

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

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Grades 9-12
Year 4
Quarter 3

THE RELEVANCE OF THE LAW

Lesson Aim

To help students see the relevance of the Ten Commandments for Christian living in the modern world.

Memory Verse

Exodus 20:1-2 - “And God spoke all these words: ‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.’”

Lesson Background

In the minds of many people in modern America, the Ten Commandments “are honored more in the breach than in the observance.” They pay lip-service to the traditional standards of Judaism and Christianity, yet make their own decisions based largely on personal feelings and the predominant views of the society around them. The Ten Commandments are thought to be somehow outmoded or old-fashioned, insufficient for the demands of a new age.

As we begin this week to study the Ten Commandments and their implications for Christians today, we will focus first of all on the issue of the relevance of the law. We will do this first of all by talking about how people in the world make decisions apart from God’s standards, using their own opinions and feelings, an evaluation of the situation in which they find themselves, or some man-made external standard. Then we will see how the standard provided by the Word of God differs from all of these man-made standards and how it provides the only sufficient basis for a life that is both pleasing to God and successful. Next week, we will look at the completeness of the law, and see in the process that no human decision falls outside the

realm of God's revealed will for our lives. Then we will examine the summary of the law given by Jesus and see how this expresses in different words the same concepts found in the Ten Commandments. Finally, beginning in the fourth week of the quarter, we will look at each of the Ten Commandments specifically, one by one, talking not only about the meaning of each, but also about how each applies to specific issues faced by the young people in your Sunday School class.

Lesson Procedure

Start the class by asking your students how they decide whether something is right or wrong. Hopefully, they will immediately indicate that they make such judgments based on what the Bible says. Probe a little more deeply by asking how they decide about things concerning which the Bible does not specifically speak. As we will see next week, there is in reality nothing about which the Bible does not speak, at least in principle, but your students probably are not consciously aware of this as yet. They may indicate that such decisions are made on the basis of what they have been told by others (such as parents or friends), or by listening to their consciences. Next try to get them to think about how their non-Christian friends make decisions. If someone does not believe in the authority of the Bible, how does he decide what is right or wrong? After allowing some discussion of this issue, present the following:

1. Non-Christian Decision Making

There are essentially three ways in which non-Christians make decisions. These basic ways have many variations, but they summarize the different approaches taken to moral issues by those who do not acknowledge the authority of God or His Word.

A. Decisions Based on the Decision-Maker

The vast majority of people in today's world seem to think that everyone should be allowed to "do his own thing." Since each person is an individual, no one else should be able to tell him what he should or should not do (except when his behavior infringes upon the rights of others, of course). No matter where a person's views may come from, he is entitled to believe and act upon them.

At least two variations of this position exist. One bases decisions upon personal feelings, internal factors that determine a person's approach to any given problem. A second bases decisions upon an evaluation of the projected results of a given action, and either engages in or rejects the behavior according to the desirability, or lack thereof, of the suspected outcome.

Ask your students to evaluate this particular approach to decision making. Why is this not a good way to make decisions about the rightness or wrongness of a given behavior? Several problems with this approach should be pointed out in the course of the ensuing discussion:

First of all, on this basis nothing can be absolutely right or wrong. Everyone is different in his or her backgrounds, experiences, and feelings, and thus each person will decide questions of morality differently, and no one can say with any legitimacy that one way of approaching a moral issue is better or worse than another. In addition, the feelings of any person are constantly in a state of flux, and thus there will be no consistency even in the moral thinking and behavior of a single individual.

Secondly, those who take this approach often believe that the end justifies the means. In other words, any behavior is acceptable as long as it produces good results, or does not produce bad ones (on this

basis, for instance, many have argued for the acceptance of deviant sexual behavior and drug experimentation, insisting that those who hurt no one but themselves should be allowed to do as they please). But on what standard, then, are the results of a given action to be judged? Who is to say what is a good result and what is evil? Even Hitler would have been moral on this basis - he was fully convinced that the destruction of the Jews in Europe was a desirable result for the benefit of the world. Furthermore, we should note that no one is able to predict with any certainty the results of his actions. A few short-term results may be predicted with some certainty, but no one knows the long-range implications of his behavior. Such judgments would require omniscience - a characteristic possessed only by God.

B. Decisions Based on the Situation

Other non-Christians, seeking to remove, at least to some extent, the subjectivism associated with the first approach we discussed, make decisions after evaluating the situation in which they find themselves. This situation would be defined, not only by their personal experiences and feelings, but also by the external factors represented by the environment and the other people involved in the decision. How do your students evaluate this approach?

They should be able to see that the situational approach does nothing at all to alleviate the subjectivism of the method considered previously. In fact, it shares the same two weaknesses, lacking any absolute standard and depending too much on the supposed results of an action to evaluate its legitimacy. After all, it is the individual who evaluates the situation, and everyone's estimation of a particular set of circumstances will be different from everyone else's. Furthermore, we still are given no criteria by which the situation is to be evaluated (someone such as Situation Ethics advocate Joseph Fletcher is no help at all when he suggests that decisions should be made on the basis of the law of love, since he never defines what he means by love).

No matter how much Christians may repudiate this type of thinking, however, they face the temptation of falling into the same pattern when they suggest that the law of God either contradicts itself in certain situations or else does not cover certain types of decisions. Those who suggest such things wind up making their own evaluations of the situation the final criterion for deciding what is right and what is wrong. Ask your students for some examples of situations in which they have been tempted to think in this way.

C. Decisions Based on a Standard

The preceding discussion has made it clear that not many in the world take seriously the idea of an unchanging standard for human behavior apart from those who rely on some form of divine revelation. There have been a few who have tried, however. One example is German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who devised what he called the Categorical Imperative as a standard to regulate moral decisions. Kant believed that morality was possible without religion or the supernatural, and taught that philosophy provided a proper basis for deciding between right and wrong. His principle stated that a particular action may be deemed to be right or moral if it may without contradiction be willed to become a universal law. On the basis of this principle, killing would be deemed immoral, since if everyone were to practice killing, it would soon become impossible - a contradiction. Similarly, universal stealing would render private property obsolete, and universal lying would make lying impossible to conceive, therefore both may be judged to be immoral.

We must recognize, however, that no moral system devised by man is perfect. Kant's Categorical Imperative is flawed in several ways. First of all, any "universal law" can exist without contradiction if it is defined with sufficient specificity (killing in general may be immoral, but killing all boys who were born in October of 1972 produces no contradiction). Secondly, anyone who tried to live by such a set of universal

laws would soon find that they begin to contradict one another. No human standard can provide a perfect basis for living in this world.

2. Christian Decision-Making

The procedures used by the world for making decisions in the moral realm leave men and women floundering in a shoreless ocean of relativism. God, however, provides a standard in His Word that gives to His people everything they need to know in order to please Him. The Christian does not need to depend on his feelings and experiences to determine his behavior. God made each one of us, and knows far more about us than we do about ourselves. The old illustration of the train and the track is appropriate here - God made us, and we function most effectively when we live according to His rules. A train may be “free” when it leaves the track, but it is not able to function effectively at all.

Not only does God know us because we are His creatures, He also knows all there is to know about the situations in which He places us and about the consequences of our actions. We do not need to be omniscient to know what we should do when we serve and obey an omniscient God.

Finally, God’s standard is perfect. It never contradicts itself, and there is no situation that it does not cover. As we will see next week, God has provided for His people directions for living that are complete and without flaw. Consequently, the study that we have just begun is one of considerable relevance. The Ten Commandments are not outmoded or old-fashioned, but provide for the Christian the only basis for a life pleasing to God.

Conclusion

Conclude by noting, for the sake of the unbelievers in your class, that this study is relevant for them as well. Though they may not be children of God, they are still His creatures. Even unbelievers benefit, though only in a temporal sense, when they live according to God’s rules. Note also that obedience to God’s standards should never be seen as the ground of salvation. The law demonstrates clearly that we are incapable of keeping it and desperately in need of the saving grace of Christ. Only those who have been transformed by that grace are in any way capable of pleasing God by desiring to obey His Word and following through on that desire in the power of the Holy Spirit.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

THE RELEVANCE OF THE LAW

1. Why do many teenagers today think the Ten Commandments are old-fashioned?
2. How do those who do not take the Bible seriously make decisions about what is right and what is wrong?
3. Why is it impossible for people to function in a world in which everyone “does his own thing”?
4. Why is it not a good idea to decide what is right and wrong based on the results that will come from a particular action?
5. Why are the Ten Commandments important even to those who are not Christians?

THE COMPLETENESS OF THE LAW

Lesson Aim

To show students that the law of God, given in the Scriptures and summarized in the Ten Commandments, covers every decision in the life of every person in this world.

Memory Verse

Exodus 20:3 - "You shall have no other gods before me."

Lesson Background

It is altogether too easy for people who are facing difficult ethical decisions to think that their situation is an exception to the rules. Excuses and rationalizations are easy to come by when the pressure is on, and far too many Christians avail themselves of such. The only way to avoid this temptation is to realize from the very beginning, before facing a pressure situation, that God has provided for each of us all that we need to know in order to do what is right. Once the knowledge has been obtained, what remains is then no more than obedience - a very difficult thing in its own right.

Today's lesson emphasizes the completeness of God's law. We will begin by noting that the Ten Commandments should be viewed as a summary of the entire will of God for human behavior, and that other summaries do exist in Scripture. We will then spend some time demonstrating that, not only do the Ten Commandments cover the entire range of human behavior, but also each one covers the whole life of man from a particular perspective, if viewed as a general principle. Finally, we will take note of the instructions given in Scripture for making decisions in those areas that are not specifically mentioned in the Bible, thus showing that God has truly given us all that we need for every decision we must face in life.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by reminding the students of the discussion with which last week's lesson began, where they talked about how they decide what is right and wrong when they are considering an issue that the Bible does not discuss. Point out that it is the purpose of today's lesson to show that there are no such problems; that the Bible, either in precept or principle, discusses every moral question that any person would have to face at any time.

1. The Summary of God's Will for Man

God has communicated His will for human behavior in many different forms. Reproduce the chart below on the board for the benefit of the students:

The Golden Rule
The Two Great Commandments
The Decalogue, or Ten Commandments
The 613 Commandments of the Old Testament Law
The Bible, Scriptures Inspired by God for His People
The Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ, Our Perfect Example

As the pyramid indicates, God has summarized His will for man in many ways. These various manifestations of the law do not contradict one another, however, but all communicate essentially the same thing. The connection may be seen in the following way: What does it mean to "do to others what you would have them do to you"? It means to love your neighbor (and to love God). How do we love God and our neighbors? The Ten Commandments tell us that we do those things by not putting other gods first, by not making images, by not killing, stealing, or lying, etc. What does it mean to do these things? The detailed laws of the Old Testament (the Jewish rabbis found 613 of them) tell us how these are to be worked out in practice. The Bible as a whole expands these principles further by giving us practical examples of men and women who either kept or violated them. Finally, the perfect and final revelation of the will of God for man is found in the life and ministry of His Son, Jesus Christ. These different steps of the pyramid are all different ways of summarizing the same thing - that man is to live by God's standard.

2. Precepts and Principles

The Ten Commandments, then, cover the whole duty of man in living a life of obedience to God. They omit nothing, and include all we need to know in order to please Him. But we can take the significance of the Ten Commandments even further if we look at a comment made by James, the brother of Jesus, in James 2:10. Here James says, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."

Ask your students what they think James means by this. They will probably be able to see that one who sins has broken the law in its entirety because he has separated himself from God by his action, no matter how seemingly petty. Also, they should realize that for this same reason, no sin is worse than any other, at least in terms of its spiritual consequences (obviously, different sins have different consequences on the human level). Another way of looking at this verse that can be useful, however, is to see that every sin breaks every one of the Ten Commandments. Let's see how this works:

- Every sin is a violation of the First Commandment because it involves putting something else before God.

- Every sin violates the Second Commandment because it is idolatry, worship of the self if nothing else.
- Every sin violates the Third Commandment because it brings the name of God into disrepute.
- Every sin breaks the Fourth Commandment because it involves a misuse of time (the commandment refers to six days of work as well as one day of rest, all of which are to honor God).
- Every sin breaks the Fifth Commandment because it goes against some form of authority constituted by God.
- Every sin breaks the Sixth Commandment because it is an assault against the image of God in man (note how Jesus expands upon this commandment in Matthew 5).
- Every sin breaks the Seventh Commandment because it is spiritual unfaithfulness, which was called adultery by the Old Testament prophets.
- Every sin breaks the Eighth Commandment because it is stealing from God the glory that rightly belongs to Him.
- Every sin violates the Ninth Commandment because it involves the false assertion that a person has the right to choose the course of action that he should follow in his own life, without respect for the law of God.
- Every sin breaks the Tenth Commandment because it involves coveting what belongs to God - autonomy.

Thus every sin violates every commandment when it is seen in its broadest sense. This should help your students to realize the extent to which they offend God every day, and the seriousness of any sin, no matter how insignificant it may seem to them.

3. Things Not Directly Mentioned

The fact of the matter remains, of course, that not all ethical issues are directly addressed in Scripture. One obvious result of this is that there are many ethical questions about which evangelical Christians sharply disagree. If the Bible does not mention the issue and Christians themselves disagree, how are we to determine what is right and what is wrong? Last summer, when we studied the book of Romans, we raised this question in the lesson on chapter fourteen (we will look at it again in a few months when we arrive at the lesson on I Corinthians 8). Remind your students of the conclusions drawn in the Romans 14 study. The amount of “reminding” you have to do will depend, of course, on how much your students remember from last summer. The following principles should be pointed out in the course of your discussion:

1. The issues in question include only those things that are right in themselves. Something Scripture shows to be wrong is ruled out as a subject of dispute among Christians.
2. Those who rightly believe the behavior to be acceptable must have a charitable attitude toward those who think it is wrong, not scoffing at their hyperactive consciences.

3. Those whose consciences are too tender to allow them to engage in the behavior should not condemn those who see nothing wrong with it, nor take a “holier-than-thou” attitude.
4. Those who think something is wrong should not be coerced into doing it, even if it indeed is not wrong. If they believe it to be wrong and do it anyway, they are sinning because they are not acting in faith.
5. No one should place a stumblingblock before his Christian brother that would cause him to sin. We are all to treat one another with love in all things.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, the Bible leaves no human decision untouched. It covers every form of human behavior from every possible perspective, giving us guidelines that control not only our outward behavior, but also our words, attitudes, and even thoughts. Even those issues that may be thought to be ethically neutral come under the principles of Scripture, which instructs us to deal with one another in love in all things.

