

Lesson 27: Deuteronomy 5.1-16 Ten Commandments - Love God

Introduction

This is our second lesson focusing on the ten commandments. The list in Deuteronomy comes in 5:7-21. Here are the six verses that come before that. This is 5:1-6.

¹ Then Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: “Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully. ² The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. ³ The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, *with* all those of us alive here today. ⁴ The Lord spoke to you face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire, ⁵ *while* I was standing between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain. He said, ⁶ ‘I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.’

Deuteronomy is a series of speeches from Moses to the second generation out of Egypt. He calls out here to that generation, “Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking to you today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully.” It is a call to obedience.

This generation desperately needs to know who their God is, who they are, and what their mission is. That mission is to go take the land of Canaan. The sin of the Amorites has boiled over for 400 years. The time of their judgement has come. The time for Israel is now. But the mission is not only to enter the land and then live however they will, just as the people of that land have done for centuries. Israel has a moral mission. They are to be a kingdom of priests. They are to live out the will of God. They are to be a light for the surrounding peoples. They are to be a blessing to the nations.

In bringing this challenge to this generation, Moses says, “The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb [which is another name for Mt. Sinai]. The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, with all those of us alive here today.” That is an interesting declaration. God did make this covenant with their fathers. And all of this generation less than 40 years old were not yet born. Moses is not rewriting history. Moses is emphasizing to this generation that the covenant does not stop with the fathers. The covenant was not just for the fathers. The covenant applies to the generation that is alive right now. This is their history, their story, their present reality, they are the ones that must decide, “Do we own this covenant ourselves? Is this our covenant?”

Moses reminds them that God spoke on that mountain. The living God spoke to us. And Moses reminds them of the fear that people felt. And that he served as their mediator. He mediated, but the words of the law are God’s words. Our God is the God who speaks. Our God is the God who reveals himself who teaches us who he is, who we are, and how to live out the mission.

The moral vision of the ten commandment continues on to those of us who are now under the new covenant. We are the generation alive now. And Jesus, not Moses, has called us to love the Lord God by living in obedience to his commandments.

So, we are taking a closer look at the ten commandments. We started with commandments 6-10 in our last lesson. We turn to commandments 1-5 in this lesson.

The Numbering of the Ten Commandments

There is debate among various Jewish and Christian traditions on how to order the ten commandments, which commandments are 1-10?

The first potential difference comes from the Jewish Talmud which takes Deuteronomy 5:6 as commandment number 1, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” While taking this as the first commandment has the advantage of emphasizing the importance of this verse, an understanding of ancient near-eastern treaties indicates that verse 6 is better understood as a very brief covenant title and covenant prologue that proceed the covenant

stipulations. The title, “I am the Lord your God” (I am Yahweh, Elohim.) is followed by the short history or short prologue “who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.”

Verse 7 is written as an imperative in a form you would expect of the first covenant stipulation. “You shall have no other gods before Me.” That is the first actual command.

Another difference between traditions occurs with the decision of whether to understand verses 8-10 as part of verse 7 or as two separate commandments. Following Augustine, the Roman Catholic Church and Martin Luther understood these verses to be one long command. “You shall have no other Gods before me,” includes then, “You shall not make for yourself an idol.”

Combining these two commandments into one is going to leave us with only nine commandments. That brings us to a third difference. The typical way to still have ten commandments is to separate verse 21 into two different prohibitions against coveting. The ninth commandment becomes, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.” And the tenth commandment becomes, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s stuff.” “Stuff” is my summary for house, field, servants, ox, donkey, “or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.”

A major problem of separating coveting into two commandments comes when you look back at the wording of the same commandment in Exodus 20:17, the version given at Mt. Sinai, which does not start with coveting your neighbor’s wife. It starts with coveting your neighbor’s house, then wife, then possessions. This difference suggests that the prohibition really is against coveting and the list provides examples that can be ordered in different ways without changing the basic intent of the command. But if we do not divide coveting into two commandments then we also cannot group “no other gods” and “no idols.”

