

St. John in the Wilderness
✝ Adult Education and Formation ✝

Notes on:

The Ten Commandments

Sep. 16, 2001 through Dec. 9, 2001

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References

The Ten Commandments 1. Introduction. I Adonai, your God am the One

Last update Dec 6, 2001

I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of bondage

Exodus 20:1-2 (RSV).

Questions, Topics

Questions and topics taken largely from the introduction and chapter 1 in **Broken Tablets : Restoring the Ten Commandments and Ourselves**. Ed. by: Rachel S. Mikva. Jewish Lights Pub; 1999,

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1. Introduction

1.1. "The Ten Utterances"

Hebrew *aseret hadibrot* = "the ten utterances"

Greek *deka logoi* ("the ten words").

- From the Greek comes the alternative name for the ten commandments = the "**decatalogue**" (see pages 317 and 350 of the Book of Common Prayer)

1.2. Scripture Reference

Exodus 20: 1-17: God's words to Israel from Mount Sinai

Deuteronomy 5:6-21: Moses's recapitulation to Israel of what God told him at Mount Horeb

1.3. Context

Part of the story of Israel's liberation from Egypt.

The basis for Israel's continuing relationship with God = "covenant."

The way to lead Israel to the fullness of life God intended.

Obedience to the commandments is a response of love from a grateful Israel.

1.4. Numbering

Varies among the religious traditions:

Commandment	Jews and Most Christian Traditions (from Rabbinic and reformed traditions)	Roman Catholic, Lutherans (after Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine)
I am the Lord your God . . .	1. *	1.
Have no other God before me.* Do not make for yourself an idol . . .	2.*	1.
Do not lift up the name of God in vain	3.	2.
Remember the Sabbath	4.	3.
Honor you father and mother...	5.	4.
You shall not murder...	6.	5.
You shall not commit adultery	7.	6.
You shall not steal	8.	7.
You shall not give false testimony	9.	8.
You shall not covet your neighbor's house, wife...	10.	9 and 10

* The Christians traditions give Exodus 20:2-3 as the first Commandment, and Exodus 20:4-6 as the second. However, some Jewish sources give Exodus 20:2 as the first Commandment, and Exodus 20:3-6 as the second.

1.5. Arrangement and Order

In Jewish tradition, the arrangement of the commandments on the two tablets has significance.

That arrangement is:

- five on one tablet, five on the other
- **first tablet:** obligations primarily to God
- **second tablet:** obligations primarily to each other
- **bridge:** 5th commandment (honor your father and mother). Father and mother are our immediate “creators,” mediators of God’s gift of life to us

first tablet	second tablet	why?
1. I am the Lord your God...	6. You shall not murder	killing destroys a reflection of God (we are each in God's image)
2. Have no other God. . .	7. You shall not commit adultery	religion and marriage both require fidelity
3. Do not lift up the name of God in vain...	8. You shall not steal	those who steal may in the end deny it by swearing falsely in God's name
4. Remember the Sabbath	9. You shall not bear false witness	profaning the Sabbath is like testifying God did not create the world
5. Honor your father and mother	10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife	such coveting can lead to complex relationships or families; making it difficult to give both parents a proper honor

God's name is not mentioned in the commandments on the second tablet. Roman emperor Hadrian (76 to 138 AD) asked Rabbi Joshua ben Chananyah why this was. His answer: God's name cannot lie adjacent to heinous crimes, just as the emperor does not put his name on outhouses and such.

The last five commandments about our relationship with others parallels the law codes of other ancient near Eastern peoples. What is unique however is that breaking these laws about our relationship with others also effects our relationship with God

1.6. At Mount Sinai

1.6.1. *Written and Oral Torah in Rabbinic Judaism*

After the destruction of the temple, the **Torah** became the central focus of Jewish faith.

Whenever two or more gather together to study Torah, there will be the Divine Presence, the *Shekhinah*.

God gave the Commandments and the entire Torah (written and oral = all rabbinic interpretation) to Moses at Mount Sinai. When a rabbi interprets Torah today, he is making oral Torah, and speaks with the authority of the Torah.

1.6.2 *The Scene at Mount Sinai in Exodus Rabbah*

The description from the rabbinic text **Exodus Rabbah** of the scene at Mount Sinai when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments:

- whole world hushed in silence
- God began to speak
- with each word, the entire world filled with a unique fragrance of spice
- each word as it spread broke out into 70 languages, filling the earth

2. The First Commandment

2.1. I, Adonai your God, am the One

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” *Exodus 20:2 (NRSV)*

‘I, Adonai your God, [am the one] who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from a slavehouse

Exodus 20:2 (tr. Eugene Borowitz, in Broken Tablets)

2.2. Can God Command Belief?

Is this really a commandment?

How can God demand we believe when belief is not under our direct voluntary control?

Some have suggested the “first commandment” should be considered a *preface* to the actual commands that follow. Maimonides on the other hand, said it is the first among the commandments, the essential pillar upon which all else rests

2.3. A God who is an “I”

“I am the LORD your God. . .

An “I” *speaks* (first person, pronoun, singular) in this commandment:

- One God vs. the polytheism of the ancient world
- An entity with characteristics of personhood
 - vs. the later Aristotle’s God as Pure Intellect continuously contemplating perfection (itself)
 - vs. the later Neoplatonic idea of “The Good” or “the One:” above definition, structure, limitation, intelligibility

2.4. The Name of God

YHWH
יהוה

Hebrew letters *yod* י, *he* ה, *waw* ו, *he* ה

This is the **Tetragrammaton**:

This name was spoken only by the high priest on the high holy days (Yom Kippur) in the temple in ancient Israel. At that time:

- Levite choirs increased their volumes to hide the sound.
- Those in the temple threw themselves prostrate to the ground.

The tetragrammaton is no longer pronounced since the Romans destroyed the temple in 70 A.D. No one now knows the correct pronunciation.

Because it is otherwise blasphemy to say the name of God, when a devout Jew encounters **YHWH** in the Hebrew scripture, they substitute a word that could not possibly sound like the real name of God -- **Adonai**, meaning “my LORD.”

The pronunciation of **YHWH** as “Yahweh” is a guess by Jewish scholars (Masorettes) some time before the 10th century.

Christian bible translators in the 16th century combined the consonants of **YHWH** (poorly transliterated as "**JHVH**," with the vowels of the substitute name **Adonai** to produce the artificial hybrid name Jehovah.

Devout Jews: saying aloud the approximation "Yahweh" is getting too close to the real name and hence is blasphemous.

Hallelujah = "Praise Yah"

2.5. "Your" God

God is God of everyone and everything. But the "your" here is a singular pronoun: God is addressing us as individuals.

implications:

- Adonai is "my" God in a very personal and intimate way
- to bring the fullness of life intended by the commandments, to fulfill God's covenant with the people of God, we must respond as individuals, one by one

2.6. God the "Bringer Out;" The Involved God

Adonai does not say

"I am the LORD your God, all powerful, almighty, omniscience, omnipresent, who created you and the universe you live in. . ."

but rather:

"who brought you out the land of Egypt. . ."

What might it say about God that he would describe himself in this way? What does it emphasize?

- God is the "bringer out"
- God is both transcendent and immanent in creation, a participant in the world and in our lives
- "high and exalted beyond this world yet present within history"

The divine presence is incarnate in all the world. God is *ruach kol basar*; the spirit that resides in all flesh. That presence may be brought to consciousness in the mind of every human who is open to it, as it may be blocked out and negated entirely by the closing of the human heart, by cruelty, or by the denial of God's image. The *Shechinah*, the divine presence in our world, does not dwell where she is not wanted."

- Arthur Green, in **Seek My Face, Speak My Name**, quoted in **Broken Tablets**

2.7. God the Liberator from Bondage

Can be a metaphor for anything that releases us from the many possible bondages that impede our freedom to act properly / live fully (listed examples here from **Broker Tablets**)

- ghetto to emancipation
- despotism to democracy
- ignorance to knowledge
- unemployment to job
- discrimination to equality
- illness to health

- neurosis to maturity
- depression to hope

Whenever we are so freed, it is through the God who liberates from bondage, who brings us out of slavery

3. References

- Broken Tablets. Restoring the Ten Commandments and Ourselves.** Rachel S. Mikva, editor. Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 1999.
- Eerdman's Dictionary of the Bible.** David Noel Freedman, Editor. Eerdman's Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 2000. (articles on "Ten Commandments", "Jehovah," "Yahweh")
- The Anchor Bible Dictionary.** David Noel Freeman, Editor in chief. Doubleday, New York, 1992. (articles on "Ten Commandments", "Yahweh")
- Philosophy and Religion in the West. Part I.** Phillip Cary. The Teaching Company, 1999

The Ten Commandments 2. Have no other god before Me

Last update Dec. 2, 2001

You shall have no other gods before me.
You shall not make for yourself a graven image,
or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above,
or that is in the earth beneath,
or that is in the water under the earth;
you shall not bow down to them or serve them;
for I the Lord your God am a jealous God,
visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children
to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,
but showing steadfast love to thousands of those
who love me and keep my commandments

Exodus 20:3-6 (RSV)

Topics

Topics largely from chapter 2 in **Broken Tablets : Restoring the Ten Commandments and Ourselves.** Ed. by: Rachel S. Mikva. Jewish Lights Pub; 1999, and chapter 2 in **Do We Still Need the Ten Commandments? : A Fresh Look at God's Laws of Love & Changing Perspectives.** John H. Timmerman. Augsburg Fortress. 1997.)

1. The Second Commandment

- 1.1. Exodus 20: 3-6
- 1.2. A "positive" phrasing of the Second Commandment

2. The Idol of Self

- 2.1. The "I" is a thief
- 2.2. Examples of the idolatry of self

3. Idols of Money, Technology, Addictions, Absolute Political Systems

- 3.1. The call to discipleship
- 3.2. The example of wealth

4. The Gods of Other Religions

5. Why Do We Worship Idols?

- 5.1. Four reasons why we tend to worship idols
- 5.2. The Religious Instinct in Humanity
- 5.3. The Desire to Manipulate God
- 5.4. A Need for a Visible God
- 5.5. A Confused Sense of Freedom

6. A Jealous God

- 6.1. A metaphor from marriage
- 6.2. Why should God be jealous? A parable

7 How can God Hold Responsible the Children of Those Who Hate Him?

- 7.1. Apparent conflict with the spirit of Deuteronomy 24:16
- 7.2. Possible Answers

8. References

1. The Second Commandment

1.1. Exodus 20: 3-6

You shall have no other gods before me

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them or worship them,

for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me,

but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments (NRSV)

1.2. A “positive” phrasing of the second commandment:

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”

Deuteronomy 6:5 (NRSV)

(Jesus knew his Torah.)