If time remains in your session today, apply the principles discussed to a specific moral problem. How is complaining, for instance, prohibited by every level of the pyramid given in the first section of the lesson? How does it violate every one of the Ten Commandments? How does something like social dancing or the use of alcoholic beverages fit the principles given in the third section of the lesson (admittedly, the use of alcoholic beverages is hardly a subject about which the Bible is silent)? What are some of the issues that concern your students that could be included in this category?

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

THE COMPLETENESS OF THE LAW

1. In what sense is it true that the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments are two different ways of saying the same thing?
2. What does James 2:10 mean? How is it possible for every sin to violate every one of the Ten Commandments? Choose one specific sin and show how it violates each of the Ten Commandments.
3. Are there any ethical questions on which the Bible gives us absolutely no guidance?
4. When the Bible does not speak of a specific moral issue, how are we to resolve it? What guidelines does the Bible give us for dealing with such a thing?

JESUS AND THE LAW

Lesson Aim

To give students insight into the summary of the law given by Jesus in Matthew 22:34-40 and help them understand what it means to love God and their neighbor.

Memory Verse

Exodus 20:4 - "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below."

Lesson Background

It is very easy for the world today to contrast the teaching of Jesus with that of the Old Testament. Many glibly speak of the ethic of love preached by Jesus that was allegedly such an improvement over the harsh legalism of the Decalogue. As we saw last week, however, there can be no discontinuity between the two; Jesus is communicating the same ideas found in the Ten Commandments when He says that "the law and the prophets" is summed up in the requirements to love God and your neighbor.

Our task this week will be to define what Jesus means when He says that Christians are to love God and love their neighbors. This job is made much more difficult by the fact that the word "love" is used in many different ways in our society and is very widely misunderstood in popular culture. Once we understand what love is, we can then see how Jesus' words fit together with the Ten Commandments that are to be the subject of our study. We can also see how love for God and love for neighbor are related to one another.

Another important issue that must be discussed this week is the badly-misunderstood concept of self-love. Too many Christians today are chasing an unattainable ideal that is keeping them from any meaningful service for Christ because they have been told that they must love themselves before they can love others. Your students may have been taken in by the same sort of teaching, and it is vital that they understand the true biblical teaching on the love of self, particularly as it relates to our ability to love others.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking your students to write on a piece of paper a definition of love. Give them no further qualifying instructions. The results should show both the variety of ways in which the term is used and also the fuzzy understanding of the much-used term that exists among your students. Have your students read the passage that forms the subject of our study today, Matthew 22:34-40.

1. What is Love?

The two most common uses of the word “love” in American society are probably in reference to a romantic feeling (“being in love”) and the act of sexual intercourse (“making love”). It can also be used, of course, to refer to a person’s strong positive reaction to a pizza! Such common uses of the word make it difficult indeed for students (or anyone else) to understand what the Bible is talking about when it uses the term “love.”

Most of your students have probably been taught at one time or another that the Greek language contains three words that may be translated “love” (*eros*, *phileo*, and *agape*), one referring to the physical aspect of love, one referring to friendship, and the third to divine love. It is the third kind of love that concerns us today, since that is the kind Jesus talks about when He tells us to love God and our neighbor in Matthew 22:34-40. The best-known discourse on this kind of love is found in I Corinthians 13. We will be looking at that chapter in more detail next quarter, so we will not examine it now. Several things should be noted about the nature of *agape* love, however.

First of all, *agape* love is an action verb. Even a cursory examination of I Corinthians 13 will show that the term is defined by what people do rather than what they feel. The idea that a person must feel positive about a person to love that person does not come from Scripture. In fact, if feelings were to be the basis for our behavior, love could not be commanded in Scripture, since it is virtually impossible to control a feeling. Quite to the contrary, however, we must realize that if we act toward someone in obedience to God’s commands, He will eventually change our feelings toward that person. Loving feelings, then, are the result of loving behavior, not its cause.

Secondly, *agape* love is not conditioned by the response of the person toward whom it is directed. If it were, how could Scripture affirm that God loved those who did not love Him, those who were ungodly and in fact hated Him? God is the example of what our love is to be, and His love is based entirely on His character, not at all dependent on the lovableness or potential desirability of those toward whom that love is directed.

Thus we may conclude that *agape* love is very different from the popular conception of love. It is volitional rather than emotional, active rather than passive, and requires that we look at others from God’s perspective, and translate that insight into action on their behalf. Because it is based on God’s character and defined by God’s Word, we must also recognize that the kind of love that Jesus commands is impossible for the unregenerate man. No man can display in his life the love of God if he is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God.

2. Love for God

Jesus told the man who had asked Him the question that the greatest commandment was to love God. Ask your students why they think loving God is foundational to all moral behavior for the Christian. Several points should be noted in the course of the discussion.

First of all, one cannot love his neighbor rightly unless he loves God. This is true because love for God provides the strength, the motivation, and the standard for loving others. We have already seen that biblical love is not natural for human beings. It can only come through the power of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Christians want to love others because they want to please God; in the same way that God's love for His people is rooted in something other than their desirability (His own purposes), Christians love others for some reason other than that other people are lovable (a desire to please and honor God). In addition, we can never know how to love others if we do not submit to God's authority expressed through the commands of His Word. One who rejects God can never understand or practice true love in the biblical sense of the word.

Secondly, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism indicates, man's chief purpose in life is to glorify God. Any man who does not love God cannot live a full and purposeful existence. He is like a fish out of water. Consequently, love for God is the foundation of all ethical discussion for the Christian.

Conversely, of course, we should recognize that the moral problems of those who do not know God have spiritual roots. It should come as no surprise whatsoever that non-Christians are unable to understand basic moral issues. Their problem is not one of ignorance, but rather one of rebellion - because they reject God, they are incapable of discerning the true nature of right and wrong.

3. Love for Others

The concept of love for others is a difficult one to put into practice if love is conceived of as a feeling. Quite obviously, our feelings for different people differ considerably, and there are some people whom all of us find virtually impossible to like, let alone love. Of course, when Jesus said we are to love our neighbors, He leaves us no easy outs. The Parable of the Good Samaritan clearly teaches that the term "neighbor" in this commandment applies to everyone, even our worst enemies. We may not therefore blunt the force of the commandment by restricting it to those with whom we are comfortable or with whom we have something in common.

As indicated in the definition of love given earlier, what Jesus commands here is not emotional, but volitional; not feeling, but action. That, of course, raises another question: If we are to show love to all, does not love require a certain depth of relationship, and thus a time commitment of significant proportions? How can we love those whom we hardly know?

The obvious response to this is that we are certainly to love all people with whom we come in contact, but the way in which that love is worked out will differ according to the context of the relationship in which it is exercised. The expression of love within a marriage will certainly be different from the expression of love to a casual acquaintance. Whatever the nature or depth of the relationship we may have with a given person, however, we are responsible to act in a loving way within that relationship, with love being defined by the commandments of Scripture. As with the love of God for us, this love is to be given independent of the response of the recipient. As Jesus said in Matthew 5, if you love only those who love you, you are no better than the heathen. God's love is displayed when it is shown to those who do not return it.

It might also be useful to note at this point that the deepest relationships require mutual love. Since for a Christian love is motivated and defined by a relationship to God, the most intimate of relationships can only be formed with fellow believers. This explains both the depth of Christian fellowship and the biblical requirement that believers only marry within the faith.

4. Love for Self

In recent years, the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 22:34-40 has been perverted in a disturbing way. To find the extent to which your students have been subjected to this sort of teaching, ask them if Jesus' commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves requires that we first love ourselves if we are to be able to love our neighbors. The harmful implications of such teaching include an emphasis on the self that cripples a person's motivation for Christian service and an encouragement of introspection that can easily produce either pride or despair. In response to such teaching, we must spend a few minutes clarifying the biblical teaching concerning the love of self.

We must first begin with the fact that the Bible assumes that all people love themselves (Ephesians 5:28-29). Love of self is nowhere commanded, but instead is assumed to be the normal human condition. Secondly, we must note that an overemphasis on the importance of self-love could lead to the dual dangers of introspection and pride. One who focuses on himself is not in any position to serve others. Instead, he becomes self-absorbed and prideful, even if that pride takes the form of indulging in self-pity because of a negative self-image.

On the other hand, of course, we must acknowledge that someone who has a poor self-image, either of arrogance or inferiority, will be hindered in any efforts to show love to others. The key factor here, of course, is that the way to open the doors to service to others is not to focus on clearing up the poor self-image. Instead, the proper road is one of obedience, serving God in love to others even if it is difficult or uncomfortable. The result will be an improved self-image, derived from the encouragement of seeing God use him to build up other people. A proper view of self is therefore not a goal, but a by-product of obedience. One who maintains that love for others is impossible unless a poor self-image is dealt with first is putting the cart before the horse. A positive view of self comes only from obedience to God in love to others.

Of what does this positive view of self consist? Above all else, the self-image of a Christian is realistic. On the one hand, the Christian realizes that he is a sinner who deserves nothing from God but condemnation. On the other hand, any child of God possesses dignity, both as a human being made in the image of God and as a child of God who has been made an heir of limitless blessings. The Christian also has the confidence of knowing that God indwells him and uses him in carrying out His purposes. Thus the Christian sees himself in a positive light, but realizes that all that is good in him is not the result of his own effort or deserving, but is there purely because of the grace of God at work in his life.

Conclusion

Conclude the lesson by again going over the definition of love given earlier and applying it to God, others, and self. In all we do, we are to look at ourselves and others from God's perspective and put that insight into action on behalf of those with whom we are dealing.

GOD’S BEING

Lesson Aim

To communicate the meaning of the First Commandment and show its importance in the lives of your students.

Memory Verse

Exodus 20:5 - “You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me . . .”

Lesson Background

The First Commandment is in its narrow sense one that deals specifically with the worship of God, but in its broader context refers to all that we do. When God tells us that we are to have no other gods before Him, He means not only that we are to worship no one else in a formal sense, but also that nothing in our lives is to be given priority over God - all is to be done to His glory (I Corinthians 10:31).

The first thing we must notice about this commandment is that it defines an exclusive covenant relationship. The Old Testament law is cast in the form of a covenant or treaty, and the fundamental component of any such treaty was that it defined an exclusive relationship between the treaty participants. God consequently begins His law with a statement of His exclusive relationship to His people. Since we are dealing here with an imposed rather than a negotiated covenant, it is appropriate that the requirement for faithfulness be placed upon one party only. God does not have to be held to a standard of faithfulness - He promises it in return for obedience by His people.

Secondly, we should notice that the commandment does have a specifically religious context. The Hebrew word translated “before me” literally means “before my face,” and is an idiomatic expression denoting “in my presence.” Since the presence of God for the Israelites of Moses’ day was centered in the Shekinah Glory in the Tabernacle, the First Commandment specifically forbids the presence of any idols representing any other gods in the Tabernacle, specifically in the Holy of Holies. We have already seen that the commandment also has a much broader sense, of course, in that all aspects of a Christian’s life partake of the character of worship.

Finally, we should take note of the tenacity with which God purposes to maintain the exclusive relationship delineated by the First Commandment. Numerous references are made in the Old Testament to the jealousy of God and to the wrath that He will display if anyone violates the exclusive relationship He enjoys with His people (Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 6:15; 32:16; Psalm 78:58 are just a few examples). God requires faithfulness of His people because He loves them, not just because He desires abject servitude.

The applications of this commandment are many and broad, but in this lesson we will only consider a few examples. These examples will include Christian attitudes toward the occult in its various manifestations (clearly the worship of another god), the issue of apostate churches (the corruption of the worship of the true God), and the involvement of a Christian in secular organizations (the denial of the relevance of God to a given aspect of life). These are by no means intended to cover the First Commandment exhaustively, but should help your students see the variety of ways in which the commandment is to influence their lives and decision making.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the class by asking your students first to quote and then to explain the First Commandment. They will probably be able to realize that the commandment requires that no false gods are to be worshiped, and some may be able to perceive that it has something to do with priorities, in that the Christian is not to put anything in his life ahead of God. Elaborate on these insights by giving the class the material from the Lesson Background that will expand their understanding of both the specific and broad applications of the commandment. Then explain that you will be spending the rest of today’s class time looking at three sample issues associated with the First Commandment in order to provide illustrations of how the command may be put into practice in the life of a Christian.

1. The Problem of the Occult

As C.S. Lewis so cogently noted in his introduction to *The Screwtape Letters*, the devil likes nothing better than to attract obsessive attention or to be ignored. Those preoccupied with Satan tend to become fascinated with him, and in the process remove themselves from important realms of Christian service. Those who ignore Satan tend to lose sight of the danger he poses to the believer, resulting in a carelessness toward the spiritual battle in which we are all engaged. The following ideas should be noted:

A. The Occult Involves Putting Satan Before God

Some of the more notorious forms of occult ritual involve the direct and explicit worship of Satan, but even those that do not do so put Satan (or demons or “the forces of nature”) before God in the sense that they blatantly ignore the biblical injunctions against trafficking in the occult in favor of practices that they feel will give them greater insight or power or whatever.

B. The Occult is Real

Too many Christians too lightly write off practitioners of the occult as charlatans who make money by taking advantage of the gullible. While many such people undoubtedly exist, the fact remains that the occult is very real. Many mediums do have contact with demons; demon possession occurs in our modern world (though all too often it is glibly attributed to “mental illness”); even some reports of the activity of ghosts and such things could be demonic manifestations (if angels can appear in visible form, why can’t demons, who are fallen angels, do the same?).

C. The Occult is Dangerous

Because it is real, the occult must be recognized as a legitimate danger to the Christian. In the same way that Peter warned Christians to be on guard against the wiles of Satan, so young people today should be careful not to get drawn in to the schemes of Satan associated with the fascination of the occult.

D. God is More Powerful Than Satan

While the occult should be guarded against as a legitimate danger, it should not terrorize the believer. The Holy Spirit who indwells the believer is more powerful than the evil forces of this world and can give the Christian the victory over temptation or any other Satanic trick. The power of the Spirit should give confidence to the Christian, but should never be used as an excuse for foolhardy involvement in what is essentially a very perilous matter.

2. The Problem of Secular Organizations

Though it is entirely possible that some of your students may be dabbling in the occult, it is likely that for most of them the preceding discussion will be largely academic in nature. This problem, however, is one that all Christians must face. If everything a Christian does is to glorify God, should a Christian ever associate himself with an organization that does not have as its main purpose to glorify God? Can a Christian ever join a secular organization?