So, I am going with the numbering system recommended by the Septuagint, the Jewish scholar Philo, and later by John Calvin. This is the list most Protestants are aware of. And I think this numbering system fits best the biblical text. The commands, in summary form, are this,

1. Have no other gods before me.
2. Make no idols.
3. Do not take God’s name in vain.
4. Keep the Sabbath.
5. Honor your parents.
6. Do not murder.
7. Do not commit adultery.
8. Do not steal.
9. Do not bear false witness.
10. Do not covet.

We covered the second five in our previous lesson. We are covering the first five in this lesson. And we are looking at these ten commandments as a summary of the whole law, or as a paradigm for the moral law of God. Jesus summed up the whole not with ten commandments but with just two commandments. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind (Matthew 22:37).” And “You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39).” But these two commandments aren’t original in Matthew. Jesus quoted from the Pentateuch. The greatest commandment to love your God comes in our very next chapter right after the ten commandments. It is in Deuteronomy 6:5. And the command to love your neighbor comes from the moral holiness code in Leviticus 19:18.

These two commands sum up the whole of Torah. So, they must also sum up the summary of Torah. These two commandments sum up the ten commandments. And we see that fairly clearly. The first five commandments have to do with our vertical relationship with God. Love your God. How? First, by keeping these commandments. The last five commandments focus on our horizontal relationships with people. Love your neighbor. How? Well, by keeping these commandments.

We also recognized in our previous lesson that the keeping of those commandments, the last five that we addressed, does not appear that difficult at first. No murder, no adultery, no stealing, no lying in a court of law, and if we ignore the last one, we're good. But when we recognize that Torah law works both at the level of civil law, setting a lower bar, and also at the level of moral perfection, setting a very high bar, then we are forced to consider the ten commandments more closely. We took our cue in that last lesson from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount recording in Matthew 5-7. Jesus is not at all anti-law. Towards the beginning of the sermon in Matthew 5:17 Jesus declared, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." Then towards the end of the sermon in Matthew 7:12 Jesus says, "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

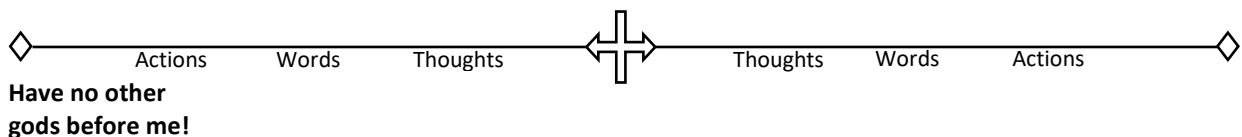
Jesus teaches us that the moral vision of the mosaic covenant flows right into the moral vision of the new covenant. And Jesus takes us into a closer look at the commandments, so that we can see with each commandment there is a moral continuum at work. It is like standing on a path and you can choose to turn in one direction or the other and you can move along that path towards one extreme or you can move along towards another extreme. Physically taking someone's life is the negative extreme of the command, "Do not murder." But Jesus teaches us that as soon as we move down the path in that direction in our mind, as soon as we begin to hate or embrace contempt for the life of another person, we are responsible for having committed murder. The path is a continuum towards the extreme action, a continuum that starts in the mind, and then it moves out to words, and then out to actions and then can end in something very extreme like actual murder.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus focused on identifying the sinful direction of the path. But understanding the other teachings of Jesus, we recognize that he is not just calling us to not do bad stuff. He is calling us to turn our backs on sin and death and to head the other way, in the positive direction. We are to fix our eyes on Jesus at the end of the path in the good direction. At the extreme positive end of that path we see this vision of a person who loves another so much that he would be willing to lay down his own life to protect or care for the life of another person. And that is the opposite of murder. And that is Jesus. That is exactly who Jesus is. The positive moral direction is also a continuum of protecting and giving life. It is not just an extreme event. But it is through our thoughts and through our words and through our actions that we are engaged in this positive moral command to give life to others.

