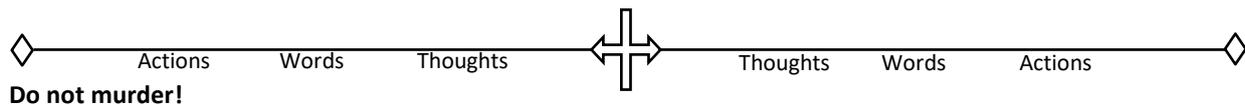
Jesus attacks the pharisees at the point of righteousness. It is the same place that any legalistic system must be attacked, whether Jewish legalism or Christian legalism. or Muslim legalism. “You say that a person must be holy to enter the kingdom of God. We agree. And that person’s holiness must surpass any human system of righteousness that you have set up. Whatever you think is righteous enough, you’ve got to go past that. It’s got to go beyond what the pharisees think righteousness truly is.” The legalist needs to see that the standard is so high that it cannot be reached. That’s how Jesus ends chapter 5. “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect.” That is a hopeless statement if perfection is required for acceptance. It is an acceptable vision if we are already accepted. I can pursue perfection without fear or worry of not attaining it, if my acceptance is not based on attaining perfection.

So, to understand what Jesus is saying to the pharisees, we have to recognize that both questions of covenant are at play any time we talk about human righteousness. Your righteousness cannot surpass that of the pharisees. That is the point. There will be no place for boasting and no need for hypocrisy. You can be vulnerable and real before God, because the first question of covenant is not answered at all by your human achievement. Perfection is required. Perfection must be given. Remember the first question of covenant, “What makes me acceptable or righteous enough to be in relationship with holy God?” And Jesus’ answer is going to agree with the law and the prophets. As we have seen through our series, the law teaches that our acceptability is based 100% on the grace of God. Human legalism cannot get us there. That is a wrong view of the law. The monuments of grace in Torah law are all fulfilled in Jesus: God walking through the covenant sacrifice in Genesis 15, God passing over houses marked by the blood of the lamb in Exodus 12, God providing the blood of a goat to cover mercy seat of the ark of the covenant and another goat to carry sin away from the camp in Leviticus 16, God raising the curse on a pole in Numbers 21 and giving salvation to anyone who looks at it. Each one of these ceremonial symbols points to our need for someone to take our place. It points to Jesus. They point to the cross. This is the way your righteousness exceeds that of the pharisees. Because you receive it as a gift of grace. You receive it by faith. You receive the righteousness of Christ.

When we turn to the second question of covenant, we realize that there is another way in which Jesus fulfills the law and the prophets. Jesus’ moral vision is not one of legalism. At the same time, it is also not one of no law. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, in 7:23, Jesus is going to say to those who come claiming his name, “Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.” Lawlessness in the Greek is the word *anomia*, which is literally, “without law.” While grace does reject legalism, grace does not advocate the way of *anomia* or no law. As Paul put it in Romans 7:6, the moral vision of Christ is a call to the new way of the Spirit. It is a way of obedience based on the moral vision of God. The second question of covenant asks, “How then shall I live, now that I am in relationship with God?” Jesus gives us a call to righteousness grounded on the fact that we have already been accepted into relationship with God by grace. We can accept the call to a high standard of righteousness because whether we fully achieve that standard or not has no affect on our acceptance, our identity, our worth, our security. We have all that in Christ by grace. So, the righteousness of Christ becomes a vision to strive towards, not a standard to be judged by.

So, recognizing the context of the Sermon on the Mount includes both a call to faithful obedience and also a rejection of the pharisees’ legalism, let’s now begin with Jesus’ interpretation of commandment number six, the first commandment of this lesson, “Do not murder.”

## The Ten Commandments as a moral paradigm



### Do not murder!

To clarify, murder is not the same thing in God's eyes as taking a life, not quite. God commands the death penalty as part of civil law in the Torah. God allows for death that may come from self-defense against an intruder in one's own home that's Exodus 22:2-3. And God allows soldiers to kill in a just war. I am not going to get into the discussion about how those laws apply today. I am simply pointing out that even though the Hebrew word can be translated here, "Do not kill," the context of Torah law is quite clear that we have to make some distinction that allows for both capital punishment and self-defense. This commandment is rightly understood in the Exodus and Deuteronomy contexts, not as "Do not kill," but as "Do not murder." No individual citizen has the right to take someone else's life, except possibly in certain cases of self-defense.

