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**Session 6**

***God of Freedom,* Week 4a**

**Exodus 20:13-17**

**16-17 October 2023**

**“Oh, That’s Easy!” –** This week we are moving from the first five commandments to the last five. As you remember, commandments one to five deal with **how we relate to *authority***, both to the authority of God Himself and to the human authorities He has placed over us. Commandments six through ten show us **how to relate to *one another*.** As we seek to follow these commandments, we want to do much more than just walk the line of obedience by doing the bare minimum. Instead we want to look for an **expansive obedience** to what is being said in any given commandment. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told His disciples that there was much more to obedience than what they had thought. And when we today look at some of these commandments (don’t kill, don’t commit adultery, etc.), we are tempted to say, “Oh, that’s easy!” But God is always concerned with the *motive of the heart* which is joined to our actions.

**Recap of Commandments #1-5 –** The first commandment asks us to honor God as God alone. The second is asking us to honor God without limitation or reduction: we don’t want to “whittle Him down” to suit our own purposes. The third command tells us to honor God’s character in all that we say or do by not taking His name in vain. The fourth command asks us to honor God as our Creator and Sustainer. And the fifth command asks us to honor our earthly authorities in a similar way.

**The Sixth Commandment** – “You shall not murder.” This is one of those commands that at first glance we are tempted to say, “At least I’ve never done *that!* This one is easy to obey.” But in doing so, we are telling ourselves that as long as I haven’t physically taken someone’s life, then I am good with God. But Jesus pressed on this very issue in the Sermon on the Mount when He links the sin of murder to the earlier sins of anger and contempt. Anger is a negative emotion that we feel whenever our will is violated. It is not a sin in and of itself; whether it becomes sin or not depends on how we deal with it. (The command “In your anger do not sin” implies that you can be angry and yet not go on to commit sin because of it.) So how does our anger turn to sin? When we hold onto it and refuse to let it go; when we rehearse over and over again the way someone has wronged us; when we enjoy being angry and even savor it. We very quickly move from something that is a simple response to someone crossing our will to something far worse: contempt. Anger says, “I don’t like what you did.” Contempt says, “I don’t like YOU!” And then very quickly, contempt moves on to say, “You are worthless.” Note the progression: anger turns to contempt which turns to devaluing. And then it is very, very easy to move on to committing murder to rid yourself of this worthless, contemptable person who has wronged you in some way.

**Where Do Sins Start? –** But having said that, we must realize that Jesus is *not* equating anger with the sin of murder. It is still better if you just get angry with someone than if you stab them in the back, either

literally or with your words. The point Jesus is making is that if no one ever sat and soaked in their anger, letting it build and filling their mind and heart, then there would never be a case of murder. If people dealt with the root problem, then no one would ever have to deal with the more severe sin of actual murder. So Jesus is calling us to an awareness of where the big sins start. If we are faithful in the small things, then we will be faithful with much. But if we are unfaithful in the small things, then who knows what whirlwind we might reap? Anger is something that we might conceal…but God looks on our hearts and knows exactly when our anger went from a natural response to something that we nurture and feed and that leads us into sin.

**Is It Okay If I Am Just a “Not Murderer”? –** We don’t want to among those who are satisfied with saying, “At least I haven’t done that.” Instead, we want to have an expansive obedience, with a right heart attitude as well as right outward actions. There is probably no law code given anywhere on earth that would say that murder is acceptable. The reason that God doesn’t want us to murder is because murder involves taking the life of someone created in His image, a fellow image-bearer. Only He holds the keys to life and death, not you and me. God wants us to move beyond being content with just not killing others, however. **He wants us to be life nurturers, life sustainers, life givers…in the way that we *think*, in the way that we *act*, and in the way that we *speak*.** (Recall that Jesus linked words with anger when He said that we are on dangerous ground if we call someone a fool or tell them they are worthless.) So let us endeavor to speak words of life to those around us. There are so many ways this can play out: we can give esteem to someone, we can be peacemakers, etc.

**The Seventh Commandment** – “You shall not commit adultery.” This is another command that we think is easy to keep and yet has deep ramifications. The sixth command deals with not treating our neighbors as *expendable*; the seventh deals with not treating our neighbors as *consumable*. When Jesus dealt with this command in the Sermon on the Mount, He said that it wasn’t enough to just not commit adultery. We are not even to lust after someone. **Just as the sin of murder was linked to the sin of anger, the sin of adultery is linked closely to the sin of lust.** Note that the sin of lust is another sin of contempt. Lust is not some romantic thing; it occurs when one person looks at another with contemptuous evil desire and says, “I will consume that person!” Adultery is a by-product of lust. It is not some sweet romance that happens. We tend to view it as something consensual between two adults. But in reality adultery adulterates an otherwise thriving marriage and consumes what is not rightfully ours. **Adultery is a contemptuous act.** If we want to consume someone, we surely are not praying for them.