So, in our previous lesson, we considered how the last five commandments all operate as a continuum or as a path. And we can choose to walk away from Jesus or towards Jesus. Those commandments give us a paradigm, a moral vision, for how we love our neighbor as ourself. This is what that looks like. This is how we fulfill the second great commandment.

And that teaching of Jesus has set up our model for how to interpret all of the ten commandments. So, now we are ready to turn to the first five commandments and to consider our relationship with God. How do we fulfill the first great commandment?

The Ten Commandments as a Moral Paradigm – Love God.



This is the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me." So, standing on the path, and turning to look down to that far end, we see a plethora of gods calling for our allegiance and worship, offering us identity, power, pleasure, and security. But we are told, "You shall have no other gods before me."

Let's think about what that means in the original context, "No other gods before me." In the ancient near east, the standard worldview adopted by every nation surrounding Israel included a primary

god as king with a pantheon of lesser gods surrounding that god. Whatever his name, whether it was Amun-Ra or Ashur or Marduk or Baal, the king of the gods sat on the throne and the other gods stood before that king as the royal court. The wording of this first commandment forbids the setting up of any pantheon to go along with Yahweh. So, it is not necessarily putting up other gods before God means a complete rejection of Yahweh, but it means establishing this whole pantheon of gods that we can go to, this whole plethora of sources that we can seek to fulfill our needs. Yahweh may be king, but we have set up this pantheon of gods surrounding him, that stand before him.

The Bible gives us a truly unique and counter-cultural vision of worship. In Deuteronomy 6:4 Moses calls out, "Hear, O Israel The Lord is our God, the Lord is one," just one, not a plethora. And in Deuteronomy 4:35, speaking about God's might in delivering Israel from Egypt, Moses tells the Israelites, "To you it was shown that you might know that the Lord, He is God; there is no other besides Him." To make the point clear, Moses says again four verses later in 4:39, "Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the Lord, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other." Moses needed to make that clear. The oneness of God, the uniqueness of God is completely countercultural to the typical ancient worldview that assumes a plurality of gods. There are other spiritual beings to be sure, demons and angels. But there are no other gods. There is only one God.

This basic command has begun to run counter-cultural to much of modern or post-modern Western thought which really has begun to embrace pluralism. That everybody can have their own god. And now it is not so much a belief objectively in a plethora of gods, but God is understood to be subjective. We create the gods with our minds. Truth is subjective. Everybody has their own vision of God. All of those visions are right. You can set up a whole pantheon of spiritual beings and nobody can say that anybody is wrong. But God is not a creation of the human mind. That is completely false. God is not subjective. God is real. And God is one. And there is no other.

Standing on the path looking down towards all these gods who would gather around the one true creator God as lesser options, we may not bow down in worship or claim allegiance outright to some particular god. But this path too is a continuum. We can move down this path in our thoughts, in our words, in our actions in a variety of ways before actually coming to the point of open allegiance to another god.

It starts in the mind with doubts and questions regarding the goodness of God. "Is he really good? Does he really care? Is he really unique? Is this really the way for me to get what I want out of life? To get pleasure or have security? Is God the only way?" These questions and concerns pop into our minds quite naturally, sometimes as just really good, honest questions, sometimes motivated by our sin nature, sometimes encouraged by Satan, sometimes coming at us from our culture. It can be hard to unpack where the questions come from. Whether the source of the questions is good or bad, what we do with those questions determines whether or not we are moving down the path towards other gods. Our orientation matters a lot. Do I have my eyes fixed on Jesus? I am doubting and questioning, but I am fixing my eyes on Jesus. Am I seeking the kingdom of God? Am I trying to find answers to my questions in him? Or am I beginning to walk away from God? Am I accepting other cultural answers or other gods or other sources of power?