So, what is murder? Murder is contempt for the life of another human being to the degree that you are willing to cut off that life for your own gain or pleasure. So, imagine yourself standing in the middle of a continuum, on a long straight path. And standing in the middle of the path, you look to your left, and down at the far end of the path you see the command, "Do not murder!" It is the extreme negative destination. And we tend to think of murder only in the sense of that extreme negative. But as soon as we turn down that path of contempt for the life of another person, whatever the form that contempt or that hatred reveals itself, we have committed the sin of murder. This is how Jesus puts it in Matthew 5:21-22,

<sup>21</sup> You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell.

Jesus begins with the civil idea of "You shall not murder." And if you murder you are liable before the court. And then he uses that same language of court, but he is raising it up to judgment day court. I mean, notice how strong this is. Jesus is not pulling any punches at all. If you are angry, you are guilty. If you call someone names or call someone a fool, you are guilty enough to go to hell. There is no softening this. "The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23)." If you take one step down the path of murder, then you have fallen short of the righteous standard of God. You must be judged guilty. You will be separated from God for ever.

I could ask you again, "How are you doing? Have you committed murder this year? This week? Today? Have you been angry? Have you shown contempt for another person's life? Have you called somebody, in your mind or out loud, stupid or worthless or bastard or bitch? Have you done it in your mind? Jesus starts with anger. This is an internal moral state. If you have taken that step in your mind, you may not even have spoken the words out loud, but if you express contempt in your mind, if you rolled around in your head the choice words you want to say, then, according to Jesus, you have broken the law of murder.

Thank you, God for the cross! What hope is there without the cross? Without Jesus taking our place of death, we have no hope, no hope. Thank you that right now we are no longer talking about the first question of covenant, that you have got us covered in grace, that we are saved by the blood of Jesus. We do not stand at the judgment seat, but you push us aside. And you take the stand for us. And we are not judged according to our ritual or according to our morality, but we are judged by grace, that we stand in the grace of Jesus and have the righteousness of Jesus. Thank you that we are right now talking about the second question of covenant and not the first question of covenant. The pharisees need to hear this, because they need to be convicted. The legalist needs to be convicted.

The Christian who thinks we are saved by some kind of righteousness needs to be convicted. You need to know that if you have had any anger in your heart or your mind then you are guilty of the fires of hell. And if you don't get that, then you do not have the right poverty of spirit. You do not understand how poor you are. And you have not begun to mourn. And you have not become meek. And you do not hunger and thirst after the righteousness of God. And you will not be filled. If you do not get that.

But if you have placed your faith in Christ. And received his grace. Then we are not talking about the first question of covenant. You are not made acceptable by your ability to not murder in your mind. We are now talking about the second question of covenant, not the first. And we are free to truly consider the call of Christ to live in obedience. And yes, we have remorse. We are sorry for our anger. We are sorry when our minds let go. But no, we do not have fear. "For there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1)." We stand secure in him, not on our own righteousness. We are not pursuing morality as a standard we must achieve. We are pursuing morality as right relationship with our Lord and as the right way to experience the abundance of human life.

Human life is not experienced through hate. Hate is an aspect of human death. Human life is not to show contempt for other human beings who bear the image of God. No matter how fallen and broken and sinful, every human being bears the dignity of our Creator's image.

The path on the road of murder begins with thoughts, it moves to words, and it comes forth in action, and, only in the most extreme cases, ends in the snuffing out of physical life. But as parents, teachers, colleagues, bosses, friends, neighbors, whenever we communicate with cutting, judgmental, condescending voices we suppress life, we show contempt for life, we snuff out life, we take away life.

