

– Chapter 20 –

The Ten Commandments and Laws about Altars – Part 2

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT –

“Thou shalt not kill.” (Exodus 20:13 KJV)

“You shall not murder.” (NKJV)

If you asked the average person to name one of the 10 commandments at random, they would likely come up with ***“Thou shalt not kill,”*** quoted from the King James Version. Above, I included the newer version of the translation as well because the very familiar wording of the original King James could cause some to assume it means the taking of any life in any manner. But, because we see the necessity of animal sacrifice beginning not long after Creation – even in the Garden itself – and continuing throughout the Old Testament, we know that cannot be the case.

We also know that the reason death even exists is because of sin. Eve understood the importance of obeying commands, too, and said as much to the Serpent in Genesis 3: ***“We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’”*** There is more contained in that statement than is visible at first glance, so let’s peel back some layers.

Almost immediately after they disobeyed God's command – and committed the first sin – both Adam and Eve were overcome with guilt for their transgression; and the shame of it led them to cover their nakedness with fig leaves. They did not yet know that “man-made solutions for sin and guilt” can never make us right with God! It was therefore necessary for God to properly cover Adam and Eve – so He ***“made tunics of skin, and clothed them.”*** (Gen 3:21 NKJV) This, of course, required the life of at least one animal ... and at this point death entered the world.

Throughout the Scriptures, we find garments used as symbols, both of God’s righteousness and man’s own distorted idea of this righteousness. The prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 61:10: ***“I will greatly rejoice in the LORD . . . For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself***

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with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.” (NKJV) Job said it this way: *“I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban.”* (Job 29:14 NKJV)

Isaiah also had a comment on man’s self-righteousness: *“But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags. . .”* (Isaiah 64:6 NKJV) So, the coats of skin which the Lord made for Adam and Eve represent a **“righteous covering”** which would allow them to again stand in His holy presence after having been soiled by sin. In fact, it could be said that through the sacrifice of Jesus, we too receive a “righteous covering” when we are baptized and the filthiness of our sin is washed away.

It cost an animal’s life to clothe Adam and Eve. For God to provide a “covering for sin,” a sacrificial death was necessary. I believe it is here that He established the foundation for animal sacrifices, and I’m reasonably certain God gave them instructions at this time about how they were to be done – principles from which there was to be no deviation. If so, it answers the oft-raised question of why Abel’s offering to the Lord was respected and Cain’s was not. (Gen. 4:4-5)

The Hebrew word translated “*garment*” or “*coats*” is “**kûttôneṯh**” and is defined by Strong’s Dictionary as a “shirt, coat, or robe” that completely covers the body. The same word is used for the high priestly robe which went from the neck to the ground. Adam and Eve’s “man-made” solution – fig leaves – did not adequately protect them. Only the skins from the sacrifice of an innocent animal could make them acceptable in God’s eyes – render them “fully clothed.” It’s an obvious parallel to the sacrifice of Christ for our sins, isn’t it.

“You shall not murder.” In regard to this verse, Spence says: *“Here again is a moral precept included in all codes, and placed by all in a prominent position. Our first duty towards our neighbor is to respect his life. When Cain slew Abel, he could scarcely have known what he was doing; yet a terrible punishment was awarded him for his transgression...”*

Few people would argue the point that the pre-meditated taking of a human life is wrong. But, what about anger? Consider the Lord’s reaction to Cain’s resentment when his sacrifice was not accepted: **“Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well,**

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will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.” If we don’t control our anger, it will control us.

In fact, Jesus makes it clear in Matthew 5:22 that misplaced anger has no place in our heart. *“But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”* All hidden resentments, grudges, and hostility toward others are diametrically opposed to the second greatest commandment: *“Love your neighbor as yourself.”*

In case Jesus’ words from the Sermon on the Mount aren’t enough, we are told in no uncertain terms in 1 John 3:15, *“Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”* (NKJV) A heart full of anger is a heart not ready to receive God’s grace and mercy. I leave you with Ephesians 4:26-27: *“Be angry and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.”* (NKJV)

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT –

“You shall not commit adultery.” (Exodus 20:14 NKJV)