And when I begin to seek other sources for that which is meant to come only from God or primarily from God, then I have begun down the road towards other gods. When I seek pleasure outside of the good pleasure God has designed for me, then I am seeking another god. When I seek to define my basic identity through relationship with another person or entity other than God, then I am seeking another god. When I give adoration and worship somewhere else, I am seeking another god. When I am looking for someone else to answer my prayers or make me secure or to give me power or to provide success, then I am seeking other gods.

The best way to resist the temptation of our hearts away from God is to turn towards God. With all our cares and our anxieties and our questions, we turn to face him, to pursue him. We can ask,

“What is the positive opposite?” What is our goal? What are we aiming for as we turn up the path towards God? And in this case, with the first commandment, it is the greatest commandment. The positive opposite of seeking out other gods is this, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

And it is not a standard we can reach. We can go ahead and admit that right now. You are not going to love God with all your heart or with all your soul or with all your might. If you can achieve it for seconds or minutes that’s great, that’s awesome. And I mean you are not going to achieve it here before heaven. But we pursue it. And we grow in it. This is a vision we can reach towards. It is a good we can run after. God wants all of who we are. That makes sense. He does not want lip service. He does not want us to play religion. He does not want legalistic obedience. He wants us to pursue him with heart and with soul and with might. We worship and adore God with our thoughts, with our words, and with our actions. We are pursuing this path. God and the good things he gives that’s what we seek to fill our souls.

Why does God demand this primary place in our lives? Why is he so exclusive? Why is this the first and greatest moral commandment? Here are two thoughts.

One, God is the greatest good. He himself is the definition of good. Pursuit of good is pursuit of God. The two cannot be separated. God cannot encourage us to give our primary allegiance elsewhere. That would not be good. That would be God encouraging us to turn away from good. God is unique in this. God is the one being in all creation who ought to call out for his own praise, because he truly is the center of all good. If God is going to praise that which is most good, God actually must praise himself. He must care about his own glory. It is not right for me to seek my own glory. It is absolutely right for God to seek his own glory. And it is right for him to call all creation to recognize his glory and give him praise.

A moral vision without God is an immoral vision.

Two, the only way for me to truly live as the moral creature I was created to be is to do so in relationship with God. I cannot live out the moral vision of loving my neighbor, if I am not living out the moral vision of loving my God. As a human, I have been created in the image of God, to reflect the glory of his nature. I cannot do this separated from God. I was not made – even without having fallen into sin – I was created to be filled by my God and to walk with him and be filled by him. I do not mean that I cannot do any good separated from God. All people are created in God’s image and able in moments to do acts of compassion and justice and kindness. But to truly address the selfishness of my own heart and mind, the pollution of my soul, to truly understand what is just and loving and pure and good, to be able to speak truth in love, to be in a process of transformation, to become whole, to have power to act in love, for all of these things I am dependent on relationship with God. I can’t be the moral being I have been created to be if I am not in relationship with God. It cannot happen. I could summarize it with these three things, (1) to grow in my understanding of God and of what is good; (2) to be changed in my desires for good; (3) and to have power to enact the good that I know I ought to do; all of these, understanding, transformation, and power all of these require that I am in an ongoing relationship with my Creator.

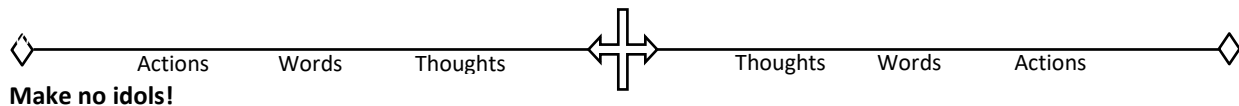
A moral vision without God is a skewed and impotent vision.

It is good and right and necessary for God to call every one of us into a full-on relationship with him. We can only be who God created us to be as human beings by growing in our pursuit of him with all of our heart and soul and strength. This is life. This is what it is to be human, a pursuit of God.

And we do not first love him. God first loves us. We respond in love to him. And in that relationship, we are then enabled to truly love people.

This command must stand first. That you will have no other god, but the one true God, and you will love him with all that you have.