2. The Idol of Self

2.1. The "I" is a thief

The Kotzker rabbi: The “I” is a thief

- it takes the partial and mistakes it for the whole.
- in our search for self-fulfillment, we tend to seek meaningful existence only of ourselves

2.2. Examples of the idolatry of self

- making our personal concerns more important than God's
- making a religious service a “pick and choose feel-good activity” that turns our emotions into idols

3. The Idols of Money, Technology, Absolute Political Systems, Addictions . .

3.1. The call to discipleship

we are called to *discipleship*, a totality of commitment to

- God
- God's word
- God's vision and desire for us and for others

we must be suspicious of *anything* that may interfere with that commitment

3.2. The example of wealth

for example, *wealth*:

No one can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth

(Matthew 6:24, NRSV)

also:

- Ezekiel 7:19-20
- Deuteronomy 32:10-18

4. The Gods of Other Religions

The Second Commandment raises difficult questions on how we should view the Gods of other religions. An unnecessarily radical viewpoint would be to declare:

- all religious non-Christians are idolaters
- all non-orthodox Christians are heretics

Questions:

- Do only Christians worship the one true living God? A case can certainly be made that Christians, Jews, and Moslems all worship the one true God, although they differ in the fullness of their knowledge about God
- What should our attitude be towards other religions?
- Can salvation be found outside the church?

5. Why Do We Worship Idols?

5.1. Four reasons why we tend to worship idols

from Timmerman:

- 1. The Religious Instinct in Humanity
- 2. The Desire to Manipulate God
- 3. A Need for a Visible God
- 4. A Confused Sense of Freedom

5.2. The Religious “Instinct” in Humanity

We have an innate sense of the divine, a inner longing for transcendence

- Platonism: “intellectual vision” of ultimate good, justice, love. . . part of the Divine Mind
- Schleiermacher: “God consciousness,” our feeling of utter dependency

can be perverted, misdirected

5.3. The Desire to Manipulate God

We have a tendency to envision, project onto:

- God,
- or
- a substitute “god”

those characteristics that satisfy our own psychological needs (thus “manipulating” God)

5.4. A Need for a Visible God

We desire to:

- “capture” God in a concrete, visible, static form (*thus denying the relatedness of God*),
- worship a God who is fully knowable, who is without mystery (*thus denying the transcendence of God*)
- worship a God fashioned by our own hands (*thus forming God in our own image*)
- worship the here and now (*an ego centered universe*)

5.5. A Confused Sense of Freedom

5.5.1. Idolatry as a path to freedom

We may have a sense that freedom is *expressed* by:

- not being bound by the conventions of others
- choosing your own way.

Idolatry, choosing what to “worship,” is hence one expression / path to freedom

5.5.2. What is freedom?

The metaphor of the train journey.

If a train wants to go to Chicago, is it bondage or freedom for it to stay on the track to Chicago?

5.5.3. Where does Grace come in?

Two paradigms of grace, our natural state and freedom

- 1. *Augustine*. Human nature was naturally inclined to the divine, but human natures became corrupted. Grace *restores* us to our natural state and allows us to freely chose good.
- 2. *Aquinas*. We are naturally inclined to the world. Grace *raises* us up so we can aspire to and achieve that which we would otherwise be incapable of in our natural state. (This grace which raises us up is "sanctifying grace.") It allows us to freely choose good, which we would be incapable of doing in our natural state.

6. A Jealous God

6.1. A metaphor from marriage

“(for you shall worship no other god, because the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God)”

Exodus 34: 14 (NRSV)

“They made me jealous with what is no god, provoked me with their idols.”

Deuteronomy 32:21 (NRSV)

This metaphor is from marriage, stressing allegiance to YHWH alone.
YHWH demands absolute loyalty and rejection of all other Gods

6.2. Why should God be Jealous? A parable

There are no other real gods, so why should God be jealous of that which is not real?

Rabbi Gamliel's answer:

The parable of the man who takes a second wife inferior to the first. The first wife will be rightly infuriated that her husband is lessening his devotion to her for a woman who is not worthy

God's passion is aroused both because:

- devotion of the husband (us) to the first wife (God) is lessened
- the second wife (idol) is not worthy of the husband (us). The husband (us) deserves better.

7. How Can God Hold Responsible the Children of Those Who Hate Him?

7.1. Apparent conflict with the spirit of Deuteronomy 24:16

“...for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me. . .”

Exodus 20:5 (NRSV)

“Parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their parents, only for their own crimes may persons be put to death.”

Deuteronomy 24:16 (NRSV)

7.2. Possible Answers

1. children are punished only if they:

- follow the sinful ways of their parents
- fail to protest if it is within their power

2. God's remembrance of the parent's sins is God taking notice that:

- a parent's actions
- genetic predisposition

all shape a child's behavior

3. a reminder that children do suffer from the iniquities of their parents. For example:

- neglect
- inheritance of a polluted world

4. statement is harsh, but God later changes his mind after the Golden Calf incident, removing the conditions on his steadfast love (Exodus 34:6-7)

8. References

Broken Tablets : Restoring the Ten Commandments and Ourselves. Ed. by: Rachel S. Mikva.

Introduction by Lawrence Kushner. Afterword by Arnold Jacob Wolf. Jewish Lights Pub; 1999

Do We Still Need the Ten Commandments? : A Fresh Look at God's Laws of Love & Changing Perspectives. John H. Timmerman. Augsburg Fortress. 1997.

Exodus. (Interpretation. A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching.) Terence E. Fretheim, John Knox Press, Louisville, 1991

The Ten Commandments 3. Do not lift up the name of your God for vain purpose

Topics

1. The Third Commandment
2. What does it mean to take the name of the Lord God in vain?
3. How far can we take it?
4. How can we lift up the name of the Lord God correctly?
5. The relationship at the heart of the commandment
6. Implications for Prayer
7. The Lord will not hold guiltless those who take his name in vain
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1. The Third Commandment

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain (RSV)

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. (NRSV)

You shall not lift up the name of Adonai your God for vain purpose, for Adonai will not clear one who uses the Name in vain (Broken Tablets)

2. What does using God's name "in vain," "for vain purpose" mean?

2.1 Definitions. Restating the Commandment

vain: dictionary definition:

- 1. having no real value, idle, worthless
- 2. marked by futility or ineffectualness; useless

Thus: do not use God's name:

- in an idle, superfluous way, or
- for a worthless or unworthy purpose, or
- for an unnecessary or futile purpose

A "positive" restatement of the commandment:

we should lift up the name of God only:

- in earnestness, in a full and deep awareness of what we are doing
- for worthy, valuable purposes
- for necessary, fruitful purposes

2.2. Examples of Lifting God's Name up in Vain

Examples of lifting up God's name in vain:

- 1. profanity. Dragging God's name through the mud of human emotion.
- 2. false swearing. Swearing to contradict known facts, to deceive
- 3. false prophecy
- 4. "reflex religion" Reflexive use of God's name without a religious commitment (often in a time of need)
- 5. frivolous use of God's name. Exclamations such as "Oh My God," "My Lord!"
- 6. unworthy use of God's name. (e.g. for magic or for destructive purposes)
- 7. unnecessary or unfruitful use of God's name.
 - praying for the sex of an unborn child (The sex of the child is already determined, so the prayer is futile, unnecessary -- unless we are truly praying for a miracle, asking God to miraculously change the sex of our unborn child to the sex we desire)
 - saying a blessing before a meal and then not enjoying the meal
 - swearing before the oblivious or unbelieving

3. How Far Can We Take It?

3.1 Can we of dust and ashes ever use the transcendent name of God without subtly taking it in vain?

- our finite minds cannot know the fullness of God
- our praise, glorification, exaltation, honoring of God will always fall short of what God is worthy of

We should therefore consider the commandment a:

- gracious permission to use God's name
- a kindness bestowed on us by the One who knows our need to connect God to our lives

This permission however has boundaries.

3.2 Is every action of a religious person a reflection on God's name?

If we call ourselves "Christians" and do not act as Christ, are we then taking God's name in vain? Is an offense against the Third commandment also part of our sin?

4. How Can We Lift Up the Name of the Lord God Correctly?

We should lift up the name of God only

- in earnestness, in a full and deep awareness of what we are doing
- for worthy, valuable purposes
- for necessary, fruitful purposes

The basis for this: the relationship at the heart of the commandment

5. The Relationship at the Heart of the Commandment

Our relationship with God involves:

- covenant loyalty
- respect and love (as in any human relationship)

Therefore we should try to lift up God's name:

- respectfully (with holy, awe-filled reverence)
- lovingly

6. Implications for Prayer

6.1. What the Third Commandment Requires for Prayer

In praying, we are invoking God's name, "lifting up" the name of God.

Third Commandment requires that we pray for:

- worthy, valuable purposes
- necessary, fruitful purposes

we pray with a deep earnestness and honesty:

- no "social duplicity" when we call upon God's name
- words matter, and they matter a lot to God
- must not make God's name a mere breath, an emptiness

6.2. Honesty in Prayer

The third commandment in particular calls us to *honesty* in prayer.

Examples of the honesty required in lifting up the name of God:

- The experience of God by Moses, Jeremiah and Daniel
 - *Moses*: God "**great, mighty and awesome**"
 - *Jeremiah*: God "**great and mighty**" (did not experience God as *awesome*)
 - *Daniel*: God "**great and awesome**" (did not experience God as *mighty*)
 - rabbis: Moses is right, but defended Jeremiah and Daniel as being true to their experience of God. They would not lie to the Holy One
- When the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem
 - God seemed mute, seemed to just let it happen
 - Instead of "**Who is like You among the gods (*elim*)**", a rabbi suggested praying "**Who is like You among the mute (*ilemim*)**". Blasphemous? or a deeply honest expression of how the Jews felt at this time?
- Job's curse of his gift of life
 - "**God damn the day I was born and the night that forced me from the womb**" (Job 3:3)
 - blasphemous? or a deeply honest expression of how he felt?

To be true to the Third Commandment requires we lift up the name of God only with deep earnestness and honesty. We must not lie to the Holy One. We must not lift up the name of God with adjectives whose meaning is empty to us.

7. The Lord Will Not Hold Guiltless Those Who Take His Name in Vain

“ . . . for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain” (RSV)

Taking God's name in vain may seem like a victimless act. What can we possibly do to harm God?

