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Exodus 20:12-17 “The Ten Commandments, Part II”

Intro. I wonder if you have noticed what has happened in our society the last 30 years or so. There has been a tremendous change in how many people view moral and ethical behavior. Up until 30-40 years ago, most people understood that there are moral absolutes. They understood that God’s Word was the foundation to morality. But things have changed. We live in a day of moral relativism. Many today deny the concept of moral absolutes. They say morality will vary depending on the situation. The individual is the one who decides right from wrong. Since the courts have removed God from our public schools, our schools now teach some form of values clarification. Morality is not based on what God says, but it is now based on what the individual perceives is best for them, or perhaps what is best for their family or community. To them, it is not a matter of right or wrong, but a matter of choosing the best or less risky option. In the final analysis, the individual is the one who determines morality.

To illustrate the situation we are in today, there was a college professor who was teaching ethics. He had bought in to the idea of moral relativism. However, he discovered that over half of his students had cheated on the exam. Imagine that. Over half of his class had cheated on the ethics exam! Though the professor was surprised, I am not surprised. If you teach moral relativism, people are going to follow their sinful desires rather than an external code.

However, the Bible teaches that there are moral absolutes, and God is the One who determines what is right or wrong based on His holy nature as revealed in His Word. For example, the 10 Commandments were written in stone. That vividly illustrates the fact that these commandments do not vary depending on the circumstance. They transcend time, because God never changes, and these laws were based on God’s character.

Jesus taught us that one of the most important commandments is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt 22:39; Lev. 19:18). If we truly love our neighbor as ourselves, we will keep the last 6 commandments. This is why love is the fulfillment of the Law (Rom. 13:8-10).

Except for the 5th commandment, all the others are stated in the negative. So for those commandments, I plan to share the positive virtues that will help you keep each commandment. So let’s take a look at each of the last 6 commandments together.

I. HONOR YOUR PARENTS

This is the first of the Commandments relating to our relationship with other people. I believe that suggests its importance. If a child grows up without proper honor and respect of parental authority, he will tend to violate the other commandments. God stresses the importance of family life by the 5th & 7th commandments.

A. The Meaning – In v.12 God says, “Honor your father and your mother....” To “honor” someone is to give him the place of superiority. It includes giving proper respect to our parents. We are to esteem our parents highly, and show it in our outward conduct. But in Ezek. 22:7 we see the opposite of this, “In you [Jerusalem] they have made light of father and mother....”

B. The Applications - A true honoring of our parents will include the following:

1. Obedience to Them - This is specifically commanded in Eph. 6:1 as an application of the 5th Commandment to honor one's father & mother. I believe obedience is the proper way to honor your parents while you are living under their roof.

2. Submission to Them – Our general attitude toward our parents is to be one of submission. We are to submit to their rebukes, instructions, and corrections.

3. Don't Give Them Back Talk – Don't give them lip or sass. Dt. 27:16 says, "Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt." Notice what the Law says in the case of a child that takes this to an extreme. In Ex. 20:17 God says, "He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death."¹ Some of you are old enough to remember that if you even tried to backtalk your parents, you paid dearly for it. Yet today, some even defend such behavior by saying that kids just need to express themselves!

4. Honoring them in their Old Age - Jesus demonstrated how that this Commandment applied to financially supporting aged parents if they need it (Mt. 15:4-6). Many have fulfilled the spirit of this Commandment in caring for their aged parents in their time of protracted sickness. On the Cross we see the Savior honoring His mother by providing a home for her with His beloved disciple John. And in a context regarding supporting a widowed mother, Paul said in 1 Tim. 5:8, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." So this command to honor your father & mother does not end when you reach 18 years old.

C. The Contemporary Problem - We are living in a day when there is too little of this Commandment being obeyed. Paul warned of these days. He wrote, "In the last days perilous times shall come.... For men shall be disobedient to parents and without natural affection" (2 Tim. 3:1, 3).

It is a plain fact that when the parent/child relationship is corrupted, a powerful solvent has been introduced which rapidly tends to disintegrate society. Parents, when you do not enforce the 5th Commandment, you do so to the peril of your children and society. Furthermore, if they do not honor & respect their earthly father, it is less likely they will honor & respect their Heavenly Father. Therefore, don't allow disobedience or a disrespectful attitude to go unpunished.

D. The Promise – This is the only commandment that includes a positive promise. In the last of v.12 God says that we should obey this commandments "that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you." While that promise may primarily be a national promise, Paul applied this promise to us as well in Eph. 6. I do not believe this is intended to be an absolute promise, for no one but Jesus has ever obeyed this commandment absolutely. But I do believe this is a general principle that so many have found to be true. Those who disobey and disrespect their parents usually do not live as long as those who do. Such people tend to do things that are self-destructive. Such people tend to drink, take drugs, smoke, & live recklessly.