I know as a parent that I have a life-stealing edge to my voice. I communicate disappointment, maybe not with the words, but with my tone. I communicate, "You do not live up. You disappoint me. You are not good enough. You are not smart enough. You are not a good child." With my tone, I communicate not that "I am disappointed in your behavior," but "I am disappointed in you." And that steals life. And I can do that even without speaking. I can do that with my creased brow and stern look. Some parents are great at communicating through silence, judgmental, disappointed, contemptuous silence.

Jesus teaches that murder starts in the mind with our thoughts, then moves outwardly with words of gossip and slander, and contempt and judgmentalness and then to action, spitting, biting, hitting. It is a continuum, it's a path.

So, now we can come back and ask, "Is God satisfied with me if I avoid murder in my thoughts, words, and actions?" Is this the higher bar that we are called to pursue? Well, I would say that God is pleased that you are resisting those things. And you are trying not to think thoughts of death or use words that steal life or actions that steal life. So, yes, God is pleased with that. But he is not satisfied if you only resist the bad side of the continuum. Christianity is not primarily about avoiding negative action, but rather, about pursuing positive action. We stand in the middle of the continuum. And we look to our left and see murder. And moving down the path in that direction is broken relationship and corruption and hurt and death. And when you turn to the right and you set your back on murder, you turn your back on the corruption of sin, you are facing the good, and what do you see? If physical murder is the extreme negative end of the continuum, what behavior do you think lies at the extreme positive end? What are we being called towards? What would you say? What is the opposite of "Do not murder?"

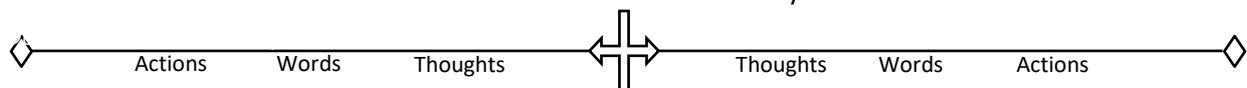
The most common response I get to that question is, "Love. Love is the opposite of murder." And that's good. But I want to get a little more specific. I am going to go with Jesus' words in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." If at the extreme negative end of the continuum a person shows so much contempt for another life that they remove

that life for their own benefit, then at the extreme positive is the person who cares so much that they are willing to give up their own life to preserve another person's life.

The negative side of the continuum is the taking of life through thoughts, words and actions. The positive side is the giving of life through thoughts, words and actions. As Paul wrote, in Ephesians 4:29, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." These are words of life. Give words of life. Cut out the biting sarcasm, and the judgmental tone, the put downs, angry accusations, passive aggressive Facebook posts. Choose to speak life.

And before the words, it begins in the mind. Chose how you will mentally think about other people. Whether you are thinking about your spouse, your children, your colleagues, members of opposing political parties, other drivers on the road, fellow students, neighbors, you have to start with your mind. And the words come up, they just come up, "stupid, good-for-nothing, lazy, hurtful, foolish, corrupt, that idiot" and you have to battle those words in your mind. I suggest that you start by claiming these truths about that other person, when you are tempted towards contempt say this, "he is the image of God, created by God, loved by God, atoned for by God." Every person you will ever meet has the extreme dignity of having been created in the image of God and having been loved by God to the degree that God laid down his own life for that person. Jesus already died for them. And you can say in your mind about every person you meet, "God made you, Christ died for you." And in that they have dignity. And they deserve your respect. Yes, they are broken. Yes, they are sinful. Yes, some of those negative words apply to their behavior. But that does not give you the right to define a person according to that behavior. They may be that, but they are more than that. And God has called you to love. And love begins with speaking words of life in your mind about the other person.

Let's move on to the next commandment. Do not commit adultery.



**Do not commit adultery!**

We are standing again in the middle of a path. Looking to one end of the path, and we see the sin of adultery.

Jesus speaks to this commandment next in Matthew 5:27-30,

<sup>27</sup> You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; <sup>28</sup> but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup> If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.