Let’s move on to commandment number two, “Make no idols.”



This commandment is longer, so let's read the text from Deuteronomy 5:8-10.

⁸ You shall not make for yourself an idol, *or* any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. ⁹ You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, ¹⁰ but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

We can see why this commandment has sometimes been counted as an aspect of the first commandment. Making an idol of some created thing, whether the sun or moon or eagle in heaven, whether bull or snake or human on earth, whether fish of any kind in the water, can be understood as a violation of the extreme negative of the first command to have no other gods. When you have actually made an idol in the shape of some created thing, you have certainly committed yourself to some other god. You have violated the first commandment.

But it is also helpful for us to think about the difference between the two commands. The first command considers our allegiance to other gods. The second command considers the definition, even the creation of false gods.

During our study of the Pentateuch, we have recognized two types of idolatry. One type of idolatry involves a turning away from God to other sources of power. The goat demons in Leviticus 17 represented this type of idolatry. Chapter 4 here in Deuteronomy focuses on this type of idolatry. There is a repeated call for Israel to remember God who spoke at Mt. Sinai and to resist the pull to go over to the gods of Canaan. Do not let society define for you or help you define sources of worship and power and identity and pleasure. Listen to God who spoke to you. Seek your definition of life in him. Don't go after that type of idolatry.

The other type of idolatry was exemplified through the making of the golden calf. This is making an idol of Yahweh. So, this isn't really a turning from Yahweh. This is a recreating of Yahweh. And this happens when we create a physical form for God, like the calf. It also happens when we make a conceptual form of God for our minds, like when we highlight specific aspects of God without mention of other aspects of God, whether we make God a god of justice without compassion or a god of mercy without wrath. Both are false conceptions of the God revealed in the Bible. When Jesus is conceived only as a lamb never as a lion or the other way around, then we are beginning down the road of idolatry when we form in our minds a conception of God that is not true to his nature as he has expressed it in his word.

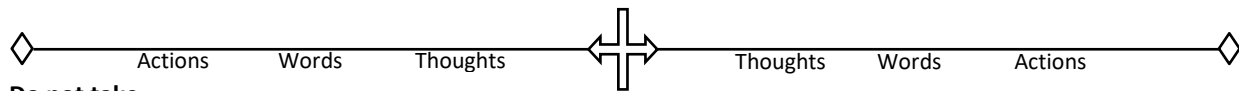
Considering this golden calf type of idolatry that would make an idol and call it Yahweh, what would the opposite positive action be for us? When we turn our back on this kind of idolatry, what are we pursuing? I like what Jesus says to the Samaritan woman in John 4:24, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Pursuing God with our heart, soul and might requires that we seek the God who truly is not the God we would create ourselves. To seek God in truth requires that we allow God to define himself for us, to reveal himself to us in his word, not primarily through our experience. We may experience God, but we have to understand that experience through his word.

This idea of allowing God to reveal himself comes out in the wording of the commandment. You may have heard his name from Exodus 34:6-7.

⁹ You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, ¹⁰ but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

We are getting the idea of God's just wrath right beside his overwhelming loving kindness. We love God by rejection other gods and by rejecting our own definition of who god is. We love God by seeking the truth about him, according to how he has revealed himself, even when that revelation runs counter to our own tradition or our own conception or our own desire.



In the third commandment we are told not to take God's name in vain. I used to think this simply meant, "Don't use God's name when you cuss." I do not think that is what this means. At least not in the way most people cuss. If someone says, "God damn you," they are probably not seriously thinking about God or about you being damned by God. But that's where the phrase comes from. It is a curse, a prayer to God, asking God to close the doors of heaven on you, that you would be eternally damned. "God damn you." It is not cussing. It is cursing. It is calling a curse on you.