II. YOU SHALL NOT MURDER

In v.13 God says, "You shall not murder." The meaning is not, "Thou shalt not kill" (KJV) but "You shall not murder." You shall not shed *innocent* blood. We may kill plants & animals for food. I believe it is OK to kill annoying bugs! We may kill animals and even people for self-

¹ Isaiah 3:5 warns of this problem, "The child will be insolent toward the elder, and the base toward the honorable."

defense (Ex. 22:2). If you are involved in a just war, you may kill in defense of your country against evil aggressors. Society may kill those who are guilty of murder. This is not the shedding of *innocent* blood. If you accidentally kill someone, you have not violated this commandment.² But we must not murder anyone. One indication that this commandment has been violated is when hatred is involved. In fact, Jesus linked hatred with this Commandment. This commandment especially relates to killing someone out of hatred, that is, premeditated murder.

The positive side of this commandment is this: We should respect the sacredness of human life. Life is a gift from God, and only He has the authority to take life, or command the taking of human life in certain cases. God emphasizes Murder is so serious that God commanded capital punishment. Ex. 21:12 says, “He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.” Why is murder such a serious offense? It is because, according to Gen. 9:6, man was made in the image of God.

In addition to the obvious, there are several applications of this commandment. For example:

1. Forcing someone into a very dangerous position - David murdered Uriah the Hittite in this way. Uriah was placed on the front line of battle, and then left to fight alone to ensure he would die in battle. This is similar to hiring a hit man. Even if you are not the one pulling the trigger, you are guilty of murder if you hire someone to do it for you.

2. Abortion – This is the ultimate in the taking of innocent life. That child in the womb has done nothing wrong, and yet their life is ended at the hands of an abortionist.

3. Euthanasia – Only God gives life. Therefore, only God has the right to take life. This leads to another application:

4. Suicide - The omission of the object shows that the prohibition included not only the killing of a fellow-man, but the destruction of one’s own life, or suicide.

III. YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY

In v.14 God says, “You shall not commit adultery.” Adultery specifically relates to married people. Once you are married, intimate, sexual contact of any kind is reserved exclusively for your spouse. That is the line you must not cross.³ Adultery is a violation of one’s marriage covenant. God is a covenant-keeping God, and He expects us to keep our covenants as well. Adultery tends to destroy or at least harm marriages. Children grow up best in homes where moms & dads love each other, and stay together. So serious was adultery that it was considered a capital crime in God’s law, punishable by death (Lev. 20:10; Deut 22:22).

The positive side of this commandment is to be faithful & devoted to one’s spouse. Back when God instituted marriage, He said, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). The marriage-relationship is paramount over every other human obligation. Let our actions reflect that.

² God provided cities of refuge in such cases as this, to protect such a person from the avenger (Ex. 21:13; Numbers 35).

³ Jesus expanded this commandment to include more than just physical relations outside of marriage. In the Sermon on the Mount He said, “whoever looks on a woman for the purpose of lusting after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matt. 5:28, my translation). He also pointed out that divorce does not necessarily do away with the sin of adultery. He said, “Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery....” (Matt. 19:9). Jesus was addressing a problem of His day. Some took Moses’ concession regarding divorce to mean that one could divorce their wife for almost any reason. So if a man found someone he liked better, he would divorce their wife, and marry the other woman. But Jesus said that such a relationship is an adulterous relationship.

This command is more relevant than perhaps any other time in American history. For the last 40 years we have been experimenting with the sexual revolution. The experiment has not turned out too well. Families have been broken and destroyed by adultery & multiple relationships. Disease is rampant. Adultery is all too common. Though adultery used to be primarily a male problem, today women are just about as likely to commit adultery as men.

I read about two churches in a small town in Georgia. On one side of the street, a sign advertised the minister's upcoming sermon, "When Your Marriage Is in Trouble." Across the street the other church had their pastor's sermon, "Love Thy Neighbor." That's why some marriages are in trouble!⁴

I hope the day will come when our society will realize that sex outside of marriage is wrong and destructive. Perhaps we as a society will condemn such forms of sexual expression instead of glorifying it. God knew what He was talking about when He prohibited adultery. This Commandment has never changed.