But consider the relationship at the heart of the commandment. Taking God's name in vain

- may hurt God
- may hurt our relationship with God
- may sully God's reputation and esteem among other people (at the deepest level, the use of God's name is a matter of mission)

8. References

- Broken Tablets : Restoring the Ten Commandments and Ourselves.** Ed. by: Rachel S. Mikva. Jewish Lights Pub; Woodstock, Vermont, 1999
- Do We Still Need the Ten Commandments? : A Fresh Look at God's Laws of Love & Changing Perspectives.** John H. Timmerman. Augsburg Fortress. Minneapolis, 1997
- Commandments of Compassion.** James F. Keenan, S.J. Sheed and Ward. Franklin, WI, 1999.

The Ten Commandments 4. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy

Remember the sabbath day,
to keep it holy.
Six days you shall labor,
and do all your work;
but the seventh day is a sabbath
to the Lord your God;
in it you shall not do any work,
you, or your son, or your daughter,
your manservant, or your maidservant,
or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates;
for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea,
and all that is in them,
and rested the seventh day;
therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day
and hallowed it

Genesis 20:8-11 (RSV)

Topics

(Questions and topics from chapter 4 in **Broken Tablets : Restoring the Ten Commandments and Ourselves**. Ed. by: Rachel S. Mikva. Jewish Lights Pub; 1999, and chapter 4 in **Do We Still Need the Ten Commandments? : A Fresh Look at God's Laws of Love & Changing Perspectives**. John H. Timmerman. Augsburg Fortress. 1997.)

1. The Fourth Commandment
2. Remembering
3. Sabbath as a Palace in Time
4. Sabbath as Divine Gift
5. Sabbath as Part of the Order of Creation
6. Sabbath Keeping as Creation Keeping
7. Sabbath as a Remembrance of Creation
8. Sabbath as Remembrance of Exodus from Egypt
9. Sabbath as Egalitarian Institution
10. Sabbath as Protest
11. Sabbath as a Foretaste of the World to Come
12. Praxis: How Do We Remember, Keep the Sabbath Holy?
13. The Blessing of the Sabbath
14. Footnote: Sunday vs. Saturday
15. References

1. The Fourth Commandment

Exodus Version

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your

son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it

- Exodus 20:8-11 (RSV)

Deuteronomy Version

Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God, you shall not do any work -- you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (NRSV)

The Structure of the Commandment

- 1. *command*:
 - remember
 - keep holy
- 2. *details*:
 - acknowledgement of six legitimate work days
 - 7th day: complete and comprehensive work stoppage for all
- 3. *rationale*:
 - because God rested on the 7th day
 - because God freed you from slavery in Egypt

2. Remembering

Zachor vs Shamor: Keep and Remember in a Single Utterance

Remembering here involves more than mere mental action, but active observance

- Exodus version: *Zachor*, “remember”
- Deuteronomy version: *Shamor*, “keep” or “observe”

Talmud:

- *Zachor*: reminds us to celebrate the positive
- *Shamor*: charges us against violating the “do nots”

3. Sabbath as a Palace in Time

A Time Set Apart

Descriptions of the Sabbath as a time set apart

- “palace in time”
- “island in time”
- “sanctuary in time”
- “holiness in time”

Keeping the sabbath holy involves separating it from all the other days (which are characterized by the activities of work, productivity, servitude to others), making it an "island in time," removed from the mainland of the rest of the week

Not all Time is Our Own

The junction to make the Sabbath a "palace in time" also reminds us that not all time is our own. The God of all time retains the right to determine how one day should be used

A Celebration of of What We Share in Eternal Time Rather Than the Tyranny of the Transient Things of Space

"Technical civilization is man's conquest of space. It is a triumph frequently achieved by sacrificing an essential ingredient of existence, namely, time. In technical civilization, we expend time to gain space. . . The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world."

- Abraham Joshua Heschel

4. Sabbath as Divine Gift

The Sabbath is a grace bestowed by God on the Creation.

The sense of the Sabbath as divine gift is seen in Jewish poetic descriptions of the Sabbath:

- "The Sabbath Bride" - radiant and beautiful, poetic symbol of charm and purity, object of love and affection
- "The Sabbath Queen" - symbol of majesty, beauty and grace

The sense of the Sabbath as a grace, a gift to us is also manifest in Jesus' statement that the Sabbath was made for human beings.

"The sabbath was made for human beings, not human beings for the sabbath"

- Mark 2:27

5. Sabbath as Part of the Order of Creation

God built the working / resting rhythm of the week into the fabric of Creation.

"God's resting is a divine act that builds into the very created order of things a working / resting rhythm."

- Terrence Fretheim

"it is ordained in the very fabric of creation that the world is not a place of endless productivity, ambition, or anxiety."

- Walter Brueggemann

6. Sabbath Keeping as Creation Keeping

Because the Sabbath is built into the very fabric of creation, to keep the Sabbath is to maintain the order of the universe. Violating the Sabbath is decline into chaos and may have cosmic consequences:

“Even more, *sabbath-keeping is an act of creation-keeping*. To keep the sabbath is to participate in God’s intention for the rhythm of creation. Not keeping the sabbath is a violation of the created order; it returns one aspect of that order to chaos. What the creatures do with the sabbath has cosmic effects.”

- Terrence Fretheim

7. Sabbath as a Remembrance of Creation

The Exodus version of the Fourth Commandment notes ". . .for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it."

Therefore, keeping the Sabbath then is also remembering Creation, acknowledging that:

- the world is not ours
- God is the Lord and Creator of the universe
- we must serve God

One way we acknowledge this is by:

- stopping our labors
- stopping our manipulation of nature
 - in the back of our minds, we may arrogantly believe that our ability to control nature means nature is ours
- letting nature "run itself" on the Sabbath

8. Sabbath as Remembrance of Exodus from Egypt

The Deuteronomy version of the Commandment urges us to "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day."

Therefore, keeping the Sabbath is also:

- remembering the Exodus,
- remembering our ultimate freedom from servitude to human masters.
 - Just as God frees the “manservants” and “maidservants” in Exodus 20:8-11 from working for their human masters on the Sabbath, God has freed us in the 21st century from working in servitude to governments, corporations or other institutions.
 - the emphasis on our freedom from servitude to human masters should perhaps include the “taskmaster” in ourselves (?)

“The very concreteness of sabbath is a sacrament witnessing to the reality of exodus and to the governance of the creator who has broken the restless penchant for productive activity. . . Sabbath is the daring recognition that with the change of sovereigns wrought in the exodus, such unrewarding expenditure of labor is no longer required.”

- Walter Brueggemann

9. Sabbath as Egalitarian Institution

The Sabbath rest is for all, rich and poor, master and servant, man and animal. The implicit equality of the Sabbath rest witnesses God's intention that creation should be a community of peace in which all creatures stand in shared rest

"What is the Sabbath? A reminder of every man's royalty; an abolition of the distinction of master and slave, rich and poor, success and failure. To celebrate the Sabbath is to experience one's ultimate independence of civilization and society, of achievement and anxiety. The Sabbath is an embodiment of the belief that all men are equal and that equality of men means the nobility of men. The greatest sin of man is to forget that he is prince."

- Abraham Joshua Heschel

10. Sabbath as Protest

Seneca, Roman philosopher wrote that spending every seventh day without "doing anything" wastes one seventh of your life.

"We must understand that doing nothing, being silent and open to the world, letting things happen inside, can be as important as -- and sometimes more important than -- what we commonly call 'useful'"

- Rabbi Gunther Plaut

Sabbath is:

- protest against worldly concept that value exists only in producing (*world is more than a place of endless productivity*)
- statement that the world is not ours (*remembrance of creation*)
- statement that we belong to no human master (*remembrance of Exodus*)

11. Sabbath as a Foretaste of the World to Come

The Sabbath envisions the new world order where:

- our value is more than what we produce
- all recognize Creation is God's
- all recognize we serve God alone
- all the world's creatures are be at peace with one another

Jews pray at the end of their Sabbath service for the Sabbath that never ends

12. Praxis: How Do We Remember, Keep the Sabbath Holy?

As a practical matter, how do we remember and observe the Sabbath and keep it holy?

Worship, whether private or communal, is not mentioned in the Fourth Commandment, but clearly is one means of making the Sabbath "holy." But worship is not the only means of observing the Sabbath.

Fundamentally keeping the Sabbath must involve:

"periodic, regular disengagement from systems of productivity whereby the world uses people up to exhaustion. That disengagement refers also to culture-produced expectations for frantic leisure, frantic consumptions, or frantic exercise."

- Walter Brueggemann

This may involve:

- termination of routines
- disengagement from some social conventions
- lowering one's standard of living

To make the Sabbath holy, we must strive to focus on:

- God as the center of our lives
- building a faith where striving for our material needs does not dominate our lives (See the Parable of the Rich Man whose land produced abundantly in Luke 12:16-29.)

13. The Blessing of the Sabbath

"If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs, then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob . . . "

(Isaiah 58: 13-14 NRSV)

14. Footnote: Sunday vs. Saturday

Early centuries: observing the Eucharist was not part of the observance of the Fourth Commandment

- Fourth Commandment commanded us to imitate God the creator who rested on the Sabbath
- Sunday: the day to celebrate Jesus' death, resurrection

However, in later centuries, Sunday began to take on both the "holiness" of the Sabbath (as the day of Eucharistic worship), and the required proscription against labor on the Sabbath:

- **Fourth Century:** Emperor Constantine required cessation of all work on Sunday except farming
- **538 AD Council of Orleans:** prohibited servile work on Sunday
 - main purpose was that landowners could not require their serfs to work on Sunday

15. References

The Book of Exodus. Walter Brueggemann. In: The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume I. Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1994

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God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism. Abraham Joshua Heschel. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1955.
To Be a Jew. Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin. Basic Books, 1972.

The Ten Commandments 5. Honor your father and mother

**Honor your father and your mother,
that your days may be long
in the land which the Lord your God gives you**

Exodus 20:12 (RSV)

Questions, Issues, Topics

Arrangement of topics largely from chapter 5 in **Broken Tablets : Restoring the Ten Commandments and Ourselves**. Ed. by: Rachel S. Mikva. Jewish Lights Pub; 1999.