**Putting Sin To Death –** Jesus told His followers that their eyes caused them to lust after someone, then they should gouge their eyes out, and if their hands led them into sin, then they should cut them off! What did He mean? **He wants us to do whatever it takes to ruthlessly deal with the contempt that hides in our hearts.** The solution to lust is *not* self-inflicted blindness: it is seeing others as God sees them.

You can’t look at another person created in the image of God and acknowledge their full personhood and then consume them! So when we strive to see the value in other human beings made in the image of God, we have a strong antidote against wanting to consume them or seeing them as expendable.

**Is It Enough If I Just Don’t Have An Affair? –** No, the seventh command goes far beyond that. Anything that we can do to combat consumption of another human being is in accordance with this command. This might mean to fight sex trafficking…or to stop the spread of pornography…or to avoid “objectifying messages” around us…or to embrace and model sexual fidelity. All of these things hold high something that God says is valuable and turns loose of what the world says is acceptable. **Lust is not just a *“problem”* to be dealt with: it is an *enemy* to be put to death!** Unfortunately, we too often view lust as something to be managed, not something that we should extinguish. We must wage holy war on this sin, because it is a great danger to our fellow image bearers. It needs a funeral, not a safe place to play!

**The Eighth Commandment** – “You shall not steal.” There is something inside of us that wants to take what others have, that views our needs as greater than those of others around us. We see this tendency even in very young children. **But what the eighth command is calling us to do is to think first in terms of *stewardship*.** Remember that it all belongs to God. The Israelites of Moses’ day were brand new at owning property. But God knew that when they reached the promised land, they would become property owners and would have potentially great wealth. He also knew that how they responded when that happened would reveal who they truly worshipped. Job had the right perspective when he said, “The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!” (Job 1:21)  **So anything that has been given to you is not for you to consume, but for you to DISTRIBUTE.** All too often, however, we see ourselves as a terminus for wealth, and not as a distributor of wealth. When we believe that the good things that have come our way relate directly to some goodness inside of us, then we are willing to hold onto things, hoarding them for ourselves. But if we know that anything this side of Hell is grace, then we behave very differently regarding our stuff.

**Where’s the Owner? –** Psychologists have observed that people are far more likely to steal in situations where the owner is not present or is just a sort of disembodied entity. For example, if you stay in a hotel, you might be tempted to take the towels because the owner isn’t a person you know, but “just” a corporation. But if you stay at a friend’s house, you probably won’t steal her towels because the friend will know what you are up to. **The more distance we perceive between us and the owner, the more likely we are to abuse the owner’s stuff.** Now think about the fact that we worship an invisible God. We can’t see Him, and if we think that He can’t see, what will we do with God’s stuff? We will tend to do whatever serves our own interests.

**What Is the “Do” That Is Implicit in the 8th Command? –** God wants us to **honor our neighbor’s belongings,** i.e. honor what God has given someone else. Honor God as the steward of all things, the

One who gives and the One who takes away. So instead of wondering, “What can I *take*?” shift your thinking to ask, “What might I *give*?” or “What could I lend without expecting repayment?” We need to coach ourselves to not live in a scarcity mentality but in an attitude of abundance, to model our lives after the One who is the Giver of all good things.

**Yet Another Act of Contempt –** We need to understand that stealing, like murder and adultery, is an act of contempt. You probably aren’t going to pray for someone whose stuff you want to steal!

**Parallels to 1 Peter**

Jen Wilkin stresses that what God wants from us is an **expansive obedience** to the Ten Commandments, i.e. He wants our hearts to rule our passions so that we keep anger and lust from growing into attitudes of contempt that in turn lead to murder and/or adultery. Peter also addresses this issue of controlling our passions:

*• As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” 1 Peter 1:14-16*

*• Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so…they may…glorify God on the day of visitation. 1 Peter 2:11-12*

Jen also said that **our lust “needs a funeral**, not a safe place to play”, i.e. that we should deal decisively with evil desires to root them completely out of our lives. Peter echoes this thought near the end of the second chapter of his book:

*• He Himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness… 1 Peter 2:24a*