We need to do all we can to make sure that our marital relationships are solid and sound. We need to maintain the sanctity of marriage. So we should take steps to protect ourselves from violating this very important commandment. 1 Corinthians 10:12 says in a context about temptation, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." Since we should not be overconfident in our ability to resist temptation, we need to do 3 things: First, maintain a close relationship with God. I know of a man who was the pastor of one of the fastest growing churches in America near Dallas, TX. He fell into the sin of adultery. Later, he admitted that he became overconfident and went 4 years without a daily quiet time of Bible reading and prayer! Second, maintain a good, intimate relationship with your spouse. In Prov. 5 Solomon warns against adultery and says in v.15, "Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well." Then he said in vv.18-19, "Rejoice with the wife of your youth.... and always be enraptured with her love." If you are happy in your marriage you are less of a target for temptation. Third, keep enough distance in your relationships with others to avoid igniting passionate desire. In California they have discovered that it is not a good idea to build a house right next to the forest. Otherwise, your house could easily catch fire from a burning forest. Even so, don't spend time alone with the opposite sex. Watch out for frequent, private conversations in person, or by phone, email, or instant messaging. In 1 Timothy 5:2 Paul told Timothy to regard "older women as mothers, younger as sisters, with all purity." Appropriate physical contact should be reserved for public settings, which will ensure that you do not cross the line into adultery.

IV. YOU SHALL NOT STEAL

A. The Meaning – In v.15 God says, "You shall not steal." Obviously, this included taking & keeping what belongs to someone else without their permission.

The positive side of this commandment is honesty, and having respect for property rights (Acts 5:4). You are not entitled to anything that belongs to another person or group. Laws against stealing are necessary for the peace and stability of society.

B. The Applications – There are many possible applications of this commandment.

1. Kidnapping – Ex. 21:16 says, "He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death." When you kidnap a person to obtain a ransom, or to sell them as a slave, you are violating this commandment.

⁴ Adapted from Dianne Locke's submission to *Reader's Digest* (Nov. 2007), 195.

2. Stealing from your employer – This has become a common problem. About 30% of "inventory shrinkage" is due to shoplifting, but a whopping 43% is due to stealing by employees.⁵ People justify it by saying their employer doesn't pay them enough. Didn't you agree to work for them for the stated wage? In Titus 2:10 Paul said that even slaves were not to pilfer from their masters.

3. Withholding wages from employees - Leviticus 19:13 says, "You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him." Then God gave an application of that principle: "The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning."

4. Borrowing and not returning - Psalm 37:21 says, "The wicked borrows and does not repay...." How many of you have books & videos from our library that you haven't returned after several months?

When I entered the 7th grade, I realized that I was in trouble. I weighed about 75 lbs. and there were big guys in Junior High; some even with hair on their face. One time one of those big guys pushed me against the brick wall outside the school and said, "Let me borrow a quarter." Now, do you think he had any intention of repaying that money? No. But he wasn't honest enough to say, "I want to steal your quarter."

In a similar way, if you find something that does not belong to you, you are to return it. If you do not know the owner, then you may hold on to it until the owner looks for it (Dt. 22:1-3; Ex. 23:4). To do otherwise is a form of stealing.

5. Not paying just debts – Again, Psalm 37:21 says, "The wicked borrows and does not repay...."

6. Robbing God in tithes and offering – According to Mal. 3:10, withholding your tithes from the Lord is robbing God.

7. Cheating on your taxes – Even Jesus paid taxes. He said in Mt. 22:21, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's...."

8. Excessive or unjust taxation – Government should respect property rights. Government has the right to collect taxes to pay for the necessary functions of government, but they do not have an unlimited right to take our money from us. Thankfully, we can vote out of office those who raise our taxes unjustly. By the way, be sure to vote this Tuesday. In a similar vein, the government should not have the right to take your private property except to satisfy a public need, and unless they give just compensation. Government should not abuse eminent domain.

C. The Alternative - Eph. 4:28 says, "Let him that steals steal no more but, rather, let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good...." Don't steal for what you need & want. Work to gain it honestly. You should earn what you have, and be content with what you have so that you are not tempted to steal.

V. YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS

This Commandment concerns our neighbor's good name.

A. The Meaning – In v.16 God says, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." This particular commandment specifically refers to giving false witness in court (23:2,

⁵ Turning Point Daily Devotional, 1-13-06.

6-8). Justice has always depended upon reliable witnesses. However, this command applies to bearing false witness in other settings, such as what you say about yourself or other people (23:1).

The positive side of this commandment is this: We must speak the truth, for God is truth. He does not lie (Titus 1:2), and we should not lie. Speaking the truth and honoring promises is the cement that holds society together.