By the 11th century BC, women were pretty much regarded as servants to men with few rights or privileges – their station in life was to please their husband and bear children. Men (and only men) had an almost unlimited liberty to divorce their wives at will – and it was not a long, drawn-out process. All that was required was a simple public written declaration called a “Bill of Divorcement.” On a whim, a man could present his wife with this “bill of divorcement” and he was then free to remarry. This game of “musical wives” could be repeated enumerable times because, to their thinking, women existed for the pleasure of men and a marriage contract should certainly not be honored if the man wanted to seek this pleasure elsewhere. In fact, men were even known to remarry a previous wife! Evidently, the Israelite men shared this view of the covenant of marriage. This command is expounded on in Deut. 24:1 – 4: *“When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found*

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some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.” (NKJV)

The latter part of this command is particularly interesting: even if a man wishes to remarry his original wife, he may not.

The Oxford dictionary defines adultery as *voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a person who is not his or her spouse.*” We know, of course, that this sin begins long before any overt act is committed. In Matthew 5, Jesus says, **“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”** (Matt. 5:27-28 NKJV) Jesus’ statement is much stronger than the original commandment because He not only condemns the act of adultery – He condemns the very thought of it! And a few verses later, Jesus tells us that adultery (sexual immorality) is the only reason for divorce that is recognized by God! Consider not only the “musical wives” scenario I mentioned above, but our own society today when you read these words: **“Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”** (Matt. 5:31-32 NKJV) We need to think seriously about what Jesus is saying in these two verses!

We can’t leave this discussion of the term “*adultery*” without mentioning the Biblical context that goes beyond the relationship between a husband and a wife. As Christians, we are considered adulterers when we do not have a wholehearted love and devotion to the Most High. If we lust after the things of this world, we are demonstrating that we don’t think He alone is enough for us. We are “cheating on Him” when we divide our loyalty – plan, wish for, decide, prioritize – based on anything other than His will and His word. Mark 12:30: **“And you shall**

love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment.”

Jesus says in Mark 8:38, *“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”* (NKJV)

THE 8TH COMMANDMENT –

“You shall not steal.” (Exodus 20:15)

Solomon's words are these: *“Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death. The Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish, but He casts away the desire of the wicked.”* (Proverbs 10:2-3 NKJV) Much later, the Apostle Paul, in his letter to the church at Ephesus, says *“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.”* (Ephesians 4:28 NKJV)

Theft, as the dictionary defines it, could refer to larceny, embezzlement or defrauding someone by taking something under false pretenses. We know these crimes are not unique to the modern world. In chapter 2 of Paul's letter to the Romans he addresses teachers who *“are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ...having the form of knowledge and truth in the law...”* Because they had been entrusted with the responsibility of both knowing the law and teaching it to others, he admonishes them with these words: *“You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?”* (Romans 2:19-21 NKJV)

Almost every human being would agree that stealing someone's property or resources is wrong, but could there be more to it than just this? In the book of Malachi, chapter 3, God is addressing the sons of Jacob (the Israelites - later the Jews), saying they have gone away from His ordinances. But they don't see it, so they ask, *“How have we robbed You?”* They are told they were stealing from God when they held some back when offering their tithes. Jehovah says

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in verse 9, ***“You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation.”***
(Malachi 3:9)

So, to “steal” is not just to “take something that doesn’t belong to you,” but in the context of our relationship with God, it is also to “hold back,” not just of our financial blessings, but also of our time and our talents — all things God has given us to use to His glory.

Let’s add another thought, as well. Is it also possible to steal from Jehovah by taking credit for something Jehovah has done? A good example of that is found in Acts 12. Herod (probably Herod Agrippa 1 – grandson of Herod the Great) had been angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and on this day they stood before his throne, asking for peace because they depended on him for food and did not wish him to be displeased with them. From his place on his high throne, he made a grand speech during which they cried out, ***“The voice of a god and not of a man!”*** (Acts 12:22 NKJV) At no point did Herod deny his own status as a deity or give any glory to Jehovah, so an angel of the Lord struck him ***“and he was eaten by worms and died.”*** (Acts 12:23 NKJV) Notice the sequence here: First eaten by worms – then died. His death was a horrible one, and it took place right there in public view, all because he did not give God the glory. ***“God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*** (James 4:6 NKJV)

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.” (James 1:17 NKJV) Any talent we have; any good we may accomplish – it all comes from God. We are not to glorify or exalt ourselves, but instead we are to be humble and grateful, giving God all the praise, honor, and glory, which is His due.