Again, Jesus speaks quite strongly about hell. One step down this path in the wrong direction leads to eternal condemnation. And again, we need to remember the context. In part, Jesus is here attacking the religious legalism of the pharisees. If you really accept a vision of the law as a standard that qualifies you as righteous enough to enter the kingdom of heaven, then your righteousness must surpass even that of the pharisees. If you want to stand on law instead of grace for your acceptance before God, then let's really consider what holiness is. What is the standard? According to Jesus you will be held accountable for the sin that begins in your mind. If you lust in your heart for a man or woman who is not your spouse, then you have committed the sin of adultery. But again, we say thank you God for the cross. Thank you that, unlike a religious legalist, we are not talking about the first question of covenant. And so, we are not afraid that our sin will send us to hell. We are not talking about achieving our own standard of righteousness. We would be without hope. Instead, we

recognize that we have been made acceptable by the grace of Jesus. We are declared righteous as a gift of faith. So, for us, we are talking about the righteousness of the second question of covenant, "Having been accepted by grace, how then shall we live?" Give us your vision Jesus for how we should live, so that we might pursue that life.

Now, as we move on, we need to make a distinction here between the sin nature and sin. I have a sin nature. Something in me is broken. I have desires and thought patterns that run contrary to the goodness of God. Because of that, sinful images and ideas pop into my mind on a regular basis, whether we are talking about sexual sin or the sin of murder and hate. Contemptuous, judgmental thoughts enter my mind without me doing anything to bring them there. So do sexual thoughts. That is my sin nature. It might even be Satan using my sin nature, but I am not going to focus on Satan right now. My own sin nature is enough of a culprit to explain those thoughts. That is me. I have to own it. I am not basically good. I am fallen and broken. On the other hand, I am not essentially my sin nature. I know I am not, because when I enter into the kingdom of God my physical body will be glorified and this body of sin I have right now will be done away with. My sin nature will be gone, and I will still be me. So, it is not essential to who I am. But it is my present reality, my reality before heaven. And so, I have to own it.

Sin is different from the thoughts that pop out because of my sin nature. Sin is what I do with those initial desires and thoughts after they rise up in my mind. It is not the initial desires and thoughts. That is just my sin nature. But if I do anything with that, then I have committed sin. If I see a sexy image online or a pretty woman walking down the street, and chemical urges rise up in me and flashing in my mind inappropriate images, then it is at that moment I have a choice to make. That is where I can engage in the battle in my mind. It is what I do with those thoughts that will constitute whether I sin or not. If I choose to keep staring. If I choose to feed on those images. If I chose to play out a fantasy in my mind. If I chose to think about that woman as an object of sexual gratification, then, according to Jesus, I have committed adultery.

What do I do then? Well, I confess it immediately, thank God for his forgiveness, and ask him to dwell in my heart and my mind through the power of the Holy Spirit. I also replace those thoughts with true thoughts. As with the temptation toward hate, I find it very helpful to claim the dignity of the woman I am looking at. Well, first I stop looking. But if it is a woman I am around for any reason, then I remind myself of the truth about that woman. She is a daughter of Eve created in the image of God with the dignity and goodness of God. She is not an object of gratification. She is a person for whom Christ died. She is mind and soul.

But even more importantly, I turn my thoughts to God. I do not want my thoughts to dwell on a woman who is not my wife, even if I am speaking truth about her to myself. I might do that quickly but then I change my thoughts to think about the glory and goodness of God. I remind myself who I serve. I remind myself that my greatest aim is to love him and serve him and bring him glory with my life. That's how I engage the battle of my thoughts. I don't just dwell on the sin. I seek thoughts of God. I seek to turn towards a greater desire. For me, when I was younger, the struggle to reject sexual thoughts was more difficult and often took a lot longer. Now, it is really momentary. The thoughts comes up, I address the battle in my mind, and I quickly move on.