1. The Fifth Commandment
2. The relationship between child and parent
3. Why does God care how we treat our parents?
4. Honor and fear / revere
5. Why are we promised our days will be long?
6. Extension of the commandment to other authorities
7. Obligations of a parent for a child
8. How far does it go?
9. What if our parents are not worthy?
10. References

1. The Fifth Commandment

1.1. Text

**“Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.”
(Exodus 20:12 NRSV)**

**“Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.”
(Deuteronomy 5:16 NRSV)**

**“You shall each revere your mother and father, and you shall keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.”
(Leviticus 19:3 NRSV)**

1.2. Synopsis

- 1. Command:
 - honor / revere your father and mother
- 2. Motivational Clause, Promise / Benefit:
 - your days may be long
 - it may go well with you
 - in the land the LORD is giving you

2. The relationship between child and parent

No inter-human relationship is more basic.

- A fundamental order of creation
- Every person is a child of parents throughout their life

Note the implied equality of father and mother.

- remarkable in a patriarchal Israel that both are equally to be honored

The Commandment speaks to:

- the “valuing of the life-world of the parents by the children”
- importance of continuity between the generations

The authors of Exodus are particularly concerned with the safe transmission to all generations of the story of God’s liberation of his people from bondage in Egypt.

3. Why does God care how we treat our parents?

There are three partners in the making of a human being:

- father
- mother
- God

God is involved!

God often describes his relationship with us in filial terms:

- Exodus 4:22
- Jeremiah 31:20
- Hosea 11:1
- Malachi 1:6
- Isaiah 64:8,
- Isaiah 66:13
- The Lord’s Prayer

Command may in part reflect the God’s divine concern and authority exercised through the parent

4. Honor and fear / revere

4.1. Honor versus Fear/Revere

honor (Exodus and Deuteronomy versions) - Hebrew *kabed*

revere or fear (Leviticus version) - Hebrew *tira'u*

4.2. Honor

honor (*kabed*):

- wide-ranging verb; no one specific behavior is commanded
- children may respond in multiple ways to honor parents (respect, esteem, concern for, affection, love, consideration, appreciation, nurture, forgiveness. . .)
- involves positive acts to help them, bring them joy, improve their lives
- “obedience is not at the center of what it means to honor”
- command directed primarily at adults (to protect parents from being driven out of their home / abused when they could no longer work)
- includes among its meanings “be heavy” suggesting “give weight to.” Parents should be treated with seriousness.

The New Testament "transposes" the relationship of the Fifth Commandment, emphasizing the mutuality, the give and take of the relationship between parent and child. In the Angel Gabriel's announcement to Zechariah that his wife Elizabeth will have a son John:

“With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17 NRSV)

Part of this mutuality is implicit in the notion of honoring:

“ ‘Honor’ is a more delicate, transitive maneuver, whereby both parties grow in dignity through the process” (Brueggemann)

4.3. Fear and Revere

fear/revere (*tira'u*):

- do not take our parent's place/position
- do not diminish the esteem due them from others

4.4. Father / mother versus Mother / father

Talmud:

- Exodus / Deuteronomy: “honor your *father* and *mother*”
- Leviticus: “fear/revere your *mother* and *father*”

Our tendency is to honor mother (who tends to be more nurturing), fear/revere father (who tends to be more authoritarian). This ordering emphasizes we should also *honor* our father, *fear/revere* our mother

5. Why are we promised our days will be long?

Not really a “promise” or a “warning” (note language “may”: It “may” go well with you, your days “may” be long).

Possibilities:

- improved relationships among the generations will *tend* to improve our lives
- quasi-legal note that retaining inheritance of the land requires or at least is more likely if we honor our parents

6. Extension of the commandment to other authorities

The Reformers extended the Fifth Commandment to other authorities; in particular, state and judiciary. Their argument was based on two passages:

Proverbs 24:21:

“My child, fear the LORD and the king, and do not disobey either of them. . .” (NRSV)

I Peter 2:13-17:

“For the Lord’s sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors. . . Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.” (NRSV)

The validity of such an extension is controversial. The argument is perhaps strongest when such authorities take on “parental” role (care of the elderly and mentally handicapped parents, for example)

7. Obligations of a parent for a child

7.1. Parent and child: a mutual relationship

The New Covenant (see quote from Luke 1:17 above) contains both:

- the child's honoring of the parent
- the parent turning his/her heart to their child

This mutuality of relationship is reflected elsewhere in the New Testament. Ephesians 6:2-4:

“ ‘Honor your father and mother’ -- this is the first commandment with a promise. ‘so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth’ And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” (NRSV)

A child's honoring of his/her parents should evoke a response of the parent to be worthy of the honor of their child.

7.2. Tasks of "Honorable" Parents

The tasks of “honorable parents” (from Timmerman)

- to *love* (unconditional love for who they are)
- to *direct* (Proverbs: training a child in the way he/she should go. Giving guidelines for right living)
- to *nurture* (guidance and support for his/her special needs/gifts)

To perform such tasks without failure would require a godlike wisdom and discernment. We all fail. Marion Wright Edelman (head of the Children's Defense Fund) wrote this letter for forgiveness of those inevitable failures to her sons (quoted in **Broken Tablets**):

"I seek your forgiveness for all the times I talked when I should have listened; got angry when I should have been patient; acted when I should have waited; feared when I should have been delighted; scolded when I should have encouraged; criticized when I should have complimented; said no when I should have said yes and said yes when I should have said no... I often tried too hard and wanted and demanded so much, and mistakenly sometimes tried to mold you into my image of what I wanted you to be rather than discovering and nourishing you as you emerged and grew."

8. How far does it go?

Matthew 10:35:

“For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law . . .” (NRSV)

Certainly part of what this disturbing passage tells us is that:

- Our honor is first directed to God
- Our responsibility to God comes first

9. What if our parents are not worthy?

What if:

- our parents are not worthy? not “honorable”?
- there is on-going hurt and pain in the relationship that is detrimental or even harmful to us?
- there is a history of child abuse?

There is no simple answer to how we should "honor" our parents in such situation. In such a struggle, we should keep in mind:

- honor is a wide-ranging verb; no one specific behavior is commanded. It is open-ended.
- The commandment to honor our parents is not based upon what our parents deserve, but rather on God's direct command: “Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you. . .” (Deuteronomy)
- Maimonides: “It is possible for a man to honor and revere and obey those whom he does not love.”
- On a first level, "'Honor' speaks to filial behavior, not to filial judgment or sentiment” (Leonard Fein in **Broken Tablets**)

In such a situation, honor can still involve positive acts to help them, improve their lives, to the degree we are able. Revere/fear can still involve not interfering with the esteem due them from others.

Honor may also involve *forgiveness*.

10. References

- Broken Tablets : Restoring the Ten Commandments and Ourselves.** Ed. by: Rachel S. Mikva. Introduction by Lawrence Kushner. Afterword by Arnold Jacob Wolf. Jewish Lights Pub; 1999
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The Ten Commandments 6. You shall not murder

Last update Nov 9, 2001

You shall not kill

Exodus 20: 13 (RSV)

Topics

1. The Sixth Commandment: Introduction
 - 1.1. Meaning of *Rasah* (to kill/murder)
 - 1.2. New Testament Extensions of the Commandment
 - 1.3. The Concepts at the Heart of the Commandment
2. The Face of the Other
 - 2.1. Martin Buber
"I it" vs. "I You"
 - 2.2. Emmanuel Levinas
Totalizing vs. "I You"
The Original Ethical Relation
The Face
 - 2.3. Murder as the Extreme Consequence of Not Seeing the Face of the Other
3. The Holiness of Life
 - 3.1. Why Human Life is Holy
 - 3.2. Murder as a Reversal of God's Creation
 - 3.3. Murder as a Usurpation of God's Ownership of Life
 - 3.4. Murder as a Blasphemy Against God
4. Are We all "Murderers"? Extrapolations on the Shedding of Blood
5. Resisting Wickedness and Evil that Threatens the Other
6. Discussion
 - 6.1. Suicide
 - 6.2. Capital Punishment
 - 6.3. Euthanasia
 - 6.4. War
 - 6.5. Abortion
7. References

1. The Sixth Commandment: Introduction

You shall not murder

- Exodus 20:13 (NRSV)

You shall not kill

- Exodus 20:13 (RSV)

1.1. Meaning of *Rasah* (to kill/murder)

The intended sense of the verb *rasah* ("to kill") is controversial. Use of this same Hebrew verb elsewhere in the Bible have included various meanings:

- murder: 1 Kings 21:19 (hence NRSV translation)
- unintentional killing: Deut 4:41-42
- execution of a convicted killer: Num 35:30

Fretheim (after Exodus 21:12, Num 35:20-21) suggests the best sense of the word is "any act of violence against an individual out of hatred, anger, malice, deceit, or for personal gain, in whatever circumstances and by whatever method, that might result in death (even if killing was not the intention)"

1.2. New Testament Extensions of the Commandment

Jesus' makes this extension of the Commandment:

"You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment, and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council, and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift."

- Matthew 5:21-24 (NRSV)

In 1 John we find:

"All who hate a brother or sister are murderers. . ."

- 1 John 3:15 (NRSV)

1.3. The Concepts at the Heart of the Commandment

At the heart of the Commandment are two concepts:

- The need to see the "Face of the Other"
- The holiness / sanctity of human life

2. The Face of the Other

(The material in this section is largely from Professor Philip Cary's lecture)

2.1. Martin Buber

2.1.1. "I it" vs. "I You"

Martin Buber

In 1923, Martin Buber published his work **I and Thou** (the usual English translations of the original German title)

He suggested we have two modes of experiencing the world, or two attitudes to the world:

- world of objects = "I it"
- encounter with Another = "I Thou" or "I You"
 - the "You" here is the "You" of intimacy, which used to exist in English in the word "thou"

I it

- we objectify, conceptualize, fit into the "box of our understanding" that which we see, hear, etc ("it").
- the "normal" experienced world of space and time

I You

- the "You" can never be objectified, or "boxed" into our understanding. A "You" has no borders, cannot be measured. A "You" "fills the sky" of our mind's eye
- an encounter, a transitory event (the "event of relation")
- can be called love

■ comes to us by grace

2.2. Emmanuel Levinas

2.2.1. "Totalizing" vs. "I You"

Emmanuel Levinas, writing in the 1960's, contrasted "I You" not only with "I it" but with "totalizing"

- **"totalizing:"** the project of most of western philosophy back to Plato: a search for truth that is a search for underlying unity, commonality, obliterating difference
- In contrast, in the **"I You" encounter:**
 - difference, not unity, is fundamental
 - the Other is "always beyond me" an infinity that can never be grasped. We can approach the Other but never reach the end of him/her

