

Deuteronomy 8

The Fifth to Tenth Commandments

Reading: Deuteronomy 5:1-21

We are onto the last six commandments and they deal with human relationship. Yet they cannot be taken on their own. In fact none of the commandments can stand on their own. This is so with these last six commandments as they must result from the worship of God who has created a people for Himself. Though they regulate human actions, they must not be seen as merely that. Ultimately it is a matter of the heart, a heart that loves and worships God.

The second half of these Ten Words deals with human relationship while the first four deal with the relationship with God. We have spoken on the Sabbath which is the transition between the two. The Sabbath is our re-formation and it is this Sabbath rest that enables us to relate in the way we should with our fellow human beings.

However, we should not see these Ten Words as two separate parts, one dealing with God and the second dealing with humanity. The second half of the Decalogue should also be seen as commandments to honor God and not simply expressing a relationship with humanity. The reason for saying this is that the Ten Words show to us the image of God. We have noted that the law is the perceptual image of God. So if the Ten Words are the perceptual image of God, then the second half of the Decalogue must also be related to the nature and worship of God. It is only as we honour our creator that we can honour our fellow beings who are the creation of God. The Ten Words should be seen as an integral whole relating to the worship of God.

Jesus referred to these Ten Words when asked about the greatest commandment. His reply was to love God with our whole being and to love our neighbour as ourselves. There are not two commandments but only one. What Jesus said about the second does not mean that there are two separate commandments. There is only one. The second is derived from the first. Without the first there would be no second.

That is the problem we have today. We have a movement called humanism, or rather secular humanism. Secular humanism has taken over from humanism which started from the church. True humanism needs to start with the first four commandments. However, the world has taken a good idea from the church and discarded its origin. Secular humanism has gone ahead without the acknowledgment of God. Secular humanism seeks to establish the human relationship without the worship of God. There are problems in working out things this way when this overarching truth, the worship of God, is not acknowledged. We can call that humanitarianism.

Though Moses began with the preamble and the Ten Words, he got back very quickly to this overarching truth, i.e. there is only one God that we worship, the first commandment. This is not to contradict what Jesus taught. The second half of the commandments does not and cannot stand on its own. That is the point I am making. Moses did not spell it out the way Jesus did. Jesus said it plainly. Moses spelt out the second commandment in the legislation he gave to people.

I won't be dealing with the second half of the Ten Words in much detail. I will mention them briefly. The second half of the Ten Words will be spelt out in more detail as we get to the body of the commandment later in the book.

The Fifth Commandment

¹⁶ Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

The second half starts with the fifth commandment to honour our father and mother. This is the transition from God the creator to our parents as pro-creator. This is the creational mandate to populate the earth to bring the image of God to the uttermost parts of the earth.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Gen. 1:28)

The fifth commandment to honour our father and mother also reflects the God-Israel relationship.

²² Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son. (Ex. 4:22)

The relationship of God to His people is that of Father. Jesus addressed God as His Father. The earthly relationship of Father and children is a reflection of the heavenly relationship. There is an intimacy of mother and children when the mother nurtures that foetus for nine months. To honour our parents we must firstly honour God when we worship Him and observe the Sabbath. The Chinese places an important part in the honouring of the parents. In fact the whole of Chinese philosophy revolves around the two themes of 仁 humanity and 孝 honouring of parents. Now because they do not have the worship of Yahweh, this has gone the humanistic way to the extreme of ancestral worship. While we may have a good thing from God, the human component often takes over and removes the giver. When that happens things degenerate, but humanity will hold on to it thinking that it is a good thing. So while filial piety is still a honoured (or imposed) culture, yet it will slowly give way to the culture of self interest.

The Sixth Commandment

¹⁷ You shall not murder.

Life is created by God and is precious because humanity is created in the image of God, created to reflect His glory. In western ethics, we have ethical principles like the principle of beneficence, i.e. maximising the good for the people, or the principle of equality, and so on. There is also an ethical principle termed the sanctity of life. This is the overarching principle in all ethical consideration. It over-rides all other ethical principles. This is so because of our Judeo-Christian heritage. Other cultures may not have that.

The interpretation of this commandment is that of homicide, premeditated murder of the first degree. It does not include manslaughter or accidental killing. There is a special provision for that. It also does not lend itself to the argument of the abolition of the death penalty. The abolition of the death penalty is a good thing but we will need to come to it by other consideration.

The Seventh Commandment

¹⁸ Neither shall you commit adultery.

Marriage is ordained by God for the enrichment and procreation of human life. Marriage is the highest form of human relationship because it reflects the heavenly marriage of the church to Christ.

² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (Rev. 21:2)

When Israel departed from God to other god, she was said to have committed adultery.