Standing on the path, few men or women look to the end of physical adultery and think, "I would like to ruin my marriage today. And while I am at it, I will shoot for making my kids hate me." Nobody starts with that. You don't start with good relationship and just dive into the end. It starts with a series of small steps down the path. It starts in the thought life. It moves to words and actions, to time on the internet looking at pornography or to working things out so that you spend more time alone at work with a particular person. It moves to a touch here or there. There are justifications all along the way. There is a silent battle. And if anything is shared with a friend, it is not usually shared with a Christian friend. The adulterer, the person going down this road, making these small steps, avoids that kind of person. If anything is said, it is said to someone sure to affirm the justifications

already going on in the mind. And then it finally happens. And you have that thought, “How did I get here? But you know exactly how you got there. You got there through a series of small steps bolstered by silent self-justifications.

From a biblical point of view, adultery is not only committed by a married person having sex with someone other than their spouse. Any time you engage in sexual activity with a person who is not your spouse, you are engaging in sexual activity with someone’s potential future spouse. Not only are you sinning against God and against your own body, you are sinning against that person’s future husband or future wife. And you are sinning against your future husband or your future wife. You are storing up images in your mind that you will eventually take with you into your future marriage bed.

The biblical call to sexual holiness is a call to reserve sex for marriage. And marriage is defined as a union between a man and a woman. We have covered that idea already in the law of Moses. It is a vision that continues through the prophets and through the New Testament.

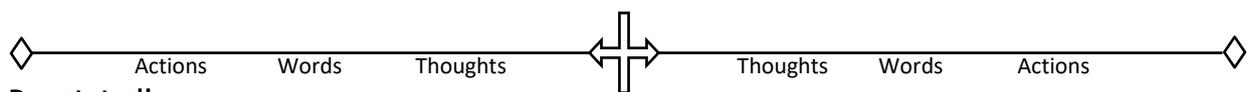
Now again, as with murder, Christianity is not primarily about not doing. The biblical moral vision calls us to turn our backs on adultery but then turn towards a vision of life, that includes sexual intimacy in marriage. We need to turn our eyes towards the other direction of the continuum. So, when we turn our backs on adultery and look up the path to the other end, what is the positive extreme on the other side of the continuum? What is the opposite of “Do not commit adultery?”

I like Ephesians 5:25 as a positive opposite, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” How did Christ love the church? Well, he died for her. This is very similar to the positive opposite of our first command, “Do not murder, but instead show love by giving up your life.” But instead of giving up your life for a friend, it is specifically applied to the marriage relationship, giving up your life for your spouse.

And even though, as a man, I sometimes dream about the glory of diving in front off a bullet to save my damsel in distress, Brenda assures me that she would prefer the everyday giving up of my life over the moment of glory giving up my life. It is a giving up your life by taking out the trash, engaging in the partnership of marriage. It includes taking lead in the spiritually environment in the home. For the woman it includes showing respect and holding back negative words, especially in public. It is a giving up of one’s own desires in the moment to benefit the life of your spouse.

Paul goes on to describe the husband’s role in Ephesians 5 as seeking the holiness and sanctity of his wife, seeking her growth in Christ, her walk with God, supporting her as she is increasingly conformed into the image of Christ. Paul reminds the husband that this is life. It may feel like your giving up your life, but in the end, it is a gain of life. You are one body with your wife. And as you give up selfish desires, you really are promoting your own good as you experience marriage the way God designed marriage to be experienced. In your thoughts, in your words, and in your actions, delight in your wife and seek her good; delight in your husband and seek his good.

If you are dating this should also be your goal, the good of the person you are dating, that they might continue to grow into the image of Christ. You are loving them and preparing them in the purity of a romantic friendship for relationship with their future spouse, whether that future spouse is you or whether you will be handing them off to another brother or sister in Christ.



**Do not steal!**

In Matthew 5, Jesus does not continue on with the rest of the ten commandments after addressing “Do not murder.” and “Do not commit adultery.” But we can continue on, following his lead. I spent a lot of time on these first two commandments in order to establish the pattern.

For every commandment we can imagine ourselves standing on a path with an extreme negative at one end and a positive opposite at the other end. In both directions, the continuum moves from thoughts to words to actions. We walk with God by turning our back to the negative end, to

corruption and death and by turning toward the positive end, fixing our eyes, on health and life. Morality for us is not a standard to achieve. Morality is a vision to pursue. And ultimately it is Jesus standing there at the end of the path. He is our vision for life. We pursue him by pursuing life according to his vision.