2.2.2. The Original Ethical Relation

The **"original ethical relation"**

- my being is secondary; my responsibility to the Other comes first
- this "unshirkable ethical responsibility" is what makes me a unique self. Our "testimony" before the Other defines us. This testimony starts with God as the Other. God calls, we answer "Here I am Lord":
 - Abraham in Genesis 22:1f
 - Samuel in 1 Sam 3: 4f
 - Isaiah in Isaiah 6: 8f

2.2.3. The Face

Levinas dilates on the **"I You" encounter** with the analogy of the Other in the encounter as Face

- We meet the Other as Face in an "I You" encounter
- The Face is my master in its need, its nakedness and vulnerability
- The Face gives me orders "Do not kill"
- We are responsible for the Other in its need, when it is in danger of death

2.3. Murder as the Extreme Consequence of Not Seeing the Face of the Other

Murder is the extreme failure of not seeing the face of the Other

3. The Holiness of Life

3.1. Why Human Life is Holy

Human life is holy because:

- 1. Human life belongs to God. It is:
 - God's *creation*
 - God's *property*. Its disposition is God's prerogative alone
 - (the metaphor of life as a "gift" must not be taken "literally." The blessings of life are gifts to us; but our life itself still belongs to God)
- 2. Every human person has an intrinsic value and goodness, for each is a being made by God in the *image of God*

3.2. Murder as a Reversal of God's Creation

Murder is a reversal of God's creation -- for each human life is God's creation:

Genesis 4:9. God to Cain:

"Your brother's blood(s) is crying out to me from the ground"

- A cry of anguish from the earth (creation)
- Murder kills the individual, all the future children and creative work yet to be done by the individual
- Murder destroys an entire world (Saving a life can save an entire world)

3.3. Murder as a Usurpation of God's Ownership of Life

Murder is a usurpation of God's ownership of life, for human life belongs to God, is God's property:

Implications for any shedding of blood:

- Life is not for human beings to do with as we wish
- If we take a human life for any reason we must:
 - discern God's intentions
 - act as "an agent of God"

3.4. Murder as a Blasphemy Against God

Murder is a blasphemy against God, for it destroys a being made in the image of God

4. Are We all "Murderers"? Extrapolations on the Shedding of Blood

4.1. New Testaments Extensions

The extensions to the Sixth Commandment that can be found in the New Testament are:

- Jesus in Matthew 5:21-24:
 - anger and insults of Another are liable under the Sixth Commandment.
- 1 John 3:15:
 - hate of Another liable

4.2. Talmudic Extensions

Some extrapolations to the Sixth Commandment that can be found in the Talmud include:

- embarrassing, shaming another
 - causes blood to drain from their face
- acts that destroy aspects of life that may not be recovered
 - rape
 - causing Another to lose their livelihood

4.3. Meaning of Extensions to the Commandment

The common theme of the extensions:

- Doing anything that denigrates Another, that causes the "death" of part of the human spirit or the human heart is wrong

A "positive" restatement of the extensions:

- We should encourage, nurture in the Other all that enriches, enhances the human spirit and heart

5. Resisting Wickedness and Evil that Threatens the Other

Responding to the face of the Other, to its needs and vulnerability, its possible danger of death, requires us to protest and resist wickedness and evil.

Calvin, writing on the positive application of the Sixth Commandment, notes both our need to respond to the misery and vulnerabilities of the Other, as well as the need to resist wickedness and evil:

“. . . that we should not only live at peace with men. . . but also should aid, as far as we can, the miserable who are unjustly oppressed, and should endeavor to resist the wicked, lest they should injure men.”

The failure to resist evil is itself evil:

There is an evil which most of us condone and are even guilty of: indifference to evil. We remain neutral, impartial, and not easily moved by the wrongs done to other people. Indifference to evil is more insidious than evil itself. . . . A silent justification, it makes possible an evil erupting as an exception becoming the rule. . . The decay of conscience fills the air with a pungent smell. Good and evil, which were once as distinguishable as day and night, have become a blurred mist. But that mist is man-made. God is not silent, He has been silenced.

- Abraham Joshua Heschel (quoted from Broken Tablets)

6. Discussion

6.1. Suicide

Genesis 9:5:

“For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning. . .”

Our life belongs to God; it is not our right to decide when to end it

Questions:

- Who is suicide a sin against?

6.2. Capital Punishment

Israel's limited use of capital punishment had to do with violations of God's created order. It was considered a matter of world restoration under God:

■ Exodus 21:12-17

■ Exodus 22: 18-20

Questions:

- When might capital punishment be justified as a restoration of the world under God?
- Is “setting an example” sufficient justification for capital punishment?
- Can a secular state act as an agent of God?

6.3 Euthanasia

Adage to physicians: “When God puts his hand on, take yours off.”

- When does God put his hand on? How can we tell?

Questions. Can we ever:

- take our hand off when God has not put his hand on?
- use our hand to actively push the Other to God when God has put his hand on?
- use our hand to actively push the Other to God when God has not put his hand on?

6.4. War

Arguments justifying war and the killing in war have included:

- defense of self
- restoration of the World to God

Questions:

- What criteria must be met for a war to be “just?” How “broken” must the world be before it is no longer tolerable and war necessary to “restore” the world to God?
- We are called to resist evil and wickedness. Is bloodshed sometimes unavoidable in resisting evil? Why? How sure must we be that there is no better alternative? If we believe bloodshed is sometimes necessary, is that necessity sometimes a consequence of a previous failure or delay to notice and resist the evil that threatens the Other?

6.5. Abortion

The debate over the ethics of the *practice* (vs. the more complex issue of the *legal availability*) of abortion:

- is not a debate about the holiness of human life (in general both sides uphold the holiness of human life)
- centers on the question: What is human life and when does it begin?

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The Ten Commandments 7. You shall not commit adultery

Last update Nov. 25, 2001

You shall not commit adultery

Exodus 20:14 (RSV)

Topics

1. The Seventh Commandment: Introduction
 - 1.1. The Meaning of Adultery
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 - 8.1. Jesus' Statement on Divorce
 - 8.2. The Exception Clause
 - 8.3. The Complexity of the Ethics of Divorce

1. The Seventh Commandment: Introduction

You shall not commit adultery

- Exodus 20:14 (NRSV)

1.1. The Meaning of Adultery

Unlike the meaning of the verb "to murder / kill" in the 7th Commandment, there is no linguistic problems in the 8th Commandment. The Hebrew verb *na'ap* unambiguously means to commit adultery. It:

- can have a man or woman as its subject
- is distinguished from other verbs:
 - *skb* to sleep with
 - *znh* to commit harlotry/prostitution

The command relates to specifically to **adultery**, which in the Old Testament is clearly in a different category than **fornication** (= sex between two unmarried / unbetrothed people).

- eg. punishment for adultery was death (Deut 22:22); whereas the penalty for seduction of a virgin was a requirement to marry the woman or pay an appropriate monetary sum.

There was a double standard in the definition of adultery in Patriarchal Israel

- for men, adultery meant sex with another *married* woman
- for women, adultery meant sex with *any other* man

1.2. New Testament Extensions to the Commandment

Jesus declared this extension to the commandment:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

- Matthew 5:27-28

1.3. Possible New Testament Extensions to the Commandment

Fornication is clearly frowned on in the New Testament:

“Out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.”

- Matthew 15:19

“Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the fornicator sins against the body itself.”

- 1 Corinthians 6:18

However whether these statements intend that fornication should fall under the Seventh Commandment is unclear.

1.4. The Issues At the Heart of the Commandment

At the heart of the Commandment live issues of:

- marriage
- sexuality
- fidelity
- family

2. Marriage

2.1. What is a Marriage?

The scriptures contain many images about marriage, ranging from the erotic imagery in the Song of Songs to the laments about women such as those in the apocryphal book Son of Sirach 25:13 (there is no wickedness or wrath greater than a woman's). There is however no "coherent theology" of marriage to be found in the Scriptures:

“There is not a biblical theology of marriage as a unified set of ideas and concepts. Instead, one has to view the richness and diversity of the various early Christian traditions.”

- Francis Fiorenza in **Systematic Theology**

The Christian sacrament of marriage grew out of the "natural" or secular institution of marriage primarily by adding elements to it, and has evolved with the natural institution over time.

2.2. The Natural or Secular Institution

“Natural” purpose of marriage:

The institution to protect and regulate the sexual and reproductive activities of people

- for the “good” of those directly involved
- for the “good” of society

The institution has thus varied, depending on what the culture deemed "good" for the individual (which might be different depending on whether the individual was male or female) and "good" for society.

Modern developments in the evolution of the natural or secular institution of marriage include:

- partners choose each other (“fall in love”) rather than undergoing an “arranged” marriage for political, commercial or other reasons
- effective contraception has removed the necessity of a link between sex and reproduction

Christian Churches in general (including the Roman Catholic Church) recognize the legitimacy of secular marriages. We discuss the theology behind this recognition in section 5.4, Marriage as a Sacrament

2.3. The Christian Institution

The changes in the Christian institution of marriage as the natural institution has evolved can be seen in the purposes of marriage numerated in the Book of Common Prayer:

1662 Book of Common Prayer:

- **1. First, [matrimony] as ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy name**
- **2. Second, it was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of the Christ’s body.**
- **3. Thirdly, it was ordained for the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity**

Modern Prayer Book (p. 423) lists:

- **1. “intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity;**
- **2. and, when it is God’s will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord”**

2.4. The Three Bonds of Marriage

The three Bonds in a Christian Marriage (from Macquarrie):

- **1. Moral Bond**
 - begins with the exchange of vows, as they declare their consent before the church
- **2. Natural Bond**
 - begins with the sexual consummation of the marriage
- **3. Sacramental Bond**
 - begins with the prayers said over them, commending their union to God and seeking divine grace for them

3. The Moral Bond of Marriage - Fidelity

The marriage vows:

- to live together in the covenant of marriage, to love, to comfort, to honor, to keep, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful as long as both shall live (from the Book of Common Prayer)
- to be sanctified (= set apart) as husband and wife (from Jewish services)

The solemnity of these vows is reflected in:

- The covenant between God and his people is frequently compared to the covenant between husband and wife in Scriptures
 - Hosea invokes images of Israel as an unfaithful wife to God
- The Second Commandment against idolatry and the Seventh Commandment against adultery are both second on their respective tablets, if you picture the Commandments given to Moses as writ on two side-by-side tablets, one listing the first five Commandments, the second the second five Commandments (See Arrangement and Order of the Commandments in the first session in the Commandments series)

“The solemn obligations undertaken by the marriage partners cannot fail to affect them in the very depths of their being. . .” (Macquarrie)

- our commitments define us and shape us. They are:
 - are both moral and ontological (ontological = involving the mystery of being / existence)
 - are essential to the attainment of full personhood

[Marriage vows] **"establish a relationship so profound that it can never cease to be of moral significance. For they bring into being a new unit, no longer you and I, but we -- and however much we fail to act out this unity, once each of us is committed together with the other to the intention of constituting such a unity, neither can ever be the same again, an entirely independent entity, free from all such ties."**

- John Lucas, Theology Vol. 78: 229, 1975

4. The Natural Bond of Marriage - Sex

[The Seventh Commandment] **"points to the recognition that sexuality is enormously wondrous and enormously dangerous. The wonder of sexuality is available in a community only if it is practiced respectfully and under discipline. The danger of sexuality is that it is capable to evoking desires that are destructive of persons and of communal relations. . . around the subject of freedom and discipline in sexuality we deal with the most intense and elemental mystery of human existence."**

- Walter Brueggemann

"At its best, sexual union is the most complete and intimate reciprocal self-giving of which two persons are capable, making them, in the biblical phrase, 'one flesh' (Gen. 2:24). It brings about a relation transcending in its closeness even blood-relationships."