Jesus says in John 7:18: ***“He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.”*** (NKJV)

And, we are told in I Thessalonians 5:18, ***“...In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you...”*** (1 Thess. 5:17 – 22)

THE 9TH COMMANDMENT –

“You shalt not bear false witness against your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:16 NKJV)

To “bear false witness” is to lie about something or misrepresent the truth. In court it is called perjury. Here are a few examples from both the Old and New Testaments that speak to the importance of honesty:

“Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal faithfully are His delight.” (Proverbs 12:22 NKJV)

And in Proverbs 30:8 we are admonished to ***“Remove falsehood and lies far from me...”***

“Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit.”
(Psalm 34:12-13 NKJV)

“Therefore, putting away lying, let each of you speak truth with his neighbor for we are members of one another.” (Ephesians 4:25 NKJV)

Most would agree that decent people tell the truth in their daily lives – it’s a given. But, there is another example of “bearing false witness” that is often missed: What about misrepresenting scripture? A lack of diligent study, prayerfully and humbly seeking the truth, can cause us to become false witnesses of God’s word if we rely on what we think the Scriptures say (perhaps what we “want” it to say?) instead of what it actually does say.

The very last words of our Bible warn us to always speak the truth in regard to God’s word – to add to or take from is to suffer consequences. Read carefully what is said in Revelation 22:18-20: ***“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written***

in this book. He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen." (NKJV)

To "bear false witness" is also to pretend to be something we are not. The same section of Romans 2 we referenced with the 8th Commandment (stealing) can also be applied here. *"Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?"* (Romans 2:17 - 23 NKJV)

Our Savior was Himself very explicit when He addressed the compromised, self-righteous religious leaders: *"You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies..."* (John 8:44 KJV) To present a facade of piety, to not accept the truth of all of Jesus' teachings, to discredit those teachings we don't like or feel are "out of touch with 21st century thinking" is to belong to this same father of lies. We have to know and acknowledge the truth in order to be set free. (John 8:32). *"Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments."* (1 John 2:3 NKJV)

THE 10TH COMMANDMENT –

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's." (Exodus 20:17 NKJV)

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To long for (covet) the pleasures of this world is to be friends with the world – and that makes you an enemy of the Almighty Creator. (See James 4:4) Remember, anything that siphons off our wholehearted love and devotion to God breaks the first and most important commandment, ***“Thou shall have no other god before me.”***

Simply put, we are to be satisfied with what we have on this earth! We are told not to worry about material things (Matt 6:25ff) and that God will supply what we need (Phil 4:19). There is no reason to covet things...because “things” don’t matter! If our relationship with God is right – we have all we need. If wealth were the key to happiness, we would never hear stories of the “Hollywood set” in therapy or drug rehab. A reliance on “things” leaves you empty and unsatisfied because you’re forever pursuing what you still don’t have.

The Hebrew writer tells us in 13:5: ***Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we may boldly say: “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”*** In the context of this 10th commandment we could say, “What does man have that I could possibly need?”

LAWS ABOUT ALTARS – (Verses 22 – 26)

The Ten Commandments (also known as the Decalogue) are followed by a series of laws – civil, social, and religious – occupying the remainder of Exodus 20 through chapter 23. It is generally understood that the laws contained in those chapters were received by Moses on Sinai directly after he had received the Ten Commandments. It also appears that they were immediately written and collected into a volume of its own known as **“The Book of the Covenant,”** regarded as an especially sacred book. If it had been divided into chapters (debatable) they might have been the following:

1. Laws about Altars
2. Laws about Slaves
3. Laws about Restitution
4. Laws about Social Justice
5. Laws about the Sabbath
6. Laws about Festivals

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A student of the Bible will know that Ezra the scribe read from the “*Book of the Law of Moses*” in Nehemiah 8:3. It is thought by many that what Ezra read was “**The Book of the Covenant**” described here. As far as I know, no separate volume by this name has survived history. If it is true that Ezra read from this book, it would be the last account of that volume. The only true copy known to us exists in the passages recorded in Exodus, chapters 21 - 23 which we will discuss to some degree in the next lesson.