Having set this pattern, I will move more quickly through the next three commandments, starting with “Do not steal.”

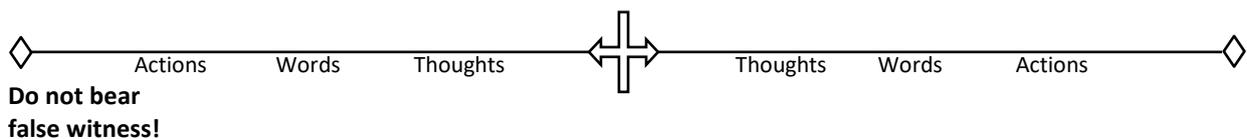
Stealing involves property. It is making a claim on something that is not rightly mine to claim. The claim begins with desiring and taking in the mind. Then it moves into words, voicing a claim on something that does not belong to me. It ends up with the action of stealing. Stealing takes a range of forms, taking property from a person or from a store, pirating software or music, cheating on taxes, taking supplies from the workplace without asking, not returning money when you notice a clerk has given you the wrong change. Simply put, taking what is not legally yours is stealing.

Turning out backs on that, what would you say is the positive opposite of “Do not steal?”

If you said, “Give,” I agree. I like how Paul states it in Ephesians 4:28,

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need.

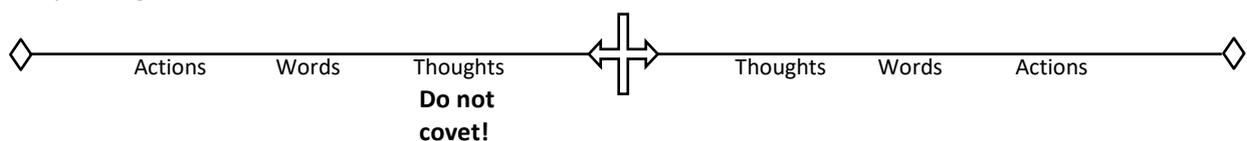
Giving begins in the mind when we consider ourselves as a steward. What I have has been given to me by God to use in taking care of my family, in building his kingdom, and in caring for people in need. We think in our minds how to help people in need. We advocate with our words. And we give from our own property. We work, in part, so that we might give.



The next command “Do not bear false witness.” often gets shortened to “Do not lie.” The commandment is more specific than that. “Do not bear false witness” commands against providing false statements in a court of law. As we look down the negative direction of the continuum to that extreme act of standing up in court and lying falsely to the harm of someone else, we can imagine other steps along the way, like lying to a neighbor or parent or teacher or speaking falsely about God.

If the negative extreme is lying as a witness, then we might consider the positive extreme as speaking the truth when called to witness. But the positive side requires a positive moral action. It is not only speaking truth when required by law to do so but taking the initiative to speak up even when not required to do so. And it includes speaking the truth for the sake of justice even when it brings opposition or persecution.

I like God’s words to Paul when he faced opposition in Corinth. I think they go well with this command, the positive aspect of this command. God told Paul in Acts 18:9, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent.”



Our final commandment, the fifth for this lesson, but the tenth overall, is unique among all the commandments. “Do not covet” is a command of the heart and mind. It is not enforceable in the civil code. It points to the higher call to morality that we have been considering. Not only does God hold individuals accountable for murder, adultery, theft or false witness, all outward actions that can be opposed by a written legal code, but God also held those living under the Old Covenant accountable

to internal morality. We see that with love the Lord you God will all your heart, mind, soul and strength. We see that with love your neighbor. We are accountable to that inward reality that leads to outward action. And we also see it here in the ten commandments with do not covet.