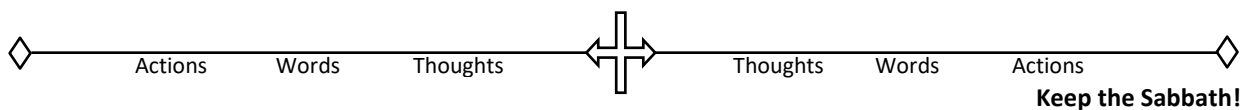
Taking God's name in vain has to do with the use of God's name for a human being's own, personal gain, whether we are calling for curse on someone else or blessing for ourselves. When we view God as a power source that we can manipulate, we are taking his name in vain. If we think that adding the name of Jesus to the end of a prayer in the right formulaic mix somehow compels God to act, then our prayer is the prayer of the occult. It is magic. If we think we have the ability to cause God to act or harness the power of God or manipulate God, if you just pray in a certain way or worship in a certain way or repeat things in a certain way or imagine things in a certain way, you just name it and claim it, then you are using God as a power source to get what you want. And that is magic. That is not prayer.

Prayer is not a formula by which we control God. And it is easy to slip into as Christians. And sometimes I think there is just some honest childlike prayer that might sound like that, but it is not manipulative. I am not talking about that. God has told us to pray about all things. And he has told us that when we pray in the name of Jesus, we will receive what we have asked for. But that is an idea that needs some time to unpack. And we do not have time to unpack all of that right now. What I will say is that praying in the name of Jesus does not mean using the right name as part of a formula. The name of Jesus is the character of Jesus. Remember the name of God in Exodus 34:6 that we have talked about so often and the name "I am" in Exodus 4 and other various names of God we have encountered through the Pentateuch. Those names have been revealing to us who God is. His name reveals his character, reveals his justice, his compassion, that he is creator and provider, he is self-existent, he is the one willing to speak to man. Praying in the name of Jesus has to do, not just using the name when we end the prayer, you know, "I pray this in the name of Jesus." It has to do with praying according to who Jesus is, knowing the character of Jesus and praying in line with the character and will of Jesus.

Prayer is not fundamentally formulaic. That is one of the reasons prayer gets so boring. Prayer is fundamentally relational. When we pray, we ask. We do not demand. God is our Father who wants to hear every desire of our heart. But in the lifting up of those desires, things happen. When we come to God and lift up our desires, sometimes he changes our hearts. When we look to him our desires have a way of readjusting. When we take our eyes off the storm of life and look at Jesus, sometimes we forget what we were going to request. Sometimes when we look at God, we do not receive relief, but we receive strength. We experience him walking with us through the suffering. And then at other times, he grants our request directly. However God chooses to answer, prayer is fundamentally relational, an entering into conversation with God about our needs and desires and dreams and struggles.

In the relational communication that is prayer, we acknowledge that God is Father and King and Lord. Those are all authority relationships. We are under his authority. So, whenever we request anything, we submit to the rightness and goodness of God. We trust him to make the call to grant or deny any request. We trust him in that. He does not exist to answer our requests. That's a genie. That's not God. We exist to be in relationship with him and prayer is a means by which we enjoy that relationship.

So, when we turn our back on that kind of prayer or oath that is taking God's name in vain, that is simply manipulation or formulaic prayer, that expects sort of this magical response if I can just use the name right, then I am going to get what I want. When we turn away from that, what are we turning towards? What is our vision for true prayer? I like Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as you will (Matthew 26:39)." Or we could go with, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy will be done." We make request, but we submit that request fully to the will of God.



The fourth and fifth commandments take on a different form than the other eight commandments. Instead of telling us what we should not do, both of these tell us what we should do. So, we start with the positive side of the moral continuum and then we have to try to imagine what would the opposite be. The positive fourth commandment is "Keep the Sabbath." That is a positive something that we are supposed to do. So, if we are going in the right direction, we are keeping the Sabbath. It is the longest commandment. So, let's read it, Deuteronomy 5:12-15,

¹² Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. ¹⁵ You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