My people consult a piece of wood,
and their divining rod gives them oracles.
For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray,
and they have played the whore, forsaking their God. (Hos. 4:12)

Adultery kills the most holy of the relationship ordained by God, the relationship of husband and wife, Christ and His church.

The Eighth Commandment

¹⁹ Neither shall you steal.

What is implied in this is not merely stealing the property of others. It is the stealing of another being or kidnapping or human trafficking. It is committing this crime for personal gain. Human trafficking is a heinous crime and is happening all over the world today. Losing even a diamond ring is nothing compared with this.

The Ninth Commandment

²⁰ Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbor.

These are trumped up charges for the sake of self-interests. The only one to gain from this is the self.

The Tenth Commandment

²¹ Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife. Neither shall you desire your neighbor's house, or field, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Neither should you covet your neighbour's Mercedes Benz or his BMW. While the first nine commandments deal with actions, this last one does not. It is a matter of the heart and it beautifully concludes the Ten Words.

How does one police this commandment? How can one look into one's heart to check for covetousness, let alone looking into the heart of another? When we covet, we can't see anything else apart from the thing or the person we covet. We are then blind to all other consideration. We may not even know that we are coveting. The all mighty self-interest takes over and enslaves us in that desire. We no longer want the worship of God because He will stop us. The thing that we desire becomes our idol. In order to justify that desire, we use the name of God in vain, like pedophiles in the church. We may keep the Sabbath but that is out of self-interest. It is no longer holy because God is no longer in it. Parents are no longer honoured. Our covetousness may even lead us to premeditated murder and stealing. Again to protect ourselves we will give false evidence to incriminate others.

A Matter of the Heart

It is all a matter of the heart. Jesus brought out the truth of this when He said,

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ ²² But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother you will be liable to judgment; ... (Matt. 5:21-22)

These commandments are not merely outward actions. They are matters of the heart. These last six commandments are not just actions that we must not do. They speak to the heart that is capable of hatching these actions. That is why the tenth commandment sums it all up.

That is why Moses said that we need to circumcise our hearts in order to obey the words of God.

Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer. (Deut. 10:16)

And only God can do that.

Moreover, the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live. (Deut. 30:6)

That is why we are asked to observe the Sabbath and to keep it holy in the presence of the Lord. That is when He will circumcise our hearts to enable us to keep the commandments. This fourth commandment is the watershed in the two parts of the Ten Words. This is the where the Lord in His holy presence comes to circumcise our hearts to enable us to keep the commandments. We can put the Ten Words in a table form like this with the Fourth Commandment between the two parts.

The Ten Words		
Worship the only one God	Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy	Honour your father and mother
		You shall not murder
No idols		You shall not commit adultery
		You shall not steal
Do not use the name of God in vain		You shall not bear false witness
		You shall not covet

The first commandment to worship the only one God undergirds the teaching of Deuteronomy. The last commandment addresses the matter of the heart. Together they are like the two ends of a thread that ties up the Ten Words. (Show this paradigm.)

The book of Deuteronomy is the key book in the Bible. It is a book of ‘law’, but not law in the way we understand it. The centrepiece of the book is the Ten Words. In fact the next five chapters or so explained to us what the Ten Words are all about. The popular opinion of the Ten Words is this. We know what they are and we have kept them. We have not transgressed them. We have not done anything prohibited by them. We have not killed and we have not stolen, i.e. we have not robbed or broken into homes. Well what about covetousness? Nobody will know anyway. Even if we have been covetous we still think that we have kept the Ten Words. We are deluding ourselves. You may have kept all nine, but if you have not kept the tenth, you haven’t kept them. I have said that if we do not exit on the tenth, we have not kept the word.

I have taken a long time to introduce the reason for the Ten Words in the opening chapters of Deuteronomy. The reason is relational. The Ten Words were not given to strangers so that by conforming to them they would come into a relationship with God. On the contrary they were given because they have a relationship with God. To the Jews it is the deliverance from Egypt.

To us it is the redemption that Jesus achieved for us on the cross in order to bring us back to the Father. It is precisely because of this relationship that we are and they were given the Ten Words. They are given not only to guide us but also to show to us the very nature of God Himself.

It is only after this reminder of faith and the grace of God that we have the Ten Words. Following the giving of the Ten Words we have what we might call the postamble or addendum. The rest of the book spells out the importance of the Ten Words and the way it is to be understood, not in the modern legal sense, but in the relational covenantal sense. If we do not see the Ten Words in this way, then we will do great violence to the context of the Ten Words and irreparable harm to our lives because we would have departed from the will and purpose of God in giving these Words to us. The next few chapters following the Ten Words consist of an emphatic reinforcement of the importance of these Words. Then the rest of the book spells out for us the working out of these commands in some practical terms.