- John Macquarrie

Sexual union in the context of daily companionship and sharing "profoundly and permanently affects the partners in their inward being." (Macquarrie). This psycho-physical sexual union adds a new bond to marriage that perhaps cannot be totally destroyed. It creates:

- a mutual belonging
- a new community

The Seventh Commandment declares God's creational intention which "links a positive role for sexuality with commitment and loyalty" (Fretheim)

Another part of the natural bond of marriage are the children that arise from the sexual union. They are the most visible example of the permanent effects of sexual union

5. The Sacramental Bond of Marriage

5.1. A Sacramental Universe

5.1.1. The Duality of Our Experience of Life

"Teach me, my God and King, in all things thee to see"

- George Herbert, Anglican poet

**"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round and plunk blackberries."**

- Elizabeth Barrett Browning

**"To me, the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."**

- William Wordsworth

"Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made."

- St. Paul, Romans 1:20 (NRSV)

Duality of Experience:

- we are embodied beings existing in a very material world
- we can feel intimations of beauty, mystery, meaning through this material world (a bush, a flower, a sunset. . .)

A "sacramental" view of the universe links the two pieces of this duality:

- the material world is good
- the material world can be "door to the sacred"

5.1.2. The Justification for the Sacramental View of the Universe

The justifications for the two parts of a sacramental view of the universe: that the material world is good, and that the material world can be a door to the sacred, are:

- The Material world is good:
 - created by God
 - in the Incarnation, God freely took on embodied existence, lived in space and time
- The Material world can be a door to the sacred:
 - God is both:
 - transcendent reality beyond the world he has made
 - immanent reality who dwells in this world and is active in it

5.2. Natural Sacraments

There are many “natural sacraments:” physical events, actions or rituals, that are “doors” to feelings, inner realities, meaning beyond the mechanics of the act or rite:

- touching, embracing another person
- making love
- sharing a meal together
- giving a gift
- gestures of hospitality and welcome

5.3. The Seven Sacraments of the Church

The Church has defined seven “sacramental” rites or rituals call the “Sacraments:”

There are two **Sacraments of the Gospel**:

- Baptism
- Holy Eucharist

There are five other Sacramental Rites that have evolved under guidance of the Holy Spirit:

- Confirmation
- Ordination
- Holy Matrimony
- Reconciliation of a Penitent (Confession)
- Unction (Anointing of the Sick)

Each of these Sacraments of the Church has:

- 1. an *outward or visible part* = “**matter**” and/or “**form**.”
 - the material object and/or physical action that is the “door” or “portal” to the sacred
 - Catechism: “the outward and visible signs”
- 2. an *inward spiritual reality* = “**res**”
 - heart of the sacrament
 - the action of God on the human spirit
 - Catechism: “the inward and spiritual grace”

5.4. Marriage as a Sacrament

The sacrament of marriage is unique among all the other sacraments in that the ministers of the sacrament are the couple themselves, not the priest. This is the theological reason why most mainstream Christian denominations including the Roman Catholic Church accept the validity of a marriage performed before a justice of the peace or the clergy of another faith.

The **res** (the *inward spiritual reality*) and the **matter** (the *outward or visible part*) of the Sacrament of marriage are:

- **res:**
 - the divine grace that blesses, aids the union
- **matter:**
 - the joining of hands at the ceremony
 - the exchange of rings
 - the act of sexual union that consummates the marriage

5.5. Sexuality in Marriage as a Natural Sacrament

Sexuality in marriage can be a “natural sacrament” - the visible, “material” expression of the inner reality of love between the partners.

Judaism does not include a formal sacramental theology, but does recognize the religious significance of this natural sacrament (recall that in Judaism, wherever two or more are gathered together to study Torah, there will be the Divine Presence, the *Shekhinah*)

“Marriage creates family, which is the locus for the preservation of Judaism and the Jewish people. In this setting, sexual intercourse is a religious act equivalent to prayer or Torah study, and the home becomes a holy place.”

- Rabbi Peter Knobel in **Broken Tablets**

6. Adultery as a Violation of the Bonds of Marriage

In a narrow sense: adultery is a violation of the bonds of marriage by having sexual intercourse outside of the marriage

In a broader sense: adultery is:

- any violation of the *moral bond*: our covenantal commitment to a mutuality that is life-giving, nurturing, enhancing, respectful
- any violation of the *natural bond*: a slap, a punch, a sneer, a shove; the withholding of physical affection, tenderness and care

7. The Family

Marriage is the founding of a new family:

- the fundamental unit of community in society
- the locus of safe human intimacy
- the means by which human race perpetuates itself
- first means by which our values are transmitted to future generations
 - in particular, “the knowledge and love of the Lord”

The Seventh Commandment seeks also to protect the integrity of the family

8. Divorce

8.1. Jesus' Statement on Divorce

“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

- Matthew 5:31-32 (NRSV)

It is important to keep in mind the context of Jesus' statement:

- in Jesus' day, a man could divorce his wife for nearly any reason, so long as he gave her the certificate (the requirement dating back to Moses). Women could not divorce at all.
- there was an ongoing debate between two Rabbinical schools of the time: Hillel school (more lenient) and Schammai school (extreme cases only)

Jesus' interpretation can be seen as offering protection for women, putting men and women on the same footing.

8.2. The Exception Clause

Jesus' statement on divorce contains the exception clause:

“except on the ground of unchastity”

There are two suggested meanings of the Greek *porneia* in this passage:

- incest
- adultery: suggesting divorce is allowed when the marriage is already broken.

8.3. The Complexity of the Ethics of Divorce

The issue of divorce is complex, for "adultery" and "divorce" are both *defined* in the context of marriage. This leads us back to the question we considered in the beginning of this session: what is a "marriage"?

- the "legal" institution,
- or:

- the genuine, ongoing relationship that includes an intact:
 - *moral bond* (fidelity, the covenantal, lifelong commitment to honoring, respecting, cherishing, nurturing each other)
 - *natural bond* (sharing the most intimate aspects of themselves as sexual beings only with each other as the ultimate expression of their love and fidelity)

It is God's creational intention that marriage be a genuine, ongoing relationship that mutually enhances the lives of both the man and the woman. Jesus clearly intends that such a relationship -- marriage -- be a lifelong union.

The Roman Catholic interpretation of Jesus' statement on divorce is that once two people are legally married, divorce is not allowed. The two may separate, but remarriage is not possible. (The only "out" is to have the marriage "annulled," a declaration that there never a marriage in the first place). However when the marriage relationship is clearly broken and there is no longer any possibility that it can mutually enhance the lives of the man and woman, this interpretation hardly seems to answer God's creational intention that marriage be a mutually enhancing, on-going, lifelong relationship.

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The Ten Commandments 8. You shall not steal

Last update Nov. 25, 2001

You shall not steal

Exodus 20:15 (RSV)

Topics

1. Introduction
2. At the Heart of the Commandment
3. Theft of Material Property
4. Non-material Thefts
5. The Victims of Theft
6. Restorative Justice and Restitution
7. Partners in Crime
8. Nature of Ownership
 - 8.1. The Ambiguities of Ownership in a World of Economic Disparity
 - 8.2. Wealth as a Resource for Human Needs
 - 8.3. Wealth as a Symptom of Economic Injustice

1. The 8th Commandment. Introduction

You shall not steal.

- Exodus 20:15 (NRSV)

The Hebrew verb *g-n-v* (steal):

- lacks an explicit object; the object can be a person or object.
- has the nuance of taking by stealth.
- Rabbinic tradition and some modern scholars suggest that kidnapping was the intended meaning (“You shall not steal a person”). The previous two commandments dealt with “capital” offenses, so this one logically should also.
- The majority of scholars say the lack of an object is intended, giving an expansive scope to the Commandment.

Brueggemann: “You shall not steal a person” not necessarily limiting. In ancient Israel:

- selfhood understood to “include the necessary ‘goods’ to make a life of dignity possible”
- (Fretheim): property understood “to be an extension of the ‘self’ of its owner, so that theft of property is a violation of person, not just a person’s wealth.”

2. At the Heart of the Commandment

God’s creational intention:

- “God dignifies human beings by giving them work to do, from which they can expect to receive some of the fruits of their labor. . .” (Fretheim)
 - Genesis 2:15-16: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; . . .”
- God gives many gifts to us for our enjoyment

Theft is the failure to accept this creational intention of God. It is the failure to accept:

- the fruits of the labors of Others.
- the gifts given Others by God.

A positive reading of the Commandment:

We should protect, honor, and celebrate:

- the fruits of the labors of Others
- the gifts given Others by God

3. Theft of Material Property

Examples:

- burglary
- shoplifting
- failing to return lost property
- not reporting all our income on an income tax form
- not returning excess money received from a malfunctioning ATM machine
- not paying for a missing item on a restaurant check
- failing to correct a bank error in our favor
- paying half price for a “child” ticket for a child just turned thirteen

Many such thefts can deceptively appear “victimless” because the theft is spread over a large number of individuals or a large organization.