In the civil form, this is an ordering of Israelite society. And it is providing rest and care for laborers. And it is giving structure to their weeks and months and their seasons and their years. Christians debate on whether this commandment still applies and if it does, what does it mean. I would need a whole lesson to get into that debate. I'll just indicate a couple of important factors. On the one hand, the Sabbath is connected to the Mosaic covenant as a sign, that is in Exodus 31 and again in Exodus 35 when covenant is renewed after the sin of the golden calf. So, it is important enough to say both times. The wording God uses in Exodus 31:17 is that the Sabbath "is a sign between me and the sons of Israel forever." And that wording that it is a "sign" and that is with "Israel" and that it is "forever" connects us back to Genesis 17 when God gave Abraham the covenant sign of circumcision. As a covenant sign for the Mosaic covenant, it makes sense that we who are in the new covenant are not bound to this sign in the way it was practiced under the previous covenant. Circumcision was the sign of the abrahamic covenant, and it was expressly commanded again under the mosaic covenant. Sabbath was the sign of the mosaic covenant, but it is not expressly commanded again under the new covenant.

On the other hand, the idea of Sabbath goes all the way back past mosaic covenant, past Abrahamic covenant to the creation, and that does at least raise the question of the debate on whether or not this should be practiced through all covenants.

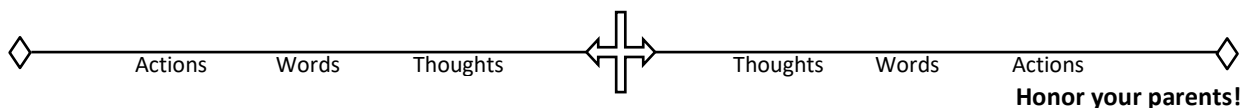
Personally, I do not believe we are bound to practice Sabbath as commanded in the mosaic law. I think the ceremonial and civil and pedagogical functions of Sabbath are fulfilled in Jesus. I do not see the Sabbath commandment repeated in the new covenant as are other commandments, and we have to consider the Sabbath rest language in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4 which suggests that Jesus Christ has provided for us a new form of Sabbath rest. We still have Sabbath rest, but it is not the Sabbath day. Hebrews 4:10 tells us, "The one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His."

So, for understanding this commandment as part of our moral paradigm, we can focus on this idea of Sabbath rest as dependence on God. So, I am going to leave aside for the moment the question, the civil, ceremonial, moral question of whether actually not working on a particular day is required. And instead I am going to focus on this idea that really comes out in Hebrews that is behind the commandment. That there was this day that was commanded in order for Israel to express a spiritual state of trust and dependence. So, whether or not the outward commands are still required of us as new covenant believers, we can focus on the inward command of dependence and rest in God.

For most of time, most of human society has worked in agriculture. That was certainly true through the whole Old Testament period. To not work on Sunday during time of harvest truly required trusting God that rain or frost would not destroy those crops that are sitting out there waiting to be brought in. It is going to have to wait until after Sabbath day. God is saying, "Trust me with the fruit of your labor. Do you really need to work on Sunday?" He is also saying, "Make me a priority. Recognize that you are not in control. And that you need time with me." Sabbath rest is displayed by giving regular priority to our relationship with God, being willing to take off from our struggles and our pursuits.

Sabbath rest is also a call to inner peace that comes from trusting God with life. Jesus said, "Do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on....seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you." Seeking first God's kingdom does not mean busy, busy, busy for God all the time. We are called to stop, to rest, to sit at his feet, to put our plans and strategies in his hands.

I like how the NASB translates Psalm 46:10 as a negative extreme for this command. So, opposite to "Keep Sabbath," is this command to "Cease striving." Just stop. Stop. Rest in God. Do not depend on your labor. "Cease striving and know that I am God."



The command is not given to the parents but to the children. God establishes for us the importance of family, even broken family. God's moral vision for us as human beings involves giving honor to our parents. This is right and good. And the command is not to give honor to good parents or successful parents or even caring parents. The commandment is simply to honor your parents. This is good and right for you that you honor the parents God has given you.