Your students will recognize immediately that the wording of this question is extreme. If a Christian must be in the world, he must associate with unbelievers, often in a formal way. The question we must deal with, then, is what guidelines do we have for determining when it is and is not appropriate for Christians to join organizations that do not have as their purpose the glory of God. The following questions can be helpful in dealing with this rather difficult issue:

A. What are the philosophy and goals of the organization?

Every organization has a basic philosophy, even though it may not always be explicitly stated. One who is thinking about joining an organization should know what it stands for and what it is trying to accomplish.

B. Is the philosophy of the organization consistent with Christianity?

Even though the organization may not be Christian, it may still have goals that Christians may legitimately support. Service organizations such as the Boy Scouts or civic groups like Little League can aim for citizenship goals that Christians can readily endorse (though recent controversies about

homosexuality have placed the Boy Scouts in a position of promoting unbiblical values). Certain groups rule themselves out, of course, by pursuing goals that are completely contrary to Christianity (Can your students come up with any examples?).

C. To what extent are members required to support the philosophy of the organization? Is there any likelihood of bringing about reform within the organization?

Is a Christian free to inject Christian values into the work of the organization, or is one who participates in the organization expected to support its philosophy in every particular? Is reform a legitimate possibility, or is the organization so fixed in its ideas that the Christian can have no hope of influencing its direction positively?

D. Will participation in the organization cause me to sin, or be a stumblingblock to anyone else?

The easiest thing in the world is to look at your participation in an organization in isolation from the rest of your life and the lives of others. It is important to think about the time impact of the organization - will it require me to take time away from church, family, or other responsibilities? It is also necessary to think of the impact of my participation on others - would my example cause others to sin?

If all of these questions can be satisfactorily answered, then the Christian may with confidence pursue involvement in the organization in question, remembering of course that all is to be done to the glory of God.

3. The Problem of Apostate Churches

The final First Commandment problem for consideration today is that of churches that have to one extent or another departed from the faith. We are not dealing here with a church where the preaching may not be your style, where the music is distasteful, or where the elders are too stodgy. Many Christians throughout the years have had to answer difficult questions when their churches have gone down the path to liberalism. Many such churches have fine traditions of God's work in their midst, and some people have long-standing ties to their churches. As things change, however, when is the time to leave? When does a church cease to be a church, and become a place where a false god is worshiped and where God is not glorified?

Some have made this decision based largely on doctrine, leaving the church when the doctrinal standard is formally altered to something incompatible with Scripture and its authority. The problem with this, of course, is that many liberal churches have never formally altered their doctrinal statements; they simply no longer believe or practice what their standards formally require. Others maintain that the key issue is the possibility of reform. As long as the church is open to biblical input and some in the congregation are interested in returning to doctrine and practice that are honoring to God, then the believer has a responsibility to continue as a witness within the church. The difficulty with this position is that the church is intended to be a place for nurture, not a mission field. One must receive as well as give ministry in order to be an effective Christian. A third approach suggests that the time to leave a church is when continuing longer would involve the Christian in actual sin. Whether that sin be acceding to false doctrine or submitting to female elders, this is where some Christians draw the line. Clearly, this is a place where a line surely must

be drawn. No Christian should remain in an organization, whether secular or “sacred,” if participation requires him to sin.

Conclusion

Obviously, in this lesson we have only scratched the surface of the multitude of possible applications of the First Commandment. In fact, you may not have had time to cover the ones given here. The idea, however, is to communicate to your students some notion of the range of problems to which the First Commandment may be applied. Hopefully, they will have gotten the idea from today’s discussion that the requirement to have no other gods before the true God touches every area of the Christian’s life.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

GOD'S BEING

1. What is the First Commandment? In what way may the First Commandment be seen as the summary statement of a covenant relationship?
2. How does the First Commandment, if taken in its broad sense, apply to everything a Christian does?
3. What should be the attitude of a Christian toward the occult? Why are both fascination and terror inappropriate responses?
4. Suppose you are considering joining a secular organization. How would you go about determining whether or not you can do so and honor God in the process?
5. Suppose you and your family have been involved in a church for many years. Gradually, however, the church has changed. The denomination has begun to turn away from Scripture and the leaders of the church are moving away from the Bible in the church's practice and teaching. How do you know when you should consider leaving the church?

GOD’S NATURE

Lesson Aim

To clarify the meaning of the Second Commandment and show the students how idols are a problem for twenty-first-century Christians.

Memory Verse

Exodus 20:6 - “. . . but showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments.”

Lesson Background

At first glance, the Second Commandment may seem to be an exercise in redundancy - a repetition in other words of the same idea communicated by the First Commandment. It is important to notice, however, that the Second Commandment goes further than the first. It not only forbids the worship of false gods, it also forbids false worship of the true God. The worship of images occurs not only in crass paganism, but also in much that passes for Christianity.

The clearest examples in Scripture of false worship of the true God are found in Exodus 32 and I Kings 12. In both of these passages, the God of Israel was worshiped in visible form (golden calves). In both cases, that worship was condemned in the strongest possible terms. In fact, the golden calves erected by Jeroboam are blamed throughout the books of Kings for the idolatry and wickedness of the Northern Kingdom. If God indeed desires worship, why is it that He becomes so upset when He is worshiped in visible form?

The obvious problem with visible images of God, of course, is that they are distortions of the nature of God. They represent Him falsely and limit Him to something much less than what He is. Although man is described in Scripture as the image of God, man is also pointedly denied worship (Deuteronomy 4:15-19), as are angels. If the highest of God's creatures are not to be worshiped, how much more heinous is it to worship those creatures that are lower than man? Those who do such things rightly draw down upon themselves the ridicule of Scripture (Isaiah 44:9-20).

We also must realize that not all images are visible. People can create images in their own minds and make those images the objects of their worship. How many people have you known who have objected to some teaching of Scripture by saying, "I can't believe in a God who would . . ."? The god they worship is obviously a god of their own making, no less than if they had carved it for themselves out of wood or stone. But are not Christians subject to the same temptation? Are our images of God formed by sources other than Scripture? How many Christians think of Jesus by visualizing Warner Sallman's famous portrait? What role does our worship music play in forming our ideas of God? To what extent may the creative efforts of man be offered up to God in worship? As anyone with experience in the churches of the Reformed persuasion is aware, these are not easy questions to answer. It is important, however, that our students consider them in order to understand how the Second Commandment is to be applied. As a result, we will include in our lesson today a discussion of the Regulative Principle, as well as an attempt to apply the commandment to areas that may be of more immediate concern to your students, such as the celebration of holidays and the use of popular music in the church. As in the last lesson, you will find that the lesson contains more material than you will be able to use. Choose the aspects of the lesson that you consider to be most appropriate for your students.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking your students how the Second Commandment differs from the First. Then go over with them some of the background material on the Second Commandment. Emphasize the point that God not only wants to be worshiped, but wants to be worshiped in a particular way, not in any way that man thinks appropriate. Be sure they understand that images of God are not just necessarily statues of wood or stone, but may be mental images as well. After getting the basic principles across, turn to the sample applications of the commandment.

1. The Regulative Principle

Take a few minutes to familiarize your students with the Regulative Principle. This teaching is based on such biblical passages as Deuteronomy 12:29-32, where God instructs the Israelites that they are not to worship in any way other than what He had explicitly commanded; in particular, they are not to adopt the worship practices of the pagan nations around them. The Regulative Principle states that, in the area of worship, anything that is not commanded by God is forbidden. This matter was a serious bone of contention between the Lutherans and the Reformed during the Reformation (the Lutherans maintained that anything not specifically forbidden was permissible). Today, its applications include the question of exclusive psalmody, the use of images in the church, and the celebration of holidays by Christians. The material below summarizes some of the key issues associated with these controversies.

2. Applications of the Second Commandment

A. Images in the Church

While the Second Commandment clearly rules out the worship or veneration of images, we must consider what it has to say about the use of images for decoration and instruction. Some would maintain that any image, whether intended to represent God or not, violates the language of the Second Commandment, since the verses prohibit not only the worship of images of God's creatures, but also their construction. This reading of the commandment is favored by Jews themselves, as well as by groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses. Such an interpretation would rule out pictorial art completely. Others see worship as the key issue, and assert that the commandment says nothing about the construction of images as long as they are not objects of worship. Most people fall somewhere between these extremes. In order to provide a basis for discussion, I will try to summarize some of the arguments on both sides of this controversy. Since Reformed churches themselves differ on this issue, I will not try to offer conclusions, but the teacher should deal with the question from the perspective of his own congregation.

i. Against Images

Those who argue against the use of images in the church for decorative or instructional purposes would assert that images within the environment of worship can easily become objects of worship, albeit subconsciously. Thus objects can come to be thought of as holy in and of themselves (stained-glass windows, a cross, a communion table, even a Bible). In the matter of instruction, the major controversy concerns pictures of Jesus. Those who argue against their use claim that any picture is bound to be a distortion (why does Jesus always look like a rather effeminate WASP?), and thus a violation of the Second Commandment.

ii. For Images

Those who advocate the use of decorative images point to the example of the Tabernacle in the Old Testament. It contained a large amount of symbolic imagery, most of which was intended to be instructive, but some of which was designed purely for the sake of beauty. The Temple, of course, was even more ornate. They argue that God is to be worshiped with our best, therefore the worship environment should be beautiful, not plain or even ugly.

As far as the use of images for instructional purposes is concerned, some maintain that, in addition to the obvious instructional value of visual aids for children, the failure to use pictorial representations of Christ would steer the thinking of Christians in the direction of Docetism, an ancient heresy that denied the reality of Christ's physical body. They say that a failure to acknowledge the physical reality of Christ's human body leads ultimately to a denial of His humanity, and that the way to avoid such thinking on the part of our children is to picture Christ as a man like ourselves.

B. Religious Holidays

Some in the history of the Church have objected to the observance of religious holidays such as Christmas and Easter on the grounds that such holidays are not sanctioned in Scripture. In fact, the observance of Easter was introduced in the second century, while the celebration of Christmas did not take anything like its present form until the fourth century. They maintain that worshiping God in a way that He has not established is a violation of the Second Commandment. Furthermore, many of the practices and

traditions associated with Christmas and Easter are pagan in origin, having been introduced into Christian observance with the conversion of the European barbarians. Do such facts mean that Christians should not celebrate the birth or resurrection of Christ?

Those who favor such celebrations point out that observance of holidays was one of the matters referred to by Paul in Romans 14 when he talked about areas of legitimate difference among Christians and that Paul did not forbid such observances, but required that, whether one celebrated such holidays or not, one do so to the glory of God. Furthermore, Jesus Himself appears to have observed a religious holiday that is not sanctioned in the Old Testament when He went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22), which we know today as Hanukkah.

In this area, the verdict of Paul in Romans 14 must be emphasized. Christians certainly do differ on this matter, but whatever they do is to be done to the glory of God. A further point should be made in that those who do choose to observe such holidays should do so unlike the world - in a way that brings honor to God. Obviously, the way in which the world celebrates Christmas and Easter is geared more toward bringing money into the retail outlets than it is toward bringing praise to the Savior. How can a Christian really honor God in such an environment?

C. Music in Worship

Worship music has been a matter of controversy for many years in the church. At times this controversy has surrounded the words that are to be sung (exclusive psalmody), while at other times the music itself has been disputed (e.g., rock music). In a sense these issues are distinct, yet in another way they are closely related.

i. The Words

It is the belief of some that God is only to be worshiped using words that He Himself has inspired. Thus they restrict themselves to the singing of psalms in worship. We should note, however, that singing is a matter of teaching as well as worship (Colossians 3:16). If this is indeed the case, it requires explanation as well as repetition of the words given to us in Scripture. Furthermore, Ephesians 5:19 seems to indicate that our singing may legitimately include more than the psalms (although those who teach exclusive psalmody maintain that these are three categories of psalms within the psalter). It is important to note, of course, that our worship must still be real worship, that which draws attention to and praises God rather than focusing on ourselves.

ii. The Music

The question concerning what music is appropriate for the worship of the Church has long been disputed. Whether it is Martin Luther borrowing melodies from the beer halls of Germany and asking why the devil should get all the good tunes or Charles Wesley writing rousing songs to attract the attention of passersby to the revival preaching of his brother John, there have been those who have seen virtue in borrowing the world's musical styles for use in the Church. Others have just as steadfastly rejected such an approach, preferring to use dignified music, which usually means the traditional tunes written one or two centuries before (of course, these tunes themselves were the radical ones rejected by the traditionalists in the age when they were written!).

Several points should be made with regard to this issue. First of all, the principle that worship is to draw attention to God applies to the music as well as the words. It is very easy, whether the music is modern

and up-beat or majestic and traditional, for the worshiper to get so caught up in the music that God is forgotten. The music should thus enhance the words of praise, not detract from them. The style of the music should not contradict or obscure the words that are being sung, but should make it easier to express the praise that is contained in the words themselves.

Secondly, we should note that this question is in many ways culturally related. The music of one culture may not carry the words of praise for another with quite the same clarity. The same is true of different eras within the same culture. We should expect change in this area, whether it be from time to time or from place to place.

Conclusion

Conclude the lesson by reiterating the basic thrust of the Second Commandment - that God is to be worshiped in God's way, not in any way that man sees fit. Whether we apply this to the hymns, holidays, or house of the church, we must be careful not to offer up to God the works of our own hands.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

GOD'S NATURE

1. How does the Second Commandment differ from the First? What does it prohibit besides the worship of false gods?
2. What is the Regulative Principle? What are some of the issues to which it has been applied?
3. Do you think that the use of pictures of Jesus is appropriate in the church? May they be used for decorative purposes, such as stained-glass windows? May they be used for instruction, such as in flannelgraph lessons for children? Why or why not?
4. How can a Christian best honor God at Christmas and Easter? Is it best to ignore these holidays, since God did not command their observance? How can those who choose to celebrate Christmas and Easter keep the focus on Christ, rather than presents, candy, and such things?
5. What qualifies a song as being appropriate for use in worship? What must be true of the words? What must be true of the music?

GOD’S NAME

Lesson Aim

To show students some of the many ways in which God’s name can be misused and impress upon them the importance of giving God the respect that is due to Him.