B. The Applications - We are not to speak falsely in any matter. We are not to lie and deceive others. Lev. 19:11 says, "You shall not ... deal falsely, nor lie to one another." And yet, in a recent study, 60 percent of people lied an average of almost 3 times in just 10 minutes.⁶ In a WebMD survey, it was discovered that quite a few patients lie to their doctor regarding their exercise, smoking, & drinking.⁷ A 2001 report showed that 2 out of 3 people who called in sick weren't.⁸ Now let's consider some other examples of bearing false witness:

1. Slander - The most flagrant form of this sin is to slander our neighbors — a lie invented and circulated with malicious intentions.

2. Gossip - Equally reprehensible is tale-bearing where there has been no careful investigation to verify the evil report. Leviticus 19:16 says, "You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people...." Many gossips even add to the story, and make it worse than it truly is.

3. Flattery - The flattering of another is a false witness. By the way, how about living right so I will not be tempted to lie at your funeral!

4. False Accusations – Ex. 23:1 says, "You shall not circulate a false report."

5. Cheating – When a business man misrepresents their product, or cheats in some other way, they are both lying and stealing. Too many people cheat in school. They are bearing false witness concerning their tests & grades. Studies have shown that about 70-75% of all H.S. & College students cheat. When you put your name on your school work, you are bearing witness that it is your work, not someone else's work. We also may bear false witness when we cheat in sports. Paul Harvey said, "Golf is a game in which you yell 'Fore,' shoot six, and write down five."⁹

VI. YOU SHALL NOT COVET

A. The Meaning – In v.17 God concludes His 10 Commandments by saying, "You shall not covet...." When I was young, I didn't even know what this word meant. Now I do know. It simply means to "desire." In its more negative form it is associated with words like "greed" or "lust." It doesn't forbid all desire, but only desiring what belongs to someone else.

The positive alternative is the virtue of contentment. Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:6, "Now godliness with contentment is great gain." Hebrews 13:5 says, "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have."

B. The Applications – God gives quite a few applications in the last of v.17. Notice that God told the Israelites that they were not to 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." To put this in more up to date language, don't covet your

⁶ http://reference.aol.com/article/_a/why-we-lie/20070305124009990003 (3/6/07).

⁷ *Readers' Digest*, Dec. '04, p.176.

⁸ 2002 CCH Unscheduled Absence Survey.

⁹ Paul Harvey in *Golf Digest*, quoted in *Reader's Digest*, 4/04.

neighbor's wife, or house, or new car, or wide screen HD TV. I believe gambling appeals to the sin of coveting. The poor are not to envy the rich. Paul warned that covetousness is idolatry.

C. The Importance of It - This Commandment differs from all the others in that while they prohibit the overt act, this condemns even the desire to act. The tenth Commandment probably has never been placed on any human statute book! Some may question why God would include such a commandment as this. After all, all the other commandments deal with outward action, but this deals with inward desire. They may say, "You mean we can't even desire what belongs to someone else?" No, and there is good reason. God forbids coveting for at least 2 reasons. First, covetousness leads to so many other sins. This commandment is so important because it gets at the root of the other sins. James 1:14-15 says, "each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin...." Our deeds will not be right if our heart is not right. Adultery and stealing are two obvious examples. Adultery begins with desire for another man's wife. Stealing begins with desire for something that belongs to someone else. Paul wrote in I Tim. 6:9 that "they that [desire] to be rich fall into temptation and a snare...." Then he warned, "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (I Tim. 6:10). This is why Jesus said in Luke 12:15, "Beware of covetousness."

The second reason God included this commandment is to show us that we are sinners by nature. This is the commandment that really convinced Paul that he was a sinner in need of a Savior. He felt like he lived by all the other commandments, but this one got him. In Romans 7:7 Paul said, "I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'" We do need a Savior, and His name is Jesus.

Conclusion: Have you kept all of these 10 Commandments? Are you consistently living in obedience to these commands? We would all have to admit that we have broken many of them, at least in our hearts. And the Bible says, "The wages of sin is death." "The soul that sins shall die." We do have a sin problem, and only Jesus is the answer to that sin problem. Only He died for our sins on a cruel cross. Only He provides forgiveness of sin. Only He rose from the dead, and can give eternal life. Turn to Jesus today, and be saved. Ask Him to save you from your sin.

Not only will Christ forgive you, but He will give you a new heart. He will change you from the inside out, and give you new power over sin. Only God can change our sinful hearts (Heb.10:14-18). I am calling upon believers to live by these commandments. Through the new birth and the gift of the Holy Spirit, you have the capacity to live by them. If you have broken any of these commandments lately, confess it to God, repent of it, and resolve to live in obedience to God through His strength!

Sources: Peter Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 420-425; Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961); C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 1 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1981); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Exodus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972); Warren Wiersbe, *Be Delivered: Exodus* (Colorado Spring: Chariot Victor Books Publishing, 1998). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).