

Session 6

October 11, 2020

HONOR ALL RELATIONSHIPS

Exodus 20:15-17; Psalm 37:1-6

When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, He replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt. 22:36-40). Indeed, the first set of the Ten Commandments is all about loving God (Ex. 20:2-11) The second set is all about loving your neighbor (Ex. 20:12-17). This requires respecting people and respecting their property.

The law is stated (Ex. 20:15-17). You will recall that the sixth commandment protects one’s life. The seventh protects one’s relationships. The final three of the Ten Commandments protect one’s property.

“Do not steal.” Interestingly, while some political philosophies suggest that no one should own personal property, the Bible assumes inherent ownership of personal belongings, and makes moves to protect it (v. 15). The statement is dogmatic and leaves no room for justifying the pilfering of *anything* belonging to another, whether material or intellectual, regardless of how grand or trivial an item it may be. As 17th century Bible commentator Matthew Henry put it, “Godliness and honesty must go together.”

“Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.” Tangible personal property taken can easily be returned or replaced. But the impugning of one’s character is both costlier and more painful. Proverbs 22:1 says, “A good name is to be chosen over great wealth; and favor is better than silver and gold.” Bearing false testimony about someone can be done formally, under oath in a court of law; or, it can be done less formally, in the court of public (or even private) opinion, through inuendo, insinuation, malicious gossip, or outright slander. Both formal and informal infractions are prohibited by the Law (see also Ex. 23:1), because of the severe (and at times irreversible) damage they can cause.

“Do not covet your neighbor’s...” The examples given in verse 17 serve to clarify the motive behind theft and malicious personal attacks: *covetousness*. It’s an old word that indicates *strong or inordinate desire*; a *craving* for something that is not ours to own. The list starts large with houses and lands, moves through human relationships, animals owned, and ends with the small but most stringent, “*anything* that belongs to your neighbor.” Once again, sin is conceived in the mind (coveting) and birthed through action (theft) (see James 1:14-15).

The law is illustrated (Ps. 37:1-6). Motivational writer Dale Carnegie once said, “*Success* is getting what you want. *Happiness* is wanting what you get.” Unfortunately, even Christians are often willing to sacrifice happiness in their quest for success. In this Psalm, David suggests that neither happiness nor success can be found by taking it from others! It is certainly aggravating that the wicked seem to prosper while the righteous find themselves struggling (see Job 21; Jer. 12; et. al). And the temptation to covet their apparent success in the world is tough to overcome. But the promise of God is true; the prosperity of the wicked is temporary and fleeting. Deep, heartfelt, and life-long contentment is only found in the Lord. Notice the active words David

uses to encourage devotion: *trust; do what is good; dwell and live securely* (v. 3); *take delight* (v. 4); *commit and trust* (v. 5). Then, notice the Lord's response to such devotion. First, He will give you the desires of your heart (v. 4); Second, He will act on your behalf, making your righteousness and justice far outshine the temporary and tarnished prosperity of the evildoers condemned in verse 1.