Memory Verse

Exodus 20:7 - “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”

Lesson Background

The Third Commandment is often given scant attention by many Christians because they assume that it refers only to profanity. This sort of narrow focus is nothing new. The Jews of Jesus’ day restricted the application of the commandment only to the name of God actually used in the commandment - the name Yahweh. It is important that your students see the broader applications of this commandment, however. The name of God can be misused in ways that are not verbal. In the broadest sense of the commandment, anyone who claims the name of Christ by professing to be a Christian misuses that name by dishonoring it every time that he or she sins. Thus every sin is in a sense a violation of the Third Commandment.

Even when thinking specifically of the name of God, more than profanity is at issue. The Third Commandment speaks of using the name of God in an empty way. How often do we use the name of God in a meaningless way when we worship? When we sing God’s praises or pray, is it done with meaning or in an empty, mechanical way?

As we have been doing throughout this series, we will look at this commandment by bringing out several specific areas of application for the students to discuss and consider. The three areas of application we will examine today involve the empty use of God's name, the use of language that defames God or His image while falling short of what is commonly recognized as profanity, and the extent to which a Christian should expose himself to profane language through literature and the media. As usual, if you are not able to utilize all of the material provided, discuss those issues that you consider to be most appropriate to the students in your class.

Lesson Procedure

Begin today's class by asking your students for examples of ways in which people violate the Third Commandment. If they are a typical group of teenagers, they will quickly mention profanity then lapse into silence. Draw them out further by asking how God's name can be dishonored. They should now be able to see that a person can misuse the name of God in many ways besides cursing and swearing. Note that today we will look at three specific applications of the Third Commandment in order to illustrate its importance for Christian teenagers.

1. Empty Uses of the Name of God

Most Christians are very careful about avoiding profanity in their speech. There are many other ways, however, in which a Christian can misuse God's name.

A. In Worship

Anyone who has been a Christian for some time is aware of the problem of lack of concentration during worship. When songs become familiar, it is easy to sing the words without thinking about them. When prayer is a common practice, it is easy to let the mind wander when someone else is leading in prayer. When praying aloud, it is easy to use meaningless cliches that carry no serious thought behind them. All of these common problems for Christians must be recognized as violations of the Third Commandment. When we speak God's name in an empty way, saying it without thinking, we break this commandment, even if such usage occurs in the course of prayer or praise.

B. By Substitution

In Matthew 5:33-37, Jesus condemns the perversion of the Third Commandment by the religious leaders of His day. They taught that, while an oath taken in the name of God was sacred, a person was not as strictly bound by an oath sworn upon anything less than the name of God. The resulting hierarchy of oaths became no more than an excuse for deception and unfaithfulness. Jesus indicates instead that when we substitute anything for the name of God, that in no way lessens the seriousness of what is being said. In our culture, we do not generally struggle with a hierarchy of oaths, but we frequently hear people (perhaps ourselves?) substitute other terms for the name of God in conversation and think that by so doing they may avoid the consequences of profanity. Such circumlocutions include replacements for the names of God and Jesus ("Gosh," "golly," "gee," etc.) and substitutes for other terms generally considered profane (e.g., "heck" for "hell" or "darn" for "damn"). Christians must realize that substituting another word for the name of God or some profane term does not in any way avoid the condemnation of the Third Commandment.

2. Defaming the Image of God

The name of God is borne by His creatures who bear His image. Anyone who deprecates the image-bearer of God deprecates God Himself. Unfortunately, speech that downgrades other people is all too common, even among Christians. Scripture indicates that our speech is to be edifying, not corrupt (Ephesians 4:29), and that we are to think (and by implication, speak) of those things that are pure and noble (Philippians 4:8). There are two ways in which these biblical principles are commonly violated.

A. Vulgarity

Scatological language and crude sexual references do not by any stretch of the imagination qualify as edifying speech. Christians should not engage in the kind of language the world often turns to in order to express negative emotions or seek cheap laughs. Needless to say, circumlocutions in this area are no better than those words used to replace the name of God. We must recognize, however, that the definition of vulgarity is culturally determined. What is considered vulgar in some cultures may not be in others. The same is true of different times within the history of the same culture (the King James translation of I Samuel 25:22 illustrates this point). Though vulgarity may be culturally conditioned, it is nonetheless clearly unacceptable for the Christian.

B. “The Put-Down”

Sarcasm and humor at the expense of others is the antithesis of Christian love, and certainly does not meet the criterion of edification. Those who spend their time making jokes at the expense of others either care nothing about others or seek to build themselves up at the expense of others. The most common excuse for this kind of humor is that no one really takes it seriously. Quite to the contrary, however, such jibes are often painful, no matter how much the target of the humor may attempt to put a good face on the situation. Others claim they are merely seeking a less-painful way of expressing constructive criticism, using humor rather than direct confrontation. The problem here is that the humor causes the pain without communicating the love that a direct confrontation allows for. No matter how common it may be, and no matter how many adults may perpetuate the practice, your students should be confronted with the fact that language that generates humor at the expense of others is a violation of the Third Commandment.

3. Profanity in the Media

Any Christian who lives outside of a monastery is confronted regularly with profane language. If a Christian is to be a part of this sinful world, such contact is unavoidable. The question arises, however, concerning the extent to which a Christian should deliberately expose himself to profane language. When it is spoken by others with whom he has contact, it is hard to avoid. But what about those things to which he exposes himself by choice? What about things like books, television, music, and movies? Is there any justification for a Christian to expose himself to the type of language that permeates the media today when such exposure can be avoided? [Allow your students to discuss this one for a while - you should get some interesting responses from them, responses that will tell you quite a bit about both the types of media to which they routinely expose themselves and the level of their commitment to obedience to Christ.] The following factors need to be considered in making decisions in this area:

First of all, there is value for a Christian in knowing the world as it is. Words express ideas, and the language used by the world communicates the ideas espoused by the world. This does not mean we need to partake of the world's sin, but it does mean we should understand how those in the world think. One of the

best ways to do this is to listen when the world expresses itself - in literature, in television, in movies, and in music.

Secondly, the motive behind our exposure to the world's ideas and language needs to be explored. Am I reading, watching, and listening to these things because I want to understand the tricks of Satan and be prepared to communicate with those who do not know Christ? Am I trying to learn how the world views Christians so I can see ways in which I can improve my testimony before unbelievers? Or am I reading, watching, and listening to the world's ideas because I agree with them? Worse yet, am I listening uncritically, simply absorbing the philosophy of the world without giving it a second thought?

The third consideration involves the problem of saturation. It does not matter what my motive may be for tuning in on the world's ideas if I so saturate my mind with them that they influence my thinking despite my efforts to the contrary. Everything that we put into our minds leaves an impression there, so we must be cautious about filling our minds with that which is unwholesome. This is true whether we are talking about profane language or whether we are talking about immoral ideas and behavior. The more we expose ourselves to it, the more likely we are to be influenced by it. Philippians 4:8 is again a critical passage to guide us in this area.

Conclusion

Conclude the lesson by reinforcing in the minds of your students the importance of purity in our speech - in the sincere and meaningful use of God's name, in the edifying manner in which we address others, and in the care we take in regulating our exposure to the corrupt speech and thinking of the non-Christian world.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

GOD'S NAME

1. In what sense does the Third Commandment regulate speech that does not directly involve God's name?
2. In what way does the Third Commandment apply to things other than our speech?
3. Why are Christians seriously in danger of misusing the name of God while in church? How can such a thing be avoided?
4. Give three reasons why Christians should not put down other people with sarcasm or humor.
5. To what extent is it appropriate for a Christian to read books, watch television shows and movies, and listen to music that contains profane language?

GOD’S WORSHIP

Lesson Aim

To make clear to students that the Fourth Commandment requires us to do everything to the glory of God every day, not just one day out of the week.

Memory Verse

Exodus 20:8-9 - “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work . . .”

Lesson Background

Throughout the history of the Church, Christians have tended to go to extremes in the application of the Fourth Commandment. Many in our own day almost completely ignore the commandment, while others throughout history have emulated the legalism of the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. While there may be legitimate differences concerning the specific application of the commandment to given situations, there are certain basic principles that must be kept in mind whenever the Fourth Commandment is under discussion.

The first of these principles involves the Sabbath as a creation ordinance. The pattern for working six days and resting one is the creative activity of God Himself. God has built into the fabric of His world the cycle of rest and activity under which His creatures function best. As such, the commandment has universal application, to this age as well as the Old Testament, and to unbelievers and believers alike.

The second principle involves the Sabbath as a blessing. The labor of man was cursed at the Fall. The rest of the Sabbath day is a temporary reprieve from the curse and a foretaste of the heavenly rest of the

Christian (Hebrews 4). The Sabbath rest should therefore never be seen as a burden to be borne, but rather as a blessing and a privilege.

The third principle involves the Sabbath as a day of worship. God has set the day aside, not just for the blessing of rest, but also for the blessing of worship. Though rest and worship should not be confused, both are associated with the blessing of the Sabbath and are included in the Fourth Commandment.

The fourth principle involves the application of the Fourth Commandment to all of the time God has given to each one of us. The commandment not only tells us to rest and worship one day out of the week, but also to work the other six. This implies that all of our time is to be given to God and used for His glory, not just one day out of seven.

The practical applications of this commandment that we will be considering today include the Christian use of the Sabbath, the Christian view of work, and the societal and personal implications of the Fourth Commandment.

Lesson Procedure

Begin today's class by having your students turn to Exodus 20:8-11 and ask them to describe the portion of the Christian's time that is regulated by this commandment. The phrasing of the question should tip them off to the fact that "one-seventh" is not the correct answer. Hopefully by examination of the text they should be able to realize that the Fourth Commandment covers all of the time God has given to us and requires that all of that time, whether devoted to work, rest, or worship, should be used for God's glory. Having established this basic principle, move on to the consideration of the topics that illustrate the practical applications of the Fourth Commandment.

1. Keeping the Sabbath

Open this issue up to discussion by asking the students what it means for a Christian to keep the Sabbath. The answers they give will probably depend both on the training that they have received at home and on the nature of the position taken by your church on the subject. After a period of discussion, focus in on some basic principles as follows.

A. The Sabbath Command is Universal

Because of its connection with the Creation, the Sabbath may not be restricted to Old Testament Judaism. It is designed for all men of all times.

B. The Sabbath Command Requires Rest and Worship

While we usually associate the Sabbath with worship, it should be noted that its primary application is to the area of rest. We are told by God that one day out of seven is to be devoted to rest and worship.

C. The Sabbath is a Blessing from God

At the Fall of man, labor was cursed. What was natural and pleasurable became a burden. The Sabbath is intended to be a temporary respite from this aspect of the curse, and thus should be viewed as a

blessing. It is also a blessing because it delivers us from daily concerns and frees us to worship God wholeheartedly.

D. The Sabbath Rest is Not One of Inactivity

Jesus showed by His example that the rest of the Sabbath is an active one. He regularly engaged in works of mercy on the Sabbath and also indicated that works of necessity were permitted. The question that arises, of course, involves how such works are to be defined. It is very easy for people to rationalize as “works of necessity” the things they wish to do on Sunday, whether it be work around the house or remunerative labor. While there certainly are some works that are necessary on Sunday, too many people excuse their own lack of careful planning (students doing homework?) or greed (working overtime in order to have desired luxuries?) by rationalizing that their labor on the Sabbath is necessary.

E. The Observance of the Sabbath is Not to Be Legalistic

The Pharisees of Jesus’ day made the Sabbath a burden rather than a blessing by laying legalistic requirements on the people that went far beyond the commandments of God’s law. Paul indicates that there should be considerable liberty in the specific application of this commandment (Romans 14:5; Galatians 4:10; Colossians 2:16). Christians ought not to condemn one another or look down on one another for legitimate differences of application in this area. Nor should Christians use this liberty as an excuse for license, or to rationalize doing as they please on the Sabbath.

2. The Christian and Work

The Fourth Commandment, as we have seen, applies not only to the Sabbath rest, but also to our work. God commands work, and therefore our attitude toward it must be within the context of our obedience to God. The following biblical truths concerning work should be communicated to your students.

A. Work is Commanded

God commands His people to work. In fact, He commands us to work for six days. Does this mean that a five-day work week (or a five-day school week, for that matter) is unbiblical? Of course not. The commandment applies not only to remunerative labor, but to all constructive activity. We as Christians are to use our time in a positive and beneficial way. It is important to note in this context that Adam and Eve, living in sinless perfection in the Garden of Eden, had work to do (Genesis 1:28; 2:15). Work involves fulfilling our purpose as God’s creatures. It should not be thought of as a necessary evil or as the consequences of sin.

B. Work is Cursed

Though work itself is noble and a part of God’s purpose for man, it is nonetheless under the curse of sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, part of the resulting curse was that work, which had previously been pleasurable, became a burden (Genesis 3:17-19). We should therefore not expect labor to be a pleasant activity (pointedly apply this truth to the schoolwork of your students; too many students mistakenly expect work to be made enjoyable for them, and do nothing but complain if it is not). The grace of God is such, however, that He often allows His children to gain pleasure from the labors they undertake for His glory.

C. Work is a Calling

For the Christian, work has special significance because it is part of his calling from God. Too often we mistakenly think that only pastors and missionaries are “called” by God to their tasks. In fact, God has called all of His people to serve Him, in whatever occupation they may be engaged. The labor of a businessman or machinist is every bit as sacred to God as that of the pastor if it is done for His glory. This also implies that no Christian has the right to view his occupation as superior to that of any other Christian.

3. Social and Personal Implications

The Fourth Commandment is for all, not just for Christians. Thus it has implications for all of society as well as for the individual lives of believers.

A. Social Implications

God gives commandments for our good, not in order to make life difficult. Thus when He says that we should work six days and rest one, He knows that this is how we will function most effectively. Any society that ignores this principle does so at its own peril.

The “rat race” in which so many people get caught up in our modern world leaves little time for rest. Many work unreasonable hours in order to provide luxuries for themselves and their families; others drive themselves to exhaustion, even in their so-called pleasures. Ask your students to discuss how society suffers when a weekly day of rest is not observed for the refreshment of body and mind. Does this then mean that Christians should push for the passage and/or enforcement of “blue laws,” which mandate the closing of most businesses on Sunday? Would such legislation guarantee that people would rest on the Sabbath?

The other extreme, of course, comes when people worship leisure. Too many in our society view work as no more than a means by which leisure may be obtained. The Christian does not work in order to rest, but rests in order to work. Work is not a necessary evil that must be endured in order to gain maximum pleasure through leisure, but rather a means of glorifying God. The emphasis on leisure has harmed our country in many ways, both through a decrease in effort among workers and through the increased decadence of the sorts of pleasure people give themselves to seeking.