More Examples:

- Failure to pay a just price for the labor or the fruits of the labor of Another:
- buying a food item that does not cover the costs of the farmer’s labor
- paying a laborer a wage insufficient for living in dignity
- If charity is an obligation (= distributing in our role as Stewards the resources which Others need), then:
 - failure to contribute generously to fight poverty, hunger, famine
 - failure to tithe to the Church

4. Non-material Thefts

Non-material thefts can include:

Theft of Creativity

- plagiarism
- failing to credit a felicitous turn of phrase or idea

Theft of Knowledge

- deliberately misleading someone
- flattering a person dishonestly

Theft of Opinion and Feelings

- deceiving another so they have an excessively high opinion of ourselves, or feel grateful to us when we are undeserving

Theft of Time

- keeping Another waiting by being late

Theft of Reputation

- gossiping, engaging in the “language of hurt”

Theft from Future Generations

- wasteful use of Natural Resources

5. The Victims of Theft

Those that we wrong and sin against in a theft are:

- the person we steal from
- God,
 - whose creational intention is that each person enjoy the fruits of their labors and the gifts God has given to them
 - who has established methods for the distribution of the divine bounty

6. Restorative Justice and Restitution

In Israel

- theft of property a “tort” -- injured party should be restored as much as possible to their original condition
- theft of a person (kidnapping) was punishable by death

The intention is that in most thefts, justice requires an attempt must be made to restore the victim as much as possible to his or her original situation.

The capital punishment for kidnapping reflects the extreme seriousness of theft of a person, and perhaps the recognition that full restoration of the victim to her or her original situation is often not possible.

7. Partners in Crime

We become “partners” in a theft if we enjoy the benefits of the theft. *Examples:*

- buy a stolen item
- advance in the company hierarchy after gossip we were not responsible for “steals” the reputation and hence chances for advancement of a rival
- live comfortably, our house, food, clothing, entertainment dependant on the labor of Others who are paid an unjust wage for their work

8. Nature of Ownership

8.1. The Ambiguities of Ownership in a World of Economic Disparity

Ownership:

- is not a natural right, but comes from the grace of God
- carries responsibilities to use our wealth as a resource for the needs of Others (Stewardship)

It is God's creational intention that:

- We and Others enjoy the fruits of our labors and the gifts God has given to us
- There should be no poverty. “There will, however, be no one in need among you.” (Deuteronomy 15:4 NRSV). All selves should have the material goods necessary for a life of dignity

The positive side of the Eighth Commandment calls us to protect and celebrate the fruits of the labors of Others and the gifts given them by God.

Yet the world is rank with poverty, hunger, with enormous disparity between the “haves” and “have-nots.” What does it mean?

Questions we must ask:

- Are we receiving more than what is justified by the “fruits of our labors”?
- Is our wealth based in part on theft from others (unjust wages, exploitation of the resources of other countries)?
- Are we doing our part to protect the fruits of the labor of Others, the gifts God has given to Others in the world?
- Are we good stewards, using our wealth as a resource for the needs of Others?

Themes on Wealth in the New Testament include (from Wheeler):

- Wealth as a resource of human needs
- Wealth as a symptom of economic injustice

8.2. Wealth as a Resource for Human Needs

Ownership carries concrete and wide-ranging responsibilities. Supporting scripture includes:

- Matthew 5:42: “Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.” (NRSV)
- Luke 6:30: “Give to everyone who begs from you, and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.” (NRSV)
- Luke 14:12-14
- Romans 12:20: “if your enemies are hungry feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink” (NRSV)

8.3. Wealth as a Symptom of Economic Injustice

There is a deep suspicion and concern in the New Testament that wealth in a world rampant with enormous disparities between the haves and the have-nots may be a sign that our wealth is culpable, the “fruit” of economic injustice.

If so, there are therefore two reasons why we should respond to the needs of Others:

- we are called to share those gifts that are rightfully ours.
- part of our wealth may be “stolen.” We must try to restore that which we have stolen or are partners in stealing.

Supporting scripture includes:

- James 5:1-6
- Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-26)
- Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46)

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The Ten Commandments 9. You shall not answer against your neighbor as a false witness

Last update Dec. 6, 2001

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor

Exodus 20: 16 (RSV)

Topics

1. The 9th Commandment. Introduction

- 1.1. Original Meaning of the Commandment
- 1.2. Old Testament Extension of the Commandment to Lying (Slander, Deceitfulness)
- 1.3. Jesus' Extension of the Commandment
- 1.4. At the Heart of the Commandment
- 1.5. Restating the Commandment

2. Lying and Deception

- 2.1. What Lies at the Heart of the Sin of "Lying"?
- 2.2. Is Withholding Truth Like Lying?
- 2.3. Slander and the "Evil Tongue"

3. Is Lying and Deception Ever Permissible?

- 3.1. Introduction
- 3.2. White Lies
- 3.3. Lies to protect Another from Serious Harm
- 3.4. Kant's Position. The Majority Position
- 3.5. Questions We Must Ask

4. Truth and Community

- 4.1. Truth Telling and a Healthy Judiciary
- 4.2. Public Truth and the Community

5. Promoting Truth

- 5.1. Promoting Truth in Our Personal Relationships, Families and Communities
- 5.2. The Need for a "Space Where Truth Can be Told"
- 5.3. Witnessing to the Truth of Christ. Evangelism

1. The 9th Commandment. Introduction

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

- Exodus 20:16 (NRSV)

You shall not testify against your neighbor as a lying witness.

- Exodus 20:16 (Brevard Childs)

1.1. Original Meaning of the Commandment

The commandment contains several technical legal terms, suggesting its original meaning was a warning against false accusation in a court of law (Childs):

- *ed saqer* (lying witness or false witness)
- *nh* (testify or answer)
- *rea* (neighbor = referred to full citizen within the covenant community)

Several measures protected the accused in ancient Israel:

- Witnesses to a crime testified before a court of elders.
- At least two witnesses were required for evidence to be valid (Num. 35:30, Deut. 17:6, 19:15).
- The witnesses had to start the execution in capital punishment cases (Deut. 13:10, 17:7, 19:16-20).
- Punishment for a lying witness was the punishment that would be given for the crime of the accused.

1.2. Old Testament Extension of the Commandment to Lying (Slander, Deceitfulness)

You shall not steal, you shall not deal falsely, and you shall not lie to one another
- Leviticus 19:11 (NRSV)

You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people. . . I am the LORD.
Leviticus 19:16. (NRSV)

Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant. . . they have acted deceitfully. . .
- Joshua 7:11 (NRSV)

There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out . . .
- Hosea 4:1-2 (NRSV)

1.3. Jesus' Extension of the Commandment

Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely. . .'
But I say to you, Do not swear at all. . .
Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one.
- from Matthew 5:33-37 (NRSV)

Swearing, oath-taking presume a tendency to lie. Jesus requires a truthfulness in his disciples that makes oaths unnecessary.

1.4. At the Heart of the Commandment

At the heart of the Commandment:

- an absolute commitment to Truth

1.5. Restating the Commandment

A "negative" reading of the Commandment. We must:

- not lie or deceive
- not be silent before falsehood

A "positive" reading of the Commandment. We must:

- be witnesses to the truth
- promote personal relationships, communities, societies where truth can be told

2. Lying and Deception

2.1. What Lies at the Heart of the Sin of "Lying"?

The dictionary definition of "**To Lie**": To say / write something untrue, with the intention to deceive.

The heart of the commandment is a *commitment to truth*. The sin of a "lie" is the *intention to deceive*, not the means of deception (voice, writing, facial expression and tone, or innuendo)

2.2. Is Withholding Truth Like Lying?

Questions:

Is it a "lie" to deliberately withhold truth to keep alive or nurture a possible *false impression* in the mind of others?

- Letting a misunderstanding that is false continue without trying to correct it
- Creating a false impression by "true" statements that have a double meaning. Example: during the Civil War, some underage (less than 16 years of age) youths eager to volunteer for the army would write the numeral "16" on a piece of paper and stand on it before the army recruiter, so they could tell him "I'm over sixteen" without technically "lying."

Is it a "lie" to deliberately withhold the truth, not for purposes of nurturing or keeping alive a false impression, but to impart an *incomplete or unbalanced understanding*?

- Is an "absence" of truth (a "vacuum" of truth) a kind of "falsehood?"
- Is an "incomplete" or "unbalanced" understanding a false understanding? Is the presentation of a "skewed" reality using partial truths the same as a lie?

2.3. Slander and the "Evil Tongue"

1. Slander - to make false charges or misrepresentations of Another to defame or damage their reputation

- *motzi shem ra* = drawing out a bad reputation

2. Jewish tradition describes the "evil tongue" (*lashon hara*) and "the dust of the evil tongue" (*avak lashon hara*), in which rather than make a false charge, we use a partial truth or an exaggerated truth to tear Another down

- gossip (*rechilus*) often involves the "evil tongue."

3. Is Lying and Deception Ever Permissible?

3.1. Introduction

How far must we take our commitment to truth?

Is lying / deception ever permissible?

Are there moral values that override our commitment to truth?

3.2. White Lies

White Lies (*devarim shevalev* = “words in the heart”). Statements understood to reflect a sentiment of the heart, not necessarily a pure, literal truth. Some examples:

- “What a beautiful baby”
- “Fine, thank you,” in response to “How are you?”
- “You don’t look a day over forty.”

We justify these “lies” because:

- as “words in the heart” the *intention* is not truly deception.
- it is *understood* by the listener not necessarily as a literal truth, but rather as an expression of a sentiment of affection or appreciation
- the *greater good* of keeping peace, of not harming Another’s feelings overrides the “minor lie”
- our *motivation* is not selfish interest, but concern for Another

The Talmud suggests that God tells white lies. It cites the story of God telling Abraham that Sarah would bear a son. Sarah, listening behind the tent entrance, “. . . laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?'" (Genesis 18:12 NRSV) God then said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?'" (Genesis 18:13 NRSV). God leaves out that Sarah had also said Abraham was old.

3.3. Lies to protect Another from Serious Harm

Example:

In WWII, lying to the Gestapo in order to protect the a Jewish family hiding in the attic.

3.4. Kant's Position. The Majority Position

Immanuel Kant’s position on lying:

- it is never permissible to lie. The duty to truthfulness is *unconditional*
- a lie:
 - harms society because “it vitiates the source of law”
 - harms the liar by destroying his/her dignity

Most moral theologians however would justify a lie when telling the truth would cause Another serious harm

3.5. Questions We Must Ask

Questions to ask if a lie is to be a permissible action:

- What is the *conflicting moral value* that justifies our lie? (for example, the life or feelings of Another). Does it override the duty to Truth?
- Is the *victim* of the lie or *deceived* harmed by it? Are there other unintended victims?
- What *motivates* our lie? (Concern to protect Another, or selfish interest?)
- What is the consequence to the “*fabric of trust*” in the community?

