

The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments
Readings and Reflections from Scripture and John Calvin
T. M. Moore
A *Pastor to Pastor* Resource

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Introduction

Welcome to *The Ten Commandments*, 28 days of meditations based on John Calvin's sermons on the Ten Commandments and the Law of God.

The Law of God, we must admit, has fallen on hard times, and not only among those in the unbelieving world who prefer to be free of all restraints. Even in the Church the Law of God is looked upon with suspicion. Rarely is it taught; even more rarely is it obeyed, at least, not to the extent Christ obeyed it, and taught His followers (cf. Matt. 5:17-19).

The Law is of much use in the household of faith, and if we continue to neglect it, we will reap the harvest of lawlessness, which is withering of love (Matt. 24:12). Calvin can help us to gain a better understanding of why the Law matters and how we may make best use of it in the life of faith.

Incorporate these brief meditations into your daily devotions. Share them with your church leaders or other pastor friends. Let this great leader from our Christian past speak into your present, and listen as the Spirit of God leads you to fan into flame His calling on your life.

This series of our *Pastor to Pastor* resources departs from our normal practice by extending for six weeks rather than four. The readings are arranged for one per day followed by a series of Questions for Reflection or Discussion at the end of the week.

We're happy to provide these readings at no charge for you to use, personally and with your staff or church leaders. Please feel free to make copies for your leadership team or to forward the link or PDF to as many people as you like. If you find these meditations beneficial, we hope you'll consider making a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe to help support this and our many other outreaches to the Church.

We hope you will find this study helpful and encouraging as you continue the Lord's work in building His Church, His Body, His Bride.

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Week 1, Day 1

To Make Us Wise

“Therefore be careful to observe *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.’” Deuteronomy 4.6

Sermons on the Ten Commandments¹

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“For the law exists precisely to make us prudent. Then further it contains (as we have said) articles whose purpose is to unite us to our God. And *that* constitutes our happiness and glory. And then it shows us the rule for right living; for it is no longer a question of searching for what God approves, as we have both the statutes and ordinances. Therefore we well know and are all persuaded that our life will be pleasing to God when we do not exceed the limits which he has assigned to us.”

Would that preachers today were “all persuaded” that the Law of God is a true source of wisdom, piety, happiness, glory, and ethical purity for the people they serve! Paul insists that the Law is holy and righteous and good (Rom. 7.12), but to listen in on the preaching in our churches, we might get the impression that the Law is better left alone. Jesus said Kingdom greatness depends on learning, living, and teaching the Law of God (Matt. 5.17-19). Perhaps the declining power of the Church today is a result of our neglect of this most prudent and powerful body of divine revelation?

What is your approach to teaching the Law of God to the people in your care? Would you say that their lives reflect the prudence, joy, piety, and purity which the Law promises to provide?

Week 1, Day 2

To Know and to Do

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. James 1.22

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“...the law of God is not given solely for men to hear it that they might be aware of its contents; rather, it is given that we might be reformed and that God may approve of the subjection which we render him. In short, we see that the doctrine of God results in practice and that it is incumbent on us to demonstrate in reality that we have not been taught it without avail.”

Even the rankest unbelievers acknowledge the wisdom of God’s Law. Unless, that is, they would prefer to have the legal protections against robbery, murder, slander, and the like revoked. Where do people think these good laws come from? Evolution? Please! God’s Law provided the framework and foundation for English common law, which, in turn, informed colonial law in America. We are living in the fading echoes of the wisdom, happiness, and morality of God’s Law. But for how much longer?

How can we expect society to remain moral if those who have been entrusted with God’s Law do not teach and practice it?

¹All quotations from John Calvin, *Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, Benjamin W. Farley ed. and tr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980).

Week 1, Day 3

To Be Pleasing to God

...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure. Philippians 2.13

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“For this is the rule of our life: that we should not merely inquire about what he says to us, but that we should renounce our own desires and attachments, and we should ask for nothing except to please him and be governed by him and his justice. When we have done that, that will be a sufficient proof that God has attained the superiority which he merits. But until we come to that point, we shall never be able to profit from his teachings.”

Every believer wants to be pleasing to God. Pleasing God brings pleasure and fulfillment to us; this is why God is at work within us by His Spirit. He works to make us pleasing to Him. And we must work out our own salvation accordingly (Phil. 2.12). Surely this means we must be students of God’s holy and righteous and good Law. Meditating in God’s Law illuminates the path of righteousness (Ps. 1). The lamp of God’s Word – including His Law – is the light we need to find the way of life that pleases the Lord. He’s working to lead us there. Let us work in harmony with Him.

Do you think the people in your congregation are motivated in their Christian faith, above all else, by a desire to be pleasing to God? How can you encourage them in this?

Week 1, Day 4

God’s Word Forever

“The grass withers, the flower fades,
Because the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
Surely the people *are* grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever.” Isaiah 40.7, 8

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Moses wanted to emphasize that the law, far from being mortal, or given only for the lifetime of those who first heard it, was a doctrine which was meant to keep its vigor and authority forever...Therefore it is appropriate for you to observe his law, since it has been established to be permanent, to endure age after age, and to be preached until the end of the world.”

“I’m not under Law; I’m under grace!” Quite so. But only as far as salvation is concerned. No, the Law won’t save us. Jesus saves us. But He saves us for Himself, that we might know full and abundant life in Him, by walking the path He walked – the path of God’s commandments (1 Jn. 2.1-6). If we do not preach the Law of God we deprive His people of the very thing for which He has redeemed them, the ability to do the good works which He determined long ago are to characterize His children (Eph. 2.8-10). So until the end of the world comes, preachers and teachers must bring the Law of God to His people. Let us not be remiss in this high and holy calling.

Can you think of some ways the Law of God might be included in most, if not all your sermons?

Week 1, Day 5

To Define and Expose Sin

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.
Romans 3.20

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“We are so inclined toward vanity that it is a pity. It is hardly necessary for us to go to school in order to learn to be deceived, for in this respect each of us is rather a skilled teacher. Briefly, we always tend toward evil, even under the species of good, so that in place of serving God, there is nothing in us but corruption and idolatry.”

Ouch! Folks don't like to be reminded that we're all sinners. And as long as we're not preaching the Law of God to them, it's a pretty good bet they'll learn to be comfortable in their sins, especially since most of those sins will not be of a scandalous nature. But sin is sin, even the “inward” sins that “don't hurt anyone else.” We cannot get on with the full and abundant life we have in Jesus Christ if we insist on wallowing in our sins, be they ever so private and “harmless.” The Law of God defines sin and exposes it, so that Christ, by His Spirit, can lead us to confession, repentance, and sanctification.

Would your people say that you are faithful in helping them to understand the nature of sin and to confront sin in their own lives?

Week 1, Day 6

For Humility

“Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 18.4

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Now, then, we see why he authorizes his law: in order that we might receive it in all fear and humility. Nevertheless he wishes for us to accept it as friendly, in order that we might taste it and take pleasure in submitting ourselves to it and permit ourselves to be governed by it according to the doctrine which it contains.”

Greatness in the Kingdom of God is equated with humility. But how do we learn humility? Jesus also said that greatness in the Kingdom is assigned to those who learn, obey, and teach the Law of God (Matt. 5.17-