B. Personal Implications

The Fourth Commandment has implications for individuals as well as for society. These implications relate largely to our use of time. The Bible condemns laziness of any kind in the strongest possible terms (Proverbs 6:6,9; 10:26; 12:24,27; 13:4; 15:19; 18:9; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-16 are a few examples). Wasting time must be seen by Christians for what it is - sin. Time is like anything else God has given to us. It is a gift of which we are to be good stewards. If Christians are to be good stewards of time, at least three things are required.

The first is organization. God is not a God of confusion, and demands that His people do everything decently and in order (I Corinthians 14:33, 40). While the primary reference of these verses is to worship, they may legitimately be applied to the life of the individual believer as well. Lack of organization is a great thief of time. Christians who fail to live orderly lives are in a sense robbing God.

The second necessity for good stewardship of time is discipline. It is not enough to be able to make out a schedule. A person must also be able to stick to that schedule. If we are to do this, we must know

ourselves and our tasks well enough to schedule intelligently, and then have the perseverance to remain at the task until it is completed and work with sufficient diligence so that it is completed within the allotted time. This issue is a particularly difficult one for young people, but the fact of the matter is that those who do not learn discipline when they are young often retain their bad habits when they become adults. Those who have no self-discipline go through life perpetually behind, under pressure, and feeling guilty. Of course it must be recognized that such discipline can only be exercised in a full sense with the help of the Holy Spirit. God is able to do what we are incapable of doing on our own.

The third factor involved in good stewardship of time is attention to priorities. As people get older and are given more responsibilities, demands on their time increase dramatically. Your students may think they are busy now, but assure them that things get much worse when they reach adulthood. A person who does not carefully consider his priorities will not be able to cope with the demands made by others on his time. The important principle to remember here is that God will never expect more from us than He gives us the time and strength to accomplish. If a person is unable to do all that he has committed himself to do, he is either using his time poorly or committing himself to too much. Good stewardship of time requires that we know what we are able to do, commit ourselves only to those things we are able to accomplish, and follow through on our commitments. These priorities are to be based, not on our feelings or on the values of the world around us, but on the Word of God.

Conclusion

Close the session with a brief review of the basic principles relating to the Fourth Commandment as it applies to the Sabbath, to the work in which we are engaged, and to the ordering of our individual lives and the society around us.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

GOD'S WORSHIP

1. How much of our time is regulated by the Fourth Commandment?
2. Does the Fourth Commandment apply only to Christians, or does it apply to unbelievers as well? In what ways?
3. What does it mean for the Christian to keep the Sabbath? How do you plan to put this into practice today?
4. Why should a Christian see work as a good thing?
5. What must a Christian do if he is to be a good steward of the time God has given him?
6. How is society harmed when it ignores the Fourth Commandment?

GOD’S ORDER

Lesson Aim

To show students that respect for all authority is required as an extension of our respect for the authority of God over our lives.

Memory Verse

Exodus 20:10 - “. . . but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.”

Lesson Background

The Fifth Commandment occupies a pivotal position within the Decalogue. The first table of the law deals largely with man’s responsibility to God, while the second deals largely with man’s responsibility to others. The Fifth Commandment serves as a transition between the two. This is true because it deals with the issue of authority. God’s authority over us is the basis upon which we submit to the authorities under which He has placed us. Thus it is because we love God (i.e., obey the first four commandments) that we desire to respond to other people in a loving way (which means obeying the last five commandments). The Fifth Commandment serves to relate the two, since human authorities are extensions of the authority of God.

The Fifth Commandment is unique not only because of the position it occupies, but also because of its content. It is the only commandment expressed in purely positive terms. All others contain some aspect of “thou shalt not.” Though it is easy to think of negative commandments as being harsh and restrictive, it is important to note that positive commandments are far more restrictive than negative ones. This is true because a negative command tells a person what he may not do but leaves an entire range of options available

to him. A positive command, on the other hand, demands one thing and one thing only, leaving no options. The Fifth Commandment could have said “Do not abuse your parents.” In that case, indifference or mere tolerance would have been an option. But the command to honor leaves no alternative before God except for a positive attitude of respect and obedience.

Another aspect of the commandment’s uniqueness lies in the fact that it incorporates a promise. The promise is one of long life, which is never defined. This may be viewed either as long within the context of God’s plan (i.e., as long as God intends for you to live), or long in the context of eternity (obedience leads to eternal life). The important thing to note about the promise, however, is the fact that it is conditional. The conditional nature of the promise is not grounded in anything that characterizes the person in authority, but rather in the obedience of the person under authority. God will not ask us whether the authority over us was godly, kind, or even reasonable - He will ask us whether or not we submitted to those under whom He placed us.

While the primary application of the Fifth Commandment is to parent-child relationships, we must realize that it also applies to other authority structures. The Bible requires honor toward all in authority, whether it be God (Ephesians 3:14), the husband in a family (Ephesians 5:22-33), masters or employers (Ephesians 6:5-9), church leaders (I Timothy 5:1; I Peter 5:1-11), political rulers (Romans 13:1-7), and even teachers (Proverbs 1:8; 3:1-2). All of these are deserving of honor, and many are even referred to as “fathers.”

There are obviously many issues that could be discussed in relation to the application of the Fifth Commandment. We will be isolating three examples today, representative of the many issues to which the commandment may be applied. These issues are the extent of parental authority, the relationship between employers and employees, and the matter of civil disobedience. As usual, the teacher should feel free to pick and choose regarding his use of the application materials, dependent largely on the time available to him and the concerns of the students in his class. Whatever you choose to cover, however, be sure to emphasize the spiritual basis of human authority. Students (and adults as well) need to be reminded that our obedience to others is rooted in and grows out of our obedience to God.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking your students what kind of commandments are more restrictive, positive ones or negative ones. If they are a typical class, they will immediately assert that negative commandments are more restrictive, largely because no one likes to be told that he cannot do something and the natural response of the unregenerate man is rebellion. Point out, however, as mentioned in the Lesson Background, that positive commands are really much more restrictive. What this implies is that the Fifth Commandment may indeed be one of the hardest commandments to keep, since it requires a very specific response. Proceed then to explain to the students that the Fifth Commandment not only talks about children and parents, but applies to the whole range of human authorities under which we find ourselves. The specific response required is one of honor, which implies both respect and obedience. We will see in today’s lesson what that respect and obedience means in three specific situations - parents, employers, and the government.

1. Honor Toward Parents

Open this section by asking your students if it is ever right to disobey their parents. This should produce some lively discussion. If they do not raise these issues, be sure to make them think about and discuss what should be done when a parent is unreasonable or tyrannical, when a parent requires the child

to do something sinful, or when a child reaches adulthood. Do any or all of these situations justify disobedience?

With regard to the unreasonable or tyrannical parent, show your students that the consistent teaching of Scripture is that even unreasonable authorities are to be obeyed. If this is true of husbands (I Peter 3:1-2), masters (I Peter 2:18), and rulers (Romans 13 was written when Nero was the emperor of Rome), must we not conclude that the same is true of parents? God will hold parents accountable for how they fulfill their responsibilities, but that is not a judgment to be made by children. The child's responsibility is one of obedience and respect.

As far as sinful requirements are concerned (lying for a parent's benefit, for instance), we must assert that we must obey God rather than men. Obedience to parents can never be used to justify sin.

The matter of adult children is perhaps the most difficult to discuss. The key factor here is the teaching of Genesis 2:24, which says that at marriage a child leaves his parents and is joined to his spouse, thus forming a new family unit. This does not mean the end of all responsibility to parents, but it does mean that those who form new households now owe their first allegiance to their own families, and that parental responsibility cannot be given priority over that. By extension, the same may be inferred concerning single children who leave home to establish their own households. Parental responsibility changes when the child leaves home. A wise parent will recognize this and prepare both himself and the child for this eventuality, but even when the parent does not do this, the truth remains that a new relationship is established when a child becomes an adult and forms his own household. The other side of this is, of course, that your students must recognize their continued responsibility for obedience even though they may consider themselves to be adults, or practically so.

2. Honor Toward Employers

Begin this section by having your students read three passages of Scripture: Matthew 20:1-16, Ephesians 6:5-9, and Colossians 3:22-4:1. Having read these, have them list on a piece of paper the responsibilities of employers and employees according to Scripture. After each student has compiled his own list, come together and discuss the results. Write a composite list on the board as you discuss these ideas. Your list should include the following:

A. Responsibilities of Employers

Employers are commanded to be reasonable and to recognize their accountability before God (Ephesians 6:9), to pay fair wages (Colossians 4:1), and to honor contracts (Matthew 20:13-15). A key question here is what constitutes a fair wage. If nothing else, we may conclude that this requires that compensation fit the work that is being done. There should be some correspondence between production and remuneration. Ask your students what common business practices and attitudes would be ruled out by these basic principles.

B. Responsibilities of Employees

Employees are told to render respect and obedience to their employers (Ephesians 6:5), to give their best effort, to be motivated by the desire to please God rather than the employer (Ephesians 6:6-8), and to expect only that which has been earned (Matthew 20:13-15). How would adherence to these principles avoid a lot of labor conflicts? How would they make many companies more productive? How would the application of these principles to school make the educational experience more profitable?

One last point that must be made in this area relates to the problem of greed. Most conflict between employers and employees stems from greed, since employers often seek to exploit their workers to maximize profit, while workers often try to gain as much pay for as little work as possible. Such attitudes are inexcusable among Christians.

3. Honor Toward Government

Christians differ sharply as to their responsibility to human governments. While all would agree that under some circumstances “we ought to obey God rather than men,” there is vast confusion as to when this principle applies. The whole area of civil disobedience is an important one today, whether one is concerned about government policies relating to abortion, homosexuality, or questions like war and capital punishment. Historically, Christians have taken one of three general positions with regard to this issue.

A. Christians may disobey the government when the government is sinful

Some in the past have asserted that all human governments are essentially sinful, and therefore the Christian owes his allegiance to none of them. This radical position is represented by the view of the Jehovah’s Witnesses that all governments are Satanic, and also by the desire of some Anabaptist groups to isolate themselves from all governmental involvement. This position, however, clearly flies in the face of Paul’s teaching in Romans 13.

B. Christians may disobey the government when the government does something sinful

Others would not argue for general lack of submission to governments, but would maintain that a government that acts unlawfully may be opposed by unlawful means. Such an attitude has surfaced through various examples of civil disobedience in the civil rights, Vietnam War, and anti-nuclear protests in past years, as well as some types of anti-abortion protests today. Here again, though, Paul’s counsel to the Romans was one of submission and obedience, even to an unjust ruler. Peter advises the same approach in his first epistle.

C. Christians may disobey the government when the government makes them do something sinful

The teaching here is that governmental authority may be disobeyed only when to obey that authority would be to violate the law of God. There are many examples of this in Scripture, from the steadfast disobedience of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to the refusal of the apostles in the book of Acts to refrain from preaching the Gospel.

Conclusion

In summary, we may note that in the same way that parental mistakes and sins do not justify the disobedience of children, sinful actions by the state do not justify disobedience by its citizens. It is only when obedience to the parent or the state would mean disobedience to God that the overruling of designated authority is justifiable. In all other situations, the child of God is to glorify God by obedience to His designated authorities, and that obedience is to be rendered as unto God Himself.

1. In what sense does the Fifth Commandment provide a transition between the two tables of the law?

2. What are the two aspects in which the Fifth Commandment is unique?

3. Must a child always obey his parents? Under what circumstances is disobedience permissible? Until what age must a child continue to obey his parents?

4. Give some reasons why it is important for an employee to obey his employer. In what ways does our society today oppose a biblical view of work?

5. Is it appropriate for a Christian to protest government policies with which he disagrees? Under what circumstances and using what methods? Is a Christian ever justified in disobeying his government?

THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

Lesson Aim

To give students a biblical basis for the sanctity of human life and help them understand how this principle applies to some of the most controversial ethical issues of our day.

Memory Verse

Exodus 20:11 - “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

Lesson Background

The Sixth Commandment is a very brief one, and one would think that it is very clear as well, but there can be no question that the application of this commandment has been the subject of more controversy than perhaps any other in recent years among Christians. The familiar King James Version rendering, “Thou shalt not kill,” and the more prosaic NIV, “You shall not murder,” are both translations of a verse that in Hebrew consists only of two words - a negative and a main verb. The main verb is *ratsach*, which would correspond to our English words “murder” and “manslaughter.” It refers to an act of taking human life that may not be deliberate nor necessarily premeditated. This word is not used in the Bible to refer to such acts of killing as death in battle, legal executions, or the killing of animals. The use of the word itself makes it clear that some of the applications made of this commandment by some people are illegitimate (it cannot be used to speak against war, capital punishment, animal experimentation, or hunting, for instance). Yet the limited scope of the word should not cause us to lose sight of what it says about the sanctity of human life.

The Bible teaches that human life is precious to God. Human life is a direct gift of God (Genesis 2:7) and is uniquely valuable because man is made in God’s image (Genesis 9:5-6). The fact that death is

threatened as the penalty for the sin of man does not mean that human life is cheap to God, but underscores the seriousness of sin. The sanctity of human life is also seen in the great patience of God in the face of human rebellion. The sin of Adam and Eve was punished by exclusion from the Garden of Eden and by a curse, leaving opportunity for repentance. The murder of Abel by Cain was punished by banishment rather than death. Even in the face of the great wickedness prior to the Flood, God gave a 120-year period of grace before judgment fell. The greatest example of the value of human life to God, of course, is the fact that He was willing to give His Son to save the lives of rebellious sinners.

Like all the other commandments, the Sixth Commandment also has a broader and more general range of application. Jesus illustrates this in Matthew 5:21-26, where He shows that the emotions and attitudes that, if left unchecked, lead to murder, are equally violations of the Sixth Commandment. Anger and hatred are just as sinful as murder itself. Another way of putting this is to say that any assault on the image of God in man is viewed as an assault on God Himself.