This is a longer law. Let's read it in full, Deuteronomy 5:21,

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field or his male servant or his female servant, his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

To covet is to desire for yourself what does not belong to you. We can imagine the heart of coveting at the beginning of each of the other negative continuums. It is not the only heart motive that leads to wrong action, but it is a very common heart motive. Why does the man murder or commit adultery or steal or stand up to bear false witness? All too often, he does so out of a coveting heart. It is a primary motive of the human heart, a corruption of the human heart that leads to other sins. Man wants something that is not his. Think of King David. What heart motive lead him to the sins of adultery and murder and false witness?

When we turn our backs on coveting and turn towards the positive side of the continuum, we turn towards thankfulness, a heart of gratitude. If my heart is full of gratitude for what God has given me, then I am not focused on what I do not have. So, that's got us faced in the right direction, gratitude or thankfulness. But what is that positive opposite on the extreme positive side of "Do not covet?" I think of Romans 12:15, "Rejoice with those who rejoice." And my wife Brenda is my model for this.

If you were ever to come and tell me that you had just won an all expense paid trip to Hawaii for your whole family, I know exactly what my initial thought would be. "I want that. I want to go to Hawaii. Why don't I ever get free stuff like that?" Brenda's first response would be to jump up and down with you in excitement over the fact that you are going to Hawaii for free. She is not thinking about herself at all. She is rejoicing with you. Not only are we called to be thankful and satisfied with what we have, even further, we are called to rejoice with others for the blessings that they have received

### **Conclusion**

We are at the end. That was the last of the ten commandments. Let's sum up the moral vision of Jesus.

One of the challenges in sharing the gospel with other people is that non-Christians hear grace as freedom to sin, whereas, Christians hear grace as freedom from sin. The difference when we think about our continuum is that the sinful heart wants to get as close as possible to the sin side without crossing the line, while the heart that seeks God, turns its back on sin and heads in the other direction, seeing the pursuit of good as equivalent to the pursuit of life.

One of the reasons that this is so hard to explain to people, is that true faith is not merely intellectual assent. True faith requires God to do something in your heart. True faith is spiritual insight that comes from an opening of the eyes of your heart. When God opens the eyes of your heart, you begin to see things differently. So, when we look down the path towards murder and adultery and theft and false witness, covetousness, we begin to see broken and damaged relationships, emptiness, corruption, and death. Faith moves us to turn our backs on that death and to instead fix our eyes on Jesus. We are looking straight towards him. Our minds are being transformed to understand the moral vision of Christ. We are beginning to see that morality is not a standard by which we earn salvation or by which we are judged as Christians. Morality is God's vision of human life. Do you want to experience the abundant life that Jesus has promised, then obey the commandments out of a heart of love for God. The commandments do not point you along a narrow way by which you earn approval. The commandments point you along a narrow way by which you experience healing, fulfillment, life, Jesus. We are not turning our faces towards a moral standard. We are turning our faces towards life itself. We are fixing our eyes on Jesus and pursuing him, his way.

## Reflection Questions

1. Read the ten commandments listed in Deuteronomy 5:1-21. What stands out to you as interesting or confusing or important or strange?
2. Notice how the command “Do not covet,” stands out as different from the other commands. Why do you think this command of the heart is listed along with the other nine? What might be a possible reason?
3. Read Matthew 5:21-48. What stands out to you as interesting or confusing or important or strange?
4. Draw a continuum line with “Do not murder” at one end and “Lay down your life” at the other. List above the line moving from the center to the left “Thoughts,” “Words,” and “Actions.” And then from the center to the right, “Thoughts,” “Words,” and “Actions.” Then come up with a couple of examples for each heading both going down the negative side of the continuum, what are a couple of negative thoughts, a couple of negative words, a couple of negative actions that lie on the negative side toward murder. And then do the same for thoughts, words and actions on the positive side towards laying down your life. Use examples true to your own life. How has showing contempt worked out negatively in you? And how has giving life worked out positively in you?  
If you are in a group, discuss your answers with one another.
5. Do the same for a continuum line with “Do not commit adultery?”
6. If you have time, you can also try one or more of the remaining three commandments.
7. How would you describe the difference between trying to get right up as close to the sin side as possible versus turning your back on the sin side and pursuing life? Is that a helpful image or distinction for you? Why or why not?