That does not mean that you validate or enable the brokenness or sin of your parents. At some point in life we must take parents off the pedestal and recognize them as human beings created in the image of God who have tried or who have not tried. They are fallen just like the rest of us.

Honor is also not equivalent with obedience. It is when you are a child. Obedience is part of the right relationship between parents and children, because parents are at that stage rightly the authority over the children. I think you continue to obey as you transition to adulthood and are still dependent financially on your parents. Ideally parents are helping you make the transition to adult responsibility. But regardless of how well they are doing, you obey as long as you are dependent on them for food and shelter, unless they are asking you to directly disobey the moral commands of God. That would be a situation you would rightly disobey. Otherwise, if you are living in their home, you obey. Their house, their rules. That is what honoring your parents looks like.

When you get married or move out on your own as a dependent single person, you continue to honor, but are no longer under your parents' authority, so honor does not include obedience. This is a pattern God gave from the beginning. Genesis 2:24 states, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." A new family has begun. They have left father and mother. And now there is a new family with a new authority structure. To honor in this context of this new reality with a new family means to respect and to speak well of, to care for but not necessarily to obey. That is unless you did not leave father and mother but are still living under their roof as a new family and that gets messy.

The opposite of the command to honor could be "Do not curse." Parental frustration brings out the temptation to curse our parents. When our parents fail us or hurt us or restrict us, we want to lash out or speak harshly. Love can turn to hate. But hate binds and hate corrodes. Proverbs 20:20 teaches us,

He who curses his father or his mother,
his lamp will go out in time of darkness.

Whatever your particular case may be "Honor your parents" is not a suggestion. It is a commandment from your heavenly Father. It is part of his vision for you to continue to grow as a whole person. And it was the one commandment given with a promise.

¹⁶ Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the Lord your God gives you.

God's plan for healthy people and a healthy society begins in the home with a mother and a father who teach their children to obey the commandments, to love God with their heart and mind, to seek God as he is in spirit and in truth, to trust God in prayer, and to find rest in dependent relationship with God.

God is calling us to abundant life. He is calling us to walk with him on the path, fixing our eyes on Jesus and pursuing him through a life of obedience to his commandments.

As Jesus taught us in John 14:21,

"He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

Reflection Questions

1. Read again Deuteronomy 5:1-22. What stands out to you this time as interesting, strange, important or confusing?
2. Is it possible to be a good and moral person, loving your neighbor, according to the moral vision of Jesus, without committing yourself to loving God? Why or why not?
3. We have addressed idolatry often in this Pentateuch series. Culturally, the ancient Israelites could easily claim faithfulness to Yahweh as king of Israel while still seeking out other gods. That is the way their world works. Yahweh is the main God, but you go elsewhere, too, to meet your needs and get things done. Thinking about idolatry as an issue of the heart, what are some major sources that people turn to apart from God as sources of security, identity, worth, pleasure, or healing? Think about this question in terms of the various age groups in your community. What might be common to all and what might be more specific to age? (If you just don't know, guess. But then go ask one or two from that age group what they think.)
 - a. What idols pull the hearts of teenagers and 20-somethings away from God?
 - b. What idols pull the hearts of those in their 30s and 40s?
 - c. What idols pull the hearts of those in their 50s and 60s?
 - d. What idols pull the hearts of those in their 70s and older?
4. Question number 3 addresses more the first commandment and the allegiance of our heart. Consider the question the second commandment and the definition of God. What are three or four ways your society defines God that may draw a little from the Bible, but is skewed and is not a seeking to know God as he reveals himself?
5. How would you describe in your own words what it means to take God's name in vain? Do you ever fall into the habit of praying a formula or trying to move God with the right words or the right approach? How does relational prayer differ from formulaic prayer?
6. How do you keep the Sabbath? How do you show dependence on God by carving out time to rest from your business and focus on relationship? If you were to improve this aspect of your life, what is one possible step you could take?
7. How do you show honor to your parents? What is one way you could improve in this area of pursuing God?
8. Why do you think the command to honor parents comes with the promise of long life in the land?