The applications of the Sixth Commandment to issues in our society are many and varied. One thinks readily of matters such as abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, war, genetic and behavioral engineering (which could be viewed as assaults on the image of God in man), organ transplants, drugs, racial prejudice, and even environmental pollution. Needless to say, we will not even be able to scratch the surface of such a list in a single Sunday School lesson. The goal of the lesson, therefore, must be to equip the students with the biblical principles needed to deal with these issues from a truly Christian perspective. Consequently, we will begin the lesson by looking at a biblical example of the application of the Sixth Commandment - the establishment of the Cities of Refuge. We will then go on to examine three key questions: Is human life unique? When does human life begin? Is human life of ultimate value? As we look at these key ideas, we will note briefly how they may be applied to some of these major social issues that have been mentioned. Your students must be made to see the basic principles, and not just be given pat answers to the social controversies. This is important because the rate of technological growth ensures that they will face in their lifetimes social problems relating to the sanctity of human life about which we have never even thought.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson, using the familiar language of the King James Version, by asking the students what kind of killing is forbidden by the Sixth Commandment. If they are unable to suggest a variety of applications, raise issues such as war, capital punishment, abortion, and the killing of animals. Do not attempt to discuss these issues, nor should you permit this section of the lesson to go on for more than a few minutes. The purpose here is to show the students the wide variety of issues to which the Sixth Commandment applies. Then, using Matthew 5:21-26, show the students that the commandment also applies to any attitudes or behavior that may constitute an assault on the image of God in man. Note then that today's lesson cannot possibly hope to cope with the large variety of issues that fall within the scope of the Sixth Commandment. Our procedure thus will be to look at one example of how the Bible applies the commandment, then examine three key questions that will enable us to apply it to modern social issues more faithfully and accurately.

1. A Biblical Example - The Cities of Refuge

It will be useful for us to see an example of how God Himself applied the basic principle given in the Sixth Commandment to a specific social problem. The Cities of Refuge provide just such an example. The problem with which Israelite society was forced to deal was the problem of accidental death. Suppose someone killed his neighbor in a field and there were no witnesses. The killer claimed that it had been an

accident. Should he be executed? Should he be allowed to go free? In Numbers 35:22-34, Deuteronomy 19:4-13, and Joshua 20 we find God's solution. He told the people to establish six Cities of Refuge, distributed evenly throughout the land. When a person caused the death of another person, whether by his direct action or by carelessness (what we would view today as criminal liability), he was required to flee to one of these cities. If he did not make his way immediately to a City of Refuge, he was fair game for the avenger of blood - a man designated by the family of the dead person to execute vengeance on the responsible party. Once inside the City of Refuge, he was safe from the avenger of blood. That was not the end of the story, however. He was then subject to a trial involving investigation of the circumstances surrounding the death. If the judges (from the City of Refuge) determined that the person was guilty of murder and that what had happened was really no accident, he was to be executed. If the death did turn out to be accidental, he was not released, but was required to remain in the City of Refuge until the death of the current High Priest. This, of course, could have been a matter of days or decades. If he wandered outside the City of Refuge before the High Priest died, he was again fair game for the avenger of blood.

The value of this example for us is that it illustrates the value of human life in several ways. Because of the provisions of refuge and a fair trial, it eliminates the frivolous or unjust taking of human life in the person of the killer. But because of the potentially severe consequences of even an accidental death (it could amount to the equivalent of life in prison for some), it motivated people to exercise great care to preserve the lives of their fellow men. Thus the provision of the Cities of Refuge emphasized the value of human life both by showing sufficient mercy to preserve the life of one who had killed another accidentally and by showing sufficient severity to encourage people to avoid accidents.

2. Is Human Life Unique?

When the Bible speaks of the value of human life, it is tied in closely with the uniqueness of man before God. In contrast to this, the world often deals with the question of the value of human life in the context of the sanctity of life in general, involving an implicit denial of the uniqueness of man. The effect of this is often not the elevation of respect for all forms of life, but the lowering of human life to the level of the animals. In some of its more grotesque manifestations, people actually argue that animals are more valuable than people, so that animal life may not be sacrificed, even if it means the preservation of human life.

The key passage to be examined here is Genesis 9:5-6. In these verses, the preservation of human life is tied directly to the uniqueness of human life. The fact that man is made in the image of God is given as the reason for the execution of one, whether man or animal, who takes the life of a human being. Such an argument obviously could not be used against the taking of animal life. In fact, Genesis 9:3 gives man explicit warrant to kill animals for food. Earlier, Genesis 1:26 had given man dominion over God's creation, which would include animal life. The Bible thus treats human life as something special. Our treatment of issues of life and death can never ignore the distinction between man and animal. The Christian neither elevates animals to the same level as man in terms of worth, nor does he ever think of man in purely physical terms. Man is more than a biological organism. No ethical issue concerning life and death can be solved without considering the eternal part of man.

At this point, ask your students how the uniqueness of man is important in the consideration of euthanasia, animal experimentation, and genetic engineering.

3. When Does Human Life Begin?

The question of the starting point of human life has become a particularly critical one with regard to the matter of abortion. Most who argue in favor of abortion deny the full humanity of the unborn child,

insisting instead that the fetus should be viewed as at best a potential human being. It is important that your students have a biblical view of this critical issue. Approach it in class today by having your students look up a series of verses. Assign one verse to each student and have that student explain what the verse says about the beginning of human life. Use the following list of verses and draw out the following conclusions:

- Genesis 2:7 - This verse does not imply, as some have suggested, that a person becomes human when he starts breathing. Instead, it shows that a person becomes a human being as soon as he begins living. For Adam, this occurred when God breathed life into him. For the rest of us, it occurs at conception.
- Psalm 139:13-16 - David was known by God in his mother's womb. The verse speaks not only of cognitive knowledge, in the sense that God knows everything, but of a personal, caring knowledge.
- Psalm 51:5 - David speaks of himself as a sinner from conception. Only human beings can be sinners (animals cannot sin). [NOTE: This verse does not mean that David was conceived by means of an adulterous relationship!]
- Judges 13:3-5 - Samson's mother was to observe the Nazirite vow from the time of Samson's conception so that he could be a lifelong Nazirite. This would hardly have been necessary if he did not become a human being until birth.
- Luke 1:35 - Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, thus there can be no doubt that He was God from the point of conception. If He was both God and man throughout His life, does not this require that He also have been man from the point of conception?
- Luke 1:41-45 - Elisabeth, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, ascribes human emotion to the infant in her womb.
- Exodus 21:22-25 - This critical passage ought to be discussed as a group, since none of your students is probably qualified to analyze it unaided. The passage describes a situation where a pregnant woman is an innocent bystander in a fight and is inadvertently hit by one of the combatants. The King James Version translates the key phrase literally - "so that her fruit depart from her." Translators differ as to whether this refers to a miscarriage (original NASB) or a premature birth (NIV). If the former is true, the unborn child is not viewed as fully comparable to a living human being, since the penalty for the death of the child is only a fine, while injury to the woman requires payment in kind. On the other hand, if the passage speaks of a premature birth, any injury to the child is punished every bit as severely as injury to the mother. The accuracy of the latter reading is indicated by the fact that the NASB had to introduce words not found in the original text in order to make sense of its rendering. Furthermore, the use of the phrase rendered "so that her fruit depart from her" for the death of a child is unprecedented in the Hebrew idiom. These verses thus clearly indicate that the life of an unborn child is considered by God to be just as sacred as that of any other human being. The application of this principle to the issue of abortion should be obvious to your students, but make sure they do not miss it.

4. Is Human Life of Ultimate Value?

Humanists today are unable to avoid extremes in dealing with issues of life and death. Because man is viewed as no more than a biological organism, decisions are made with regard to his life and death on the same basis as that of an animal. On the other hand, because man is no more than a biological organism, men see this life as all that there is and make all decisions in terms of temporal values.

For the Christian, this option is not available. The Christian knows that life is more than what is to be experienced in our earthly existence. It is eternal values that make the difference. This means, for instance, that decisions about the medical treatment of a dying relative would be made with concern for whether the person was a Christian or not. It means that, while human life is valuable, it is not of ultimate value. There are times when the sacrifice of human life is a desirable thing (though I am not suggesting that such a noble gesture should be imposed on anyone else involuntarily!). Similarly, pain should not always automatically be viewed as a bad thing. God can use pain to sharpen a person's spiritual awareness and bring him face to face with his condition before God. I am not here suggesting that pain should deliberately be inflicted upon a person, but it is possible that the use of painkillers that impair a person's ability to function in the last hours of his life may not always be the wisest choice in the context of eternity. The application of this principle to euthanasia should again be clear, but make sure the students understand the importance of including the spiritual dimension of a person's existence in any decisions made concerning the life or death of that person.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

1. In the Sixth Commandment, what does “Thou shalt not kill” prohibit? Are there any kinds of killing that are permitted by the Sixth Commandment?
2. Name two ways in which the Cities of Refuge in the Old Testament demonstrated the sanctity of human life.
3. What does the fact that man is made in the image of God have to do with the sanctity of human life? Why do those who deny the uniqueness of man often view human life as expendable?
4. When does the Bible indicate that human life begins? Why is this important when considering the subject of abortion?
5. Why do those who think that human life ends at death make wrong decisions concerning matters of life and death? How should eternal values influence our decisions about questions of medical ethics?

THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE

Lesson Aim

To enable students to see the way in which the Seventh Commandment applies to their own sexual temptations and encourage them to live lives of purity pleasing to God.

Memory Verse

Exodus 20:12 - "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you."

Lesson Background

The Seventh Commandment, like the Sixth, is often ignored because people feel that it is irrelevant to them if they have not actually committed adultery. Like the Sixth Commandment, however, we find that the Seventh has a broad range of applicability to issues relating to the family and to the roles of men and women in the world.

The consideration of this commandment is particularly important to your students because of the warped view of sexuality being promulgated in the world today. The casual idea that sex is no more than a physiological function has been enormously destructive in American society and has been imbibed to a large extent by many Christian teens. Furthermore, the deliberate and terribly damaging muddying of the distinctions between men and women in our society has caused great confusion among our young people, many of whom have grown up without role models to demonstrate for them what it means to be a man or a woman.

Human sexuality is an important issue, and is found at the center of many of the most basic concepts in Scripture. For instance, the creation of man in the image of God is said to involve “male and female” (Genesis 1:27). Part of what it means for man to be in the image of God lies in the nature of the distinction between men and women. The clue to understanding this relationship lies in I Corinthians 11:3, where Paul draws an analogy between the relationship of men to women and the relationship of God to Christ. This tells us that the very real differences between men and women are rooted in an essential unity, and yet that essential unity in no sense minimizes the differentiation of roles that God intended. In the same way that Christ is fully equal to God the Father and yet performs a different role in the scheme of redemption, so men and women are equal, yet are intended by God to fulfill different roles in society and in the church.

The Bible also tells us that human sexuality was adversely affected by the Fall. In Genesis 3:7, we see that sexual shame was one of the results of man’s sin. Sexual relationships were immediately altered by the destruction of the spiritual relationship that had previously existed. The close ties that exist between the spiritual and the sexual (is it a coincidence that the prophets speak of idolatry as spiritual adultery?) indicate that man’s sinfulness is bound to pervert his sexuality (as Romans 1 clearly shows), and that true sexual oneness cannot be meaningfully achieved apart from spiritual oneness.

The redemptive work of Christ was intended to heal human relationships in the area of sexuality as well as in other areas. One of the first provisions God made for man after his sin in the Garden was a provision for proper sexual attitudes (Genesis 3:21). This intended restoration is indicated by the fact that God often uses marital imagery to describe the relationship between Himself and His people, with Israel being spoken of as the wife of Jehovah and the Church being called the Bride of Christ. The Song of Solomon also illustrates the fact that sexual fulfillment is not contrary to spirituality, but may be seen within the context of true spirituality.

There are, of course, many practical issues that we could discuss in relationship to this commandment. Some such issues were covered in the unit on dating, sex, and marriage last year. Today we will present brief discussions of the relationship of sex to marriage, the problem of divorce, and homosexuality. The main principle to be communicated to your students is the close relationship that exists between sexual purity and spirituality. The Christian cannot afford to be drawn into the world’s lax views of human sexuality.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by reading Matthew 5:27-28. Then ask the students, making it clear that the question is rhetorical, whether there is one person in the room who can honestly say that he or she has no problems in the area of adultery. The Seventh Commandment cannot be shrugged off lightly, especially for those of us who live in the sex-saturated world of modern America. Indicate to the students that while the issues associated with the Seventh Commandment are legion, we will look only at three examples today, seeking to apply in examining them the basic biblical teachings concerning sexuality and marriage.

1. The Relationship of Sex to Marriage

Only a few short decades ago, it used to be commonplace in America for people quite naturally to think of sexual behavior only within the context of marriage. Ask your students to list some of the factors that have contributed to the contemporary dissolution of the bond between the two and some of the evidences of that dissolution. They should be able to recognize that the availability of contraceptives and abortion on demand, the loose attitudes toward sex displayed on television and in the movies, and the “sexual revolution” of the 1960s, with the accompanying spurt in recreational sex, couples living together without benefit of

marriage, and the removal of many of the stigmas previously associated with unwed parenthood have all contributed to the present attitude that sees nothing wrong with sex outside of marriage.

The Bible tolerates no such looseness, however. Whether the term involved is adultery (sexual immorality on the part of a married person), fornication (a broader term referring to sexual immorality of any kind), or prostitution (interestingly enough, taken from the same root that produces the word “fornication,” indicating that it is sin whether a person is doing it for love or for money), the Bible makes it clear that sex outside of marriage is sin.

The aspect of the issue that is particularly important to your students, however, is the matter of premarital sex. The Bible does make a distinction here, since in the Old Testament law the penalty for adultery was death, while the penalty for premarital sex was marriage without the opportunity for divorce (Exodus 22:16-17; Deuteronomy 22:28-29). Does this mean that premarital sex is less serious than adultery, or that those who are planning to marry anyway are permitted to engage in it? In a sense, adultery is more serious than premarital sex, largely because it is a violation of the marriage covenant. Premarital sex, however, is also outside of a covenantal relationship, and thus a violation of God’s intention for human sexuality. The only two options God makes available are marriage and sexual abstinence (I Corinthians 7:9). There is no third alternative.

The passage read at the beginning of the lesson made it clear that adultery can be committed without actually engaging in sexual intercourse. Jesus indicated that lustful thoughts constituted adultery. Sexual desire in itself does not constitute lust, since it is a natural drive created in all of us by God. Instead, the lustful thoughts described by Jesus in this passage consist of sexual desires that, if fulfilled, would be adulterous in nature. The desire to engage in sinful sexual activity is lust, and is in itself tantamount to adultery.

It is this principle that allows us to answer the age-old question always asked by teenagers, “How far can I go?” Sexually-oriented behavior such as hand-holding and kissing is not mentioned in Scripture. Such behavior, however, generates desires in the participants. We may safely say that such behavior may be evaluated on the basis of the desires it generates. If a certain type of behavior produces the desires just described as lustful, that behavior is sin for that person. Of course, it must be recognized that this will vary from person to person and from couple to couple, depending on the nature and intimacy of the relationship. Naturally, it is much easier to draw black-and-white lines - “This is okay, that is wrong.” There can also be no question that the easiest kind of behavior to rationalize at the time of decision is sexual behavior. But your students must understand the importance of examining their own attitudes and motives with the desire to be pleasing to God in all that they do. One who would honor God in these things must be brutally honest with himself and his partner.

2. The Problem of Divorce

The principle of the sanctity and permanence of marriage has obvious implications for the subject of divorce. In a society that seems more and more willing to accept divorce, it becomes vitally important for Christians to understand what the Bible teaches on the subject.

Any discussion of divorce must be rooted in the fundamental teaching of Scripture concerning the permanence of marriage. According to Genesis 2:24, God instituted marriage and intends it to last throughout the earthly lives of those involved. Divorce is therefore not something to be taken lightly, but must be seen as one of the results of sin in the world, much like disease in the physical realm. The Bible’s teaching on the matter of divorce is confined to a relatively few passages, which can be summarized briefly in today’s session. The major Old Testament passage is Deuteronomy 24:1-4, in which divorce is permitted

with appropriate safeguards, largely in terms of refusing to allow the return of a wife to an original partner after having been married to someone else in the interim. The indecency mentioned in Deuteronomy 24:1 was interpreted very loosely by the Jews, resulting in a situation in which divorce could be very easily obtained by the husband for the flimsiest of reasons.

In the New Testament, Jesus reaffirms the sanctity of marriage, asserting that the lenient provisions for divorce in the Old Testament were made only because of the hardness of people's hearts (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18 are the relevant passages). The only justification for divorce cited by Jesus is that of marital unfaithfulness, and even there divorce is permitted, but not required. Divorce under such circumstances is a recognition that the marriage bond has already been broken by the act of adultery. Since divorce does involve the recognition that the marriage bond has been severed, it implies the right of remarriage, but only when the bond has been truly broken. Legitimate divorce carries with it the right of remarriage, but illegitimate divorce would mean that any subsequent marriage would be adulterous in nature.

Paul speaks further on the subject in I Corinthians 7:10-15. In addressing believers, he makes the point that believers are not to divorce one another, but if a believer is married to an unbeliever and the unbeliever dissolves the marriage, the believer is then free to remarry. The believing partner is not free to initiate the dissolution of the marriage, however.

What do these guidelines in Scripture mean to your students? They mean first of all that they should enter marriage with the understanding that it is to be a permanent and exclusive relationship. Anyone who enters a marriage with the idea that divorce is an option for the future has already gone a long way toward undermining his marriage. Secondly, your students should recognize that Paul's comments do not justify a marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian. Paul was speaking to new converts whose spouses had not come to Christ. He was not in any way justifying "missionary dating," or worse, "missionary marriages"! Thirdly, impress upon your students the fact that divorce is the result of sin in the world. This means that even divorces that are said to be legitimate in Scripture are associated with a great deal of pain, suffering, and guilt. The cavalier attitude taken by most Americans toward the matter of divorce masks a great deal of agony, not only for the adults whose lives are shattered, but for the millions of children who never know the peace of a family life that follows God's design.

3. Homosexuality

Another symptom of our society's deviation from the biblical understanding of sexuality is the increasing acceptance of homosexuality in America. Instead of seeing it as sin and perversion, many today are lobbying for the recognition of "alternative sexual preferences" and working to end discrimination against those who choose to live in this way.

The biblical view of homosexuality leaves no doubt that it is to be considered sinful. It was one of the causes of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:4-8) and is described by Paul (Romans 1:26-27) as the natural result of the rejection of God. The issue often raised today about whether a person's homosexual orientation is the result of heredity, environment, or personal choice is largely irrelevant to the moral issue. We are all sinners, by heredity, environment, and personal choice. This does not excuse our sin. No more does it excuse the sin of the homosexual.

While homosexuality can never be a viable alternative for the Christian and must be viewed as a sin to be repented of by one who comes to Christ, we who are Christians may not therefore treat homosexuals as pariahs. Perhaps the closest analogy from Scripture is Jesus' treatment of those with leprosy. They were the outcasts of society, yet Jesus ministered to them, delivering them from their leprosy when they came to

Him in faith. Though I certainly would not agree that homosexuality is a disease, the compassion shown by Jesus to lepers can serve as an example for us in our attitude toward those who are caught up in this vicious cycle of sin. Christ can deliver the homosexual as surely as He could heal the leper (see I Corinthians 6:9-11).

Conclusion

Summarize the lesson by reemphasizing the biblical imperative of sexual purity, in our thoughts and words as well as in our actions. In the dating experiences of your students, in the marriages they face in the future, and in their contacts with the sexual perversions of our world, they need to adhere firmly to the biblical principles concerning sex and marriage while resisting the alluring philosophies of the secular world.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE

1. When Jesus says that someone who lusts has committed adultery, what kind of behavior is He forbidding?
2. What guidelines does the Bible provide for teenagers to help them know where to draw the line as far as sexual behavior in a dating relationship is concerned?
3. Why does the Bible say that divorce is wrong? Under what circumstances does the Bible indicate that divorce is permissible?
4. Is it accurate to describe homosexuality as an “alternative sexual orientation”? Why or why not?

THE SANCTITY OF PRIVATE PROPERTY

Lesson Aim

To show students that the Eighth Commandment requires not only respect for the property of others, but also stewardship of their own to the glory of God.

Memory Verse

Exodus 20:13-15 - "You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal."

Lesson Background

At various times in the history of the Church, some Christians have become extremely uncomfortable with the whole concept of private property. As a result, there have sprung up on numerous occasions communal groups that have insisted that the only valid lifestyle for a Christian is one in which all property is held in common. Such groups have found their precedent in the book of Acts, where many sold their property and gave the proceeds to the apostles for distribution to the poor. Though such dedication to a radical implementation of Christianity is certainly praiseworthy, the Eighth Commandment indicates that it is rooted in a misunderstanding of the teachings of Scripture. Christ does not require of all His followers what He asked of the Rich Young Ruler - that he should sell all he had and give to the poor.

Three basic principles must contribute to our understanding of the Eighth Commandment. These principles involve ownership, stewardship, and love. When the Eighth Commandment says, "You shall not steal," it implies the legitimacy of private property. The very fact that the Bible recognizes the possibility

of stealing indicates that ownership of property is a valid concept. The teaching that I may not take what is yours implies that you may rightfully consider certain things to belong to you.

While ownership of property is legitimate, however, it must not be thought to be absolute. By right of creation, everything ultimately belongs to God. He has delegated dominion over the earth to mankind, but that implies that our ownership, while legitimate from a human standpoint, is really ultimately no more than stewardship of what belongs to God. Ownership thus does not imply that I may do whatever I please with what is mine. I must use that which God has given me to glorify Him, and I am accountable to Him for how I use it.

In Ephesians 4:28, Paul indicates that the opposite of stealing is giving. The virtue that the Eighth Commandment thus requires is the use of our substance for the benefit of those around us. The right of private property in Scripture is never seen as justifying selfishness, in which we ignore the needs of those whom God has placed within our reach.

These three principles will be incorporated into today's lesson as we look at the Bible's teaching concerning wealth, the problem of stealing as it applies to the Christian in today's world, and the importance of stewardship as a principle governing our attitude toward the things given to us by God.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by describing the early church in Jerusalem, emphasizing the way they shared their goods with one another and sold their property to meet the needs of the poor members of the congregation. Ask your students if this is how all churches ought to function. If they seem positively disposed in this direction (they probably will not be), ask if this means that God advocates communism (if they weren't put off by the first suggestion, they certainly will oppose this one, and should readily recognize that what appears in the early chapters of Acts is totally unlike what passes for communism today, if for no other reason than the voluntary nature of what occurred in the early church). If they recognize that God did not intend all churches to share all their property in common, ask them to tie this in with the Eighth Commandment. Show them, as was explained in the Lesson Background, how the Eighth Commandment implies the legitimacy of private property. At this point move on to consider the topics covered in today's lesson.

1. A Biblical View of Wealth

Christians too often go to extremes with regard to the question of wealth. Medieval monks took a vow of poverty, believing that material goods detracted from spiritual welfare, and that the greatest spiritual attainments were only possible in the absence of material possessions. Today we have those in the church who preach the gospel of wealth, teaching that prosperity comes to all who have sufficient faith. Neither of these extremes represents a valid view of the biblical teaching concerning wealth.

Contrary to the view espoused by the monks, the Bible does not picture wealth as inherently evil. God often promised prosperity to the Israelites in return for obedience (e.g., Deuteronomy 7:12-13) and delights in bestowing abundant blessings on His children. Wealth also must not be seen as an unadulterated good, however. The Bible notes that wealth tends to turn a person away from God (Matthew 19:23-24), to generate self-sufficiency and pride (Luke 12:16-21), and fails to bring satisfaction, or even to eliminate greed (Ecclesiastes 2:4-11). If wealth, then, is neither totally good nor totally evil, what should the Christian's attitude toward it be? Several conclusions may be drawn, but let your students kick the question around for a few minutes before giving them the ideas listed below.

First of all, wealth is not to be sought by the Christian as an end in itself. Because it is transitory in nature and has no eternal significance (Matthew 6:19-21), it is not to be pursued for its own sake and is to be used to accomplish spiritual good (Luke 16:1-9).

Secondly, wealth is to be recognized as a gift from God, which He gives to whomever He chooses to give it. We should never equate wealth with the special favor of God. In fact, the wise man will pray that God give him neither riches nor poverty (Proverbs 30:8-9).

Thirdly, wealth is to be used for the good of others rather than to oppress others (James 5:1-6; Romans 12:8). All we have comes from God and ultimately belongs to Him, and therefore we should use it for His glory. This includes responsibility for the support of our families (I Timothy 5:8) and God's Church (I Corinthians 16:1-3; II Corinthians 9:6-7; I Timothy 5:17-18).

At this point, ask your students if they think luxury is immoral. They will probably get rather defensive at the thought, but allow them to discuss it for a while. The discussion should reveal much about their own attitudes toward material possessions. While we cannot dogmatically state that luxury in itself is wrong, we should note that the priorities presented in Scripture point toward simplicity as a valid lifestyle for the Christian, in opposition to the sort of ostentatious consumption valued and encouraged by the culture in which we live. Your students should be challenged with the fact that the distinctiveness of the Christian life involves a rejection of the materialism of the surrounding world. This is surely part of what it means to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness."

2. The Christian and the Problem of Stealing

Ask your students to name some ways in which they personally at times have been tempted to steal. They will probably mention things such as shoplifting and cheating in school (stealing someone else's work or answers). But stealing, just like murder and adultery, is far more common than most people realize when understood in the broad sense of the word.

Three overlapping areas come readily to mind when thinking of ways in which Christians are often tempted to steal - stealing by wasting or abusing, stealing time, and stealing from God. We steal from others when we abuse things we borrow. We steal from our parents or our school when we waste supplies or abuse furniture. We steal from people when we waste their time by lack of punctuality. We steal time from others when we engage in disruptive behavior in class that prevents others from learning. We steal from employers when we waste time that is supposed to be spent in working. We steal from God when we abuse His gifts, waste the time He has given us, or refuse to give Him what rightfully belongs to Him (Malachi 3:8-10). All of these practices are violations of the Eighth Commandment and should be recognized as such by Christians, though they are often ignored because they are so commonplace.

3. The Importance of the Principle of Stewardship

Begin this section by explaining the job of a steward in the first century. The steward was a servant who had a significant amount of responsibility in supervising the affairs of his master. He often had complete charge of the estate's finances, made purchases, sold crops, and supervised the other slaves. Though his responsibility was great, nothing under his control belonged to him - it was all the property of his master, and he was responsible to oversee its use for the benefit of his master and according to his master's wishes. In a similar way, Christians are stewards of all that God has given us, which includes all we own. We have no absolute sovereignty over our possessions, but are accountable to God for all that we do with our goods. This means that all decisions we make with regard to spending money and using time should be made in the light of our responsibility to honor God in all we do.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

THE SANCTITY OF PRIVATE PROPERTY

1. Why does the Eighth Commandment imply that ownership of private property is legitimate for a Christian?
2. In what senses must a Christian acknowledge that his authority over the things he owns is not absolute?
3. Why is it wrong to view wealth either as a sin or as a sign of God's favor?
4. What was the job of a steward in the first century? Why should we view ourselves as stewards today?
5. In light of the biblical principle of stewardship, what would you conclude about the morality of gambling?
6. What are some of the most common ways in which Christians violate the Eighth Commandment?

THE SANCTITY OF TRUTH

Lesson Aim

To show students the importance, not only of speaking the truth, but also of living the truth.

Memory Verse

Exodus 20:16 - "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor."

Lesson Background

At first glance, it may sound as if the Ninth Commandment were referring only to the testimony given by a witness in court. While this commandment certainly does forbid lying in court, it goes far beyond that, prohibiting lying under any circumstances. As Jesus said in Matthew 5:37, "Simply let your yes be yes and your no be no." A Christian is to be a person who has a reputation for being truthful.

There are several reasons for this. First of all, Scripture tells us that truth is intimately connected with the character of God (John 14:6). Since truth is defined by conformity to God's character and His revelation, and untruth by lack of conformity to the same, the Christian who seeks to be godly must be truthful. It is impossible to be like God and be less than truthful.

Secondly, we should recognize that untruth is not only an offense against God, but also against our neighbor. It destroys relationships by breaking down trust. The reputation established by a thousand truthful statements can be destroyed by a single lie. Lying is manipulative, and it implies a lack of confidence in the one to whom a person is speaking. When I lie to someone, I am implying that the other person cannot be

trusted to handle the truth in a responsible manner. I am acting as if I knew better than that person what was good for him or her, and even worse, as if I knew better than God Himself.

Among the commandments in the second table of the law, there is none with which Christians struggle more, at least in terms of its obvious application. Most Christians do not murder, commit adultery, or steal, though as we have seen, the broader applications of these commandments are things with which all of us struggle. Lying, however, is another matter. We all face frequent temptations to distort the truth for what often appear to us to be very good reasons. Sometimes these temptations are to speak what is not true, sometimes they involve deceptive actions (hypocrisy), and sometimes they move us to do no more than keep silent when the cause of truth requires speaking out. Lying is all around us in various institutionalized forms, whether it be cheating in school, cheating on income taxes, false advertising, political rhetoric, or journalistic license. In today's lesson, we will look at various difficult passages of Scripture in which it appears that lying is being condoned or even praised, from these passages attempt to define more carefully the nature of lying, and then finish the lesson by looking specifically at the problem of cheating in school.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the class by listing on the board the Sixth through the Ninth Commandments. Ask the students to rank them according to the order of difficulty involved in keeping each one. I would be very surprised if your students did not recognize right away that the Ninth Commandment is the hardest for them to keep, at least in terms of its obvious application. Once this has been acknowledged, ask them if they think it is ever right to lie, distort the truth, tell a half-truth, or conceal the truth from someone. You will probably find considerable hedging on the subject among the members of your class, with some thinking that lying is sometimes best, while others argue that telling less than the truth is occasionally necessary.

1. Does the Bible Condone Lying?

There are a surprisingly large number of passages in Scripture where lying appears to be condoned or even praised. Depending upon the number of students in your class, either divide the class up into groups or divide the following incidents among your students:

- Abraham - Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18
- Isaac - Genesis 26:6-11
- Jacob and Rebekah - Genesis 27:1-30
- Hebrew Midwives - Exodus 1:17-21
- Rahab - Joshua 2:4-5; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25
- Joshua - Joshua 8:3-29
- Samuel - I Samuel 16:1-5
- Elisha - II Kings 6:19

Ask them the following questions: What is the nature of the deception practiced in this passage? Should the deception be characterized as a lie? Why or why not? Does the Bible condemn the deception, praise it, or say nothing one way or the other? What does this passage contribute to our understanding of what the Ninth Commandment forbids? In the ensuing discussion, the following points should be brought out.

- Abraham and Isaac - The statements made by these two men were technically true, but were clearly intended to deceive. It is just as clear that God disapproved and condemned their behavior as showing a lack of faith.

- Jacob and Rebekah - The lie manufactured by this scheming pair got them what God had promised would be theirs anyway - the paternal blessing - but did so at the cost of Jacob's exile from the family. Before he was able to return, his mother died. This clearly demonstrates that the end does not justify the means. Lying is not a proper way to accomplish a godly goal.
- Hebrew Midwives - What they told Pharaoh was probably true, though in this case it was little more than an excuse. When the passage says that God blessed the midwives, we must conclude that He is blessing them for their obedience to Him, which involved disobedience to Pharaoh.
- Rahab - This is the most common example used by those who insist that lying is sometimes justified. Rahab clearly lied to protect the Israelite spies from the king of Jericho. She is later both commended and rewarded. It is important to note, however, that she is commended and rewarded for her faith, not for her lie. One who knew as little about the God of Israel as did Rahab might understandably have thought it necessary to do whatever she could to help the cause of His people. What she did was wrong, though sincerely motivated. God used the lie, as He did the sins of others at various other times in Scripture, but that does not by any means condone what Rahab did. Like Abraham and Isaac, she showed a lack of confidence in God's power to provide safety, though such uncertainty was more understandable in her case than in the others.
- Joshua - This is a tricky one, since it involves military deception. No lies were spoken, but the enemy was led to believe that Israel was doing something other than what it was really engaged in. Are we to conclude that, in the same way that killing in times of war is not murder, deception in warfare is not lying? However we phrase it, I think we must acknowledge that military strategy was not in view in the giving of the Ninth Commandment.
- Samuel - In this situation, the prophet did not lie, but spoke only as much of the truth as Saul was entitled to know. We may therefore conclude that speaking the truth does not require us to tell everything we know to everyone who wants to know it, whether or not they have a right to the information. There are times when it is legitimate to conceal information from someone who has no right to have access to that information.
- Elisha - The prophet knew what the Syrians wanted and he saw that they got it, though not in quite the way they had in mind. He did lead them to the man they sought, and the end result was profitable for everyone concerned. This is not to suggest that deception is acceptable if everything works out all right in the end, but we may conclude that since Elisha did intend to reveal the full truth to the Syrians, it was not wrong for him to reveal that truth gradually.

2. What is Lying, Really?

What may we conclude from these examples about the nature of lying? The following points should be noted:

- Lying is any deliberate deception of another person, whether verbal or non-verbal.
- Even if this deliberate deception involves using the truth, it is still wrong.
- The end does not justify the means. Lying is not permissible in order to accomplish a worthy purpose.

- Information may be legitimately concealed from someone who has no right to the information. This may not be done by lying, however. If someone asks me a question and I don't want to answer it, I may refuse to answer, but I may not say "I don't know" if I really do.
- The gradual revelation of the truth is at times acceptable.

One further point should be made at this juncture. Even though we have defined lying in this section as involving deliberate deception, we should note that, like any other sin, lying is wrong even when it is done unintentionally. The ignorant blasphemer has still blasphemed, the sincere worshiper of false gods has still violated the First Commandment, and the unknowing speaker of an untruth has still deceived. This should make Christians very cautious about what they affirm. A reputation for truthfulness is too fragile to be risked through thoughtless speech. Thus we should not affirm anything we do not know to be true, nor deny anything we do not know to be false. Such careful speech will cause a person to be known as judicious, prudent, and trustworthy. The same care should be taken by all Christians in the realm of theology. Far too many Christians are dogmatic about issues about which they know little. Such dogmatism divides Christians and turns off unbelievers. We must reserve our assured affirmations for those matters about which the Bible speaks with a clear voice.

3. The Problem of Cheating

As we move on to this specific application of the commandment, ask your students to estimate what percentage of the students in their classes cheat on assignments or tests. The matter of cheating in school is one about which the Bible does not directly speak, largely because it does not say anything about school at all. The Bible does condemn cheating in business practices, however, and the following conclusions may be drawn in relationship to the matter of cheating in school.

First of all, cheating clearly violates both the Eighth and Ninth Commandments. The cheater steals the work of others and steals credit he does not deserve. He also lies to the teacher by giving the impression that he possesses knowledge that he does not have, and he also lies to the world by getting a grade that has not been earned and is not a genuine reflection of his understanding of the subject matter and his effort in the class.

Secondly, cheating hurts many people on many levels. It is, like any sin, an offense against God. A Christian who cheats is dragging the name of Christ in the mud. Cheating also harms the cheater, who is both developing bad work habits and missing out on knowledge that may be needed at a later time. It harms the teacher because it destroys trust and, even if not discovered, contributes to a false view of the progress of the class. Other students are hurt as well, since a grade unfairly gotten cheapens the achievements of those who have earned their grades, often forces down the grades of those who are honest in competitive situations, and places a moral burden on those who are aware of the cheating, since they must decide whether to reveal the cheater or share his guilt. In short, it cannot be justified for any reason or in any degree.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT THE SANCTITY OF TRUTH

1. When the Ninth Commandment says not to give false testimony against a neighbor, about what kinds of neighbors is it speaking (cf. Luke 10:25-37)?
2. Explain why the examples of the Hebrew midwives (Exodus 1), Rahab (Joshua 2), and Samuel (I Samuel 16) do not justify lying.
3. In what ways is cheating a violation of the Ninth Commandment? What are some of the ways in which cheating hurts both the cheater and those around him?
4. What does the Ninth Commandment teach us about the salesman who paints an unrealistically rosy picture of his product? the politician who makes promises he knows he cannot keep? the lawyer who tries to free a client he knows is guilty, or who tries to pin guilt on an innocent man for the benefit of his client?
5. May a Christian ever work for an intelligence agency, where deception is the major purpose for which the organization exists?

THE SANCTITY OF CONTENTMENT

Lesson Aim

To show students the importance of hearts that are content whatever the circumstances in which God may place them.

Memory Verse

Exodus 20:17 - “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Lesson Background

One of the insights gained by Gautama Buddha in his so-called Enlightenment while sitting under a fig tree was that desire was the cause of all human suffering. While Buddha’s solution to the problem was far from the teaching of Scripture, he was to some extent right in the way he defined the problem. Jesus indicated in the Sermon on the Mount that actions come from attitudes, and that a person who harbors sinful attitudes has violated the law of God as much as the person who puts those attitudes into practice. Because of this, some have seen the Tenth Commandment as a sort of summary of the entire Decalogue. All sin, they suggest, comes from wanting what one does not have. The Tenth Commandment must thus be recognized as having tremendous value for the Christian.

The value of the Tenth Commandment may be seen in the significance given to it by Paul in Romans 7:7. It was the Tenth Commandment that first opened Paul’s eyes to his own sinfulness. Like most of the Pharisees, Paul had been confident of his standing before God because of his scrupulous external observance of the details of the law. It had simply never occurred to him that sin was a matter of the heart. It was the

commandment against coveting, which deals exclusively with the inner life and has no direct relation to overt behavior, that enabled Paul to see his own need for salvation.

We must recognize, of course, that coveting is not restricted in its fruits to the inner life of a person. Covetousness invariably produces envy. The first is a sinful desire for an object, while the second is anger or hatred toward someone who has the desired object. Covetousness thus destroys human relationships, even when kept secret. If I covet what you have, I will soon envy you, and this will have a negative effect on my attitude toward you (cf. James 4:1-5).

We also should note that the opposite of covetousness is contentment. The contentment spoken of by Paul in Philippians 4:11-13 allowed him to be free from dependence on the circumstances in which he found himself. The Christian who violates the Tenth Commandment will find himself a slave to circumstances and will never know contentment in this life.

The world's definition of success in life often encourages covetousness, and thus works directly against the teachings of Scripture. We must thus also examine what the Bible has to say about success if we want to know how to apply the Tenth Commandment to our lives. In this lesson, after going over a few basics necessary for understanding the Tenth Commandment, we will spend most of our time examining two passages, Philippians 4:4-19 and II Peter 1:3-11. The first allows us to understand the nature of contentment, and the second gives us God's definition of success.

Lesson Procedure

Start by asking your students what they think it means to covet. They will probably respond by saying that coveting involves wanting something one does not have. Is it always wrong to want something you don't have? Of course not, but it is wrong to desire something without reference to the will of God on the subject. One who covets wants something whether God wants him to have it or not. Such desire is destructive and sinful.

Next, ask them to discover what makes the Tenth Commandment different from the other commandments in the second table of the law. Hopefully they will be able to recognize that it deals with an inner attitude rather than outward behavior. Show them the importance of this by bringing in the material from the Lesson Background taken from Romans 7:7, showing how this commandment is able to point to the sins of even an outwardly good man. You may also want to use the notion that the Tenth Commandment is a summary of the Decalogue to include at this point a brief review of the quarter, going through each commandment and talking about the role played by covetousness in the sins that violate each of them.

A third early point to make involves the negative effects of covetousness on a person's life. Again using the background material and James 4:1-5, show how covetousness destroys human relationships. Then introduce the two major concepts that will occupy us for the remainder of the lesson, contentment and success. Before turning to the key passages to be discussed, show how covetousness relates to each of these ideas, making contentment impossible and success unattainable.

1. Contentment (Philippians 4:4-19)

A person who allows his desires to be guided by the will of God for his life will be content. Because he trusts God, he will be satisfied with whatever God sends his way, whether those circumstances are pleasurable or difficult. Paul clearly had apprehended this truth. Have your students go through the fourth

chapter of Philippians verse by verse and pick out ideas that show how to avoid covetousness and cultivate contentment. The following should be noted:

- verse 4 - The rejoicing described by Paul here is not a foolish hilarity in the face of disaster, but a positive confidence in the God who is sovereign over all of life. Our circumstances cause rejoicing only if we are confident that God is in control of them. Otherwise, we want something other than what we have, and we become covetous and discontent.
- verses 6-7 - Worry and covetousness are close relatives. Both show that the basis of our security is in material things rather than in God. The peace that comes from God will never be experienced by one who thinks that he will never be happy until he has ____.
- verse 8 - These are the things a Christian is to desire. Such desires are in line with the will of God and will keep us from coveting those things that tend to draw us away from Him and drive wedges between ourselves and others.
- verses 11-13 - Paul's contentment comes from being free from circumstances. The covetous person ties his happiness to his circumstances, and thus becomes their slave. Paul covets no man's possessions, and thus is able to prosper gracefully and suffer peacefully. Such an attitude is possible only through the Holy Spirit, of course. Only a Christian can aspire to such a condition.
- verses 18-19 - Because Paul is not covetous, he can describe himself as "amply supplied" even while languishing in prison. He is confident that God would provide for the Philippians in the same way He had provided for him - according to His will, and in such a way as to produce fullness and contentment.

2. Success (II Peter 1:3-11)

We live in a world that defines success in material terms. The successful person is one who has the right job, earns a good salary, has the right possessions, wears the right clothes, drives the right kind of car, lives in the right location, etc. The Bible, of course, pictures such people as miserable failures (Luke 12:13-21; 16:19-31; 18:18-29). Anyone who determines his success in life by these standards will always fall victim to covetousness, since he will inevitably find that whatever he has is not good enough or big enough or secure enough. God defines success in completely different terms, as may be seen in II Peter 1:3-11. Success here is defined in terms of character, not possessions. Note the following:

- verse 3 - God has "given us everything we need." The person who truly believes this will not struggle with the sin of covetousness. He will be successful in his life because he will be looking for success in the right place.
- verse 4 - It is the promises of God that give the Christian confidence and deliver him from the lusts to which the world is enslaved, along with the corruption that those lusts produce.
- verses 5-7 - The virtues listed in these verses define success for the Christian. Saving faith is to be complemented by moral excellence, a knowledge of God's truth, self-control, perseverance, increasing godliness, concern for others, and unconditional love.
- verses 8-9 - Those who cultivate these virtues will be successful, leading productive Christian lives, while those who fail to do so will live lives of bleakness and frustration, no matter how great their possessions.

- verses 10-11 - It is the possession of these virtues that gives assurance of salvation, since they can only be found in one inhabited by the Spirit of God. One who has assurance will be at peace with God and the world and will have no reason to covet the goods of his fellow man.

Conclusion

Conclude the lesson by encouraging your students to examine their own lives for the presence of the virtues listed by Peter, or the presence of covetousness.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

THE SANCTITY OF CONTENTMENT

1. What is covetousness? How did the commandment against this sin open Paul's eyes to his need of salvation when the other commandments could not?
2. Some have suggested that the Tenth Commandment can be seen as a summary of the entire Decalogue. In what way does each of the commandments involve a desire for something that one has no right to have?
3. How are covetousness and contentment mutually exclusive?
4. Why does the world's definition of success always produce covetousness? Why does God's definition of success prevent it?
5. In II Peter 1:5-7, Peter lists seven virtues that are to be added to saving faith. Why is each virtue incomplete without the one that follows it? Why, for instance, is knowledge useless apart from self-control? Use examples from Scripture to illustrate each relationship.