4. Truth and Community

4.1. Truth Telling and a Healthy Judiciary

“Viable human community depends on truth telling”

- Brueggemann

In the sense of the original, narrow meaning of the commandment:

- Truth in the courtroom is essential to a healthy judiciary system
- A healthy judiciary is essential to a viable community

The commandment is **“a recognition that community life is not possible unless there is an arena in which there is public confidence that social reality will be reliably described and reported.”**
(Brueggemann)

4.2. Public Truth and the Community

In the sense of the broader meaning of the commandment:

- members of a community should not distort or skew reality to each other.
- public truth must accurately portrait reality

Relevance in modern life:

- propaganda
- forms of “spin doctoring”
- advertising

5. Promoting Truth

5.1. Promoting Truth in Our Personal Relationships, Families and Communities

(from Timmerman)

Truthful living in our personal relationships, families and communities requires that we:

- choose our words with care so we don't distort things
- *listen*, lovingly and carefully, so we know what words to choose
- keep our word. Don't promise more than we can keep

5.2. The Need for a "Space Where Truth Can be Told"

(from Keenan)

We need to create a “space where truth can be told”

- in our personal relationships
- in our families
- in our communities
- in our culture

Our culture however does not invite truth-telling. It does not provide much space where truth can be told. The problems are:

- Intolerance and ridicule that inhibit honesty
- Litigiousness of our culture
 - failing to apologize because admission of fault invites legal prosecution
- The “tattered cloak of privacy”
 - we say we believe in a right to privacy for public officials, but insatiably lap up invasions of that privacy
- We have no credible leadership urging us to promote truth

“if we would . . . learn more about tolerance, human failure, the real possibility of broken promises. . . if we learned to allow others to speak, acknowledge, opine, or even, if necessary, confess and repent, we could become a society promoting truthfulness.”

- James F. Keenan, S.J.

5.3. Witnessing to the Truth of Christ. Evangelism

As Christian, we have a special call in promoting truth: evangelism

- “we follow truthful living by the way we represent Christ to others in our words and actions”
(Timmerman)

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The Ten Commandments 10. You shall not covet anything that is your neighbor's. Concluding Comments on the Commandments

last update Dec. 23, 2001

You shall not covet your neighbor's house;
you shall not covet your neighbor's wife,
or his manservant,
or his maidservant
or his ox, or his ass,
or anything that is your neighbor's

Exodus 20:17 (RSV)

Topics

The Tenth Commandment

1. The 10th Commandment. Introduction
 - 1.1. The Question Over the Meaning of *Hamad*, To Covet
 - 1.2. A Matter of the Heart
 - 1.3. Implications of the Commandment as a Matter of the Heart
2. Desire
 - 2.1. Misdirected Desire
 - 2.2. A Commandment About Our Deepest Desires
 - 2.3. Changing Our Hearts and Deepest Desires
3. Coveting and Consumerism

The Ten Commandments: Concluding Comments

4. Concluding Comments on the Commandments
 - 4.1. A Unique Revelation
 - 4.2. Position of the Commandments in Faith
 - 4.3. Two Truths That Stand Out in the Study of the Commandments
 - 4.3.1. Two Truths
 - 4.3.2. The Centrality of God
 - 4.3.3. The Rewards of Righteousness
 - 4.4. Jesus and the Commandments
 - 4.4.1. What is Necessary for Eternal Life?
 - 4.4.2. The Fulfillment of the Law
 - 4.4.3. Which Commandment is First of All?

References

1. The 10th Commandment. Introduction

You shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor
- Exodus 20:17 (NRSV)

1.1. The Question Over the Meaning of *Hamad*, To Covet

There is a controversy among biblical scholars over the intended meaning of Hebrew verb "covet" in this Commandment:

- verb is *hamad* (to covet, lust after)
- Does it mean a:
 - the combination of the feeling of desire plus the action to obtain the object of desire, or
 - just the feeling of desire for that which belongs to another?

1.2. A Matter of the Heart

Most commentators conclude that the intended meaning of "to covet" refers to an attitude of the heart and mind:

"the commandment is probably solely concerned with attitudes of the heart/mind that subtly or not so subtly lead to the misuse of that which is not one's own."

- Terrence Fretheim, Exodus, Interpretation Bible Commentary Series

The 10th Commandment thus differs from the previous commandments about sins against one's neighbor. It warns:

- not against an *action* (murder, stealing, adultery, lying testimony),
- but against a *state of the heart*, a *feeling*

The 10th Commandment ". . .relates to the spirit of the individual that forms the interior ground of the violation of the other commandments."

- Terrence Fretheim, Exodus, Interpretation Bible Commentary Series

It can thus be seen as an appropriate "culmination" of the Ten Commandment.

1.3. Implications of the Commandment as a Matter of the Heart

That the Tenth Commandment is a warning against a particular state of the heart, a feeling, implies:

- God wants us not just to be a people who does not murder, steal, commit adultery or lie, but in addition:
- God wants us to be a people *who are not tempted* to murder, steal, commit adultery or lie, a people *in whose heart* such acts are repulsive

"Obedience" to the Tenth Commandment cannot be a simple act of will, as the "state of our hearts" and the "duties of our heart" are not under our conscious control, or even always under our conscious purview.

" . . . it is easier to obey 'duties of the limbs,' those obligations and prohibitions that involve outward behavior, and which thus involve social approbation and disapprobation, than it is to fulfill the 'duties of the heart,' since 'only' God knows if we have fulfilled the latter, not our neighbors, or, often, not even ourselves."

- paraphrase by Rabbi Weiman-Kelman in **Broken Tablets** of Bahya ibn pakuda in his 11th century work **Duties of the Heart**

2. Desire

2.1. Misdirected Desire

The 10th commandment is not against desire. Human beings are driven by desire. The Commandment is specifically against a *desire for that which is not properly one's own*. This is:

- a misdirection of desire
- a desire destructive to community
- a desire destructive to the person who covets

“It is not forbidden to wish to have a house like my neighbor’s house or a car like his or even a woman just like his wife. What is forbidden, I think, is to want *his* car or *his* wife, *her* house or *her* husband -- to replace the other, not to replicate her. It is all right to want to have a big house. It is forbidden to want to live in someone else’s house or life. I am commanded to be me, not you or her. I am forbidden to covet *your* place, to wish to be *you*.”

- Rabbi Arnold Wolf, in **Broken Tablets**

“to covet is to deny our own life and our own being, which God cannot abide”

- Rabbi Rachel S. Mikva in **Broken Tablets**

2.2. A Commandment About Our Deepest Desires

(from Keenan)

Both Luther and Calvin commented that the 10th Commandment is about our “deepest desires”

Our “deepest desires” are:

- rarely expressible
- complex, wanting satisfaction in a variety of ways
- often discernable / felt in:
 - disappointments of expectations arising from them. Disappointments can be “windows” to our deepest desires
 - loss
 - the pleasure or happiness in seeing something that fits in with those desires

Our goal as Christians:

- our deepest desires should be grounded in a love of God and neighbor
- images and hope for the “kingdom of God” = a world where God rules and God’s will is done, should live in our deepest desires

“As Christians, we have a deeply abiding and viscerally felt image of the kingdom of God that we carry in our hearts.”

- Keenan

In the Tenth Commandment, **“we confront our own desire for a loving relationship with God. Will I covet the things of this world, and envy others the things I don’t have, or will I turn all my desire to the Lord?”**

- Timmerman

2.3. Changing Our Hearts and Deepest Desires

Changing our hearts and deepest desires is perhaps the work of lifetime. We must:

- learn an enduring, grateful satisfaction with our lot (the opposite of coveting)
- “discipline our hearts to accept what is ours and what cannot be ours (objects and abilities)” - Mikva
- have no “false idols.” We must turn both our minds and hearts to God. For this reason:
 - first and last Commandment are often described as “bookends” to the Commandments
 - violation of the Tenth Commandment comes out of a violation of the First Commandment.

To learn “an enduring, grateful satisfaction with our lot” involves knowledge of ourselves, which is also no simple task, a task that is also a work of a lifetime.

3. Coveting and Consumerism

(from Brueggemann)

We must recognize that we live in a culture and society that encourages a type of coveting called consumerism

“the propensity to covet in our society is enacted through an unbridled consumerism that believes the main activity of human life is to accumulate, use, and enjoy more and more of the available resources of the earth.”

- Brueggemann

This consumerism is based on an assumption of scarcity, which justifies accumulating all that one can.

“This commandment summons the faithful to break with the practice of acquisitive individualism and to reject the ideology of scarcity upon which it is based.”

- Brueggemann

The rejection of the coveting of consumerism, which is an “activity of untrusting restlessness,” links the Tenth Commandment with the Fourth Commandment on the Sabbath.

4. Concluding Comments on the Commandments

4.1. A Unique Revelation

(from Brueggemann)

The Decalogue (Exodus 20:1-17), the “Ten Words” or “Ten Utterances” of God is:

- the only direct address of commands from God to Israel
- thus a unique revelation

4.2. Position of the Commandments in Faith

Views of the relationship of the Commandments to faith:

- 1. Non-negotiable will of God. Absolute rules / laws of God
- 2. “mission statement” of the community of the faithful, providing a framework for specific actions
- 3. “instructions” for the “inculcation of an attitude of the mind / heart” (Fretheim)

4.3. Two Truths That Stand Out in the Study of the Commandments

4.3.1. Two Truths

Timmerman suggests two truths stand out in the study of the Commandments:

- The Centrality of God
- The Rewards of Righteousness

4.3.2. The Centrality of God

God is central to all the commandments:

- Commandments fundamentally relate to our relationship with God
- violation of any Commandment is an offense against God, an undoing of God's intention for creation
- God's passionate response when we mistreat our neighbor is seen in Exodus 22:21-27

4.3.3. The Rewards of Righteousness

A heart turned towards God through loving obedience to the Commandments will find peace:

“O that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your prosperity would have been like a river, and your success like the waves of the sea;”

- Isaiah 48:18 (NRSV)

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

- John 14:27 (NRSV)

4.4. Jesus and the Commandments

4.4.1. What is Necessary for Eternal Life?

Asked what is necessary for eternal life, Jesus cites some of commandments, but suggests a serious disciple can do more (Matt 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-30).

- Commandments are a “threshold to more serious discipleship and a step on the demanding way to ‘eternal life!’” (Brueggemann)

4.4.2. The Fulfillment of the Law

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter; not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

- Matthew 5:17-19 (NRSV)

4.4.3. Which Commandment is First of All?

When asked, "Which Commandment is the first of all?", Jesus answered,

“The first is, ‘Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’

The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

- Mark 12:28-31 (NRSV):

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