The Authority, Finality and Permanence of the Word of God

Verse 22 is about the most important statement after the giving of the Ten Words. Just as the opening of chapter 5 introduces the Ten Words of God, this concluding section of the chapter reinforces the importance and relevance of the Ten Words for us and nothing more important than this single statement of Moses at the end of the Ten Words – the authority, finality and permanence of the Word of God.

These words the Lord spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, and he added no more. He wrote them on two stone tablets, and gave them to me. (Deut. 5:22)

This has also been mentioned prior in Deuteronomy 4

So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. ²You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the LORD your God with which I am charging you. (Deut. 4:1-2)

The **Authority** of the Word is emphasised by the loud voice of God in proclaiming these Words to the people.

to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness,

When this loud voice out of the fire, the cloud and the thick darkness proclaimed the Ten Words, there was an authority to it. This sense of authority is lacking today because we associate it with authoritarianism or dictatorship. There is an authority in the home, in our community and it needs to be exercised. When we move away from God, we move away from the proper exercise of authority. This authority is the authority of the Word. When we do not have the Word of God, we will substitute that with another word, and that is the word of man, an opinion and more likely popular public opinion that will be soothing to the ears of the hearers. There is loss of authority.

The Ten Words given to us through Moses three and a half thousand years ago is still authoritative for all peoples and all times.

The **Finality** of these Words is made clear to Moses when he was told that no more was to be added to them.

he added no more.

This is it. That is why Jesus said that this is the greatest commandment. Jesus had nothing more to add to it. In fact Jesus Himself is the living expression of these Ten Words. Hebrews said to us that Jesus is the final installment because He is the living Word, the image of God. The law is the perceptual image of God. This oneness of man and word is realised in the person of Jesus Christ.

Today we think that we can do better than this. We have added many other legislation thinking that we can go beyond the Ten Words. We may have church orders, but they need to be subordinated to the Word of God. This is not being old fashioned or conservative. It is being in the very centre and bosom of God's Being, in His will and embrace.

The **Permanence** of these Words is shown to us when they were engraved onto the two tablets of stone. There is little doubt that these Words are meant to be there for all times and people.

He wrote them on two stone tablets, and gave them to me.

The Glory and Greatness of God vs our mortality

²³When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you approached me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders; ²⁴and you said, "Look, the LORD our God has shown us his **glory and greatness**, and we have heard his voice out of the fire. Today we have seen that God may speak to someone and the person may still live. ²⁵So now why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer, we shall die. ²⁶For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and remained alive?

We don't like authority, finality and permanence today. We hate authority. There is nothing final today. There is always a new theory, a new diet regime. We shun permanence. Everything is changeable like the weather and we like to keep up with it.

Nowadays we don't care too much about what God really says. Yet Deuteronomy gives to us the reason why we should accept the authority, finality and permanence of the Word. Deuteronomy shows to us not only the greatness of God but also His glory.

What we have seen are Ten Words, but they also display God's glory and greatness. As we have said before the Ten Words are not just commandments, they also show to us the nature of God, i.e. His image. That is why they show to us His glory and greatness.

If we simply see the Ten Words as commandments for us to follow, then we have missed the point of it all. Yes, we are to live within the premises of these commandments, but that is only because we are created in the image of God and have been transformed through the cross into that image. That is why we need to read what precedes the commandments and what follows.

The greatest delusion in history

Go near, you yourself, and hear all that the LORD our God will say. Then tell us everything that the LORD our God tells you, and we will listen and do it." (Deut. 5:27)

v. 27 - We will listen and do it. Don't we all have said that at some stage of our lives? I have decided to follow Jesus, so the song goes and how many people had said that and how many really mean it. They fall onto the wayside with the first hurdle. But have we not actually done just that, making that bold proclamation about obeying God? Israel did that and theirs was a sad

history of disobedience and hence the Babylonian captivity. In God's grace they were allowed to return to Jerusalem.

We need to fear God and to keep His commandments.

If only they had such a mind as this, to fear me and to keep all my commandments always, so that it might go well with them and with their children forever! (Deut. 5:29)

We cannot bypass the sabbath and move straight to the keeping of the commandments. That does not work. We can never do that with our sense of self sufficiency. We need to fear God and that means trusting Him for His provision to us to do what He wants us to. That is the grace of God. We need the circumcision of the heart. It is God and His grace to us that enables us to keep His commandments.

²⁸ The LORD heard your words when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me: "I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you; they are right in all that they have spoken. ²⁹ If only they had such a mind as this, to fear me and to keep all my commandments always, so that it might go well with them and with their children forever! ³⁰ Go say to them, 'Return to your tents.' ³¹ But you, stand here by me, and I will tell you all the commandments, the statutes and the ordinances, that you shall teach them, so that they may do them in the land that I am giving them to possess." ³² You must therefore be careful to do as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn to the right or to the left. ³³ You must follow exactly the path that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you are to possess. (Deut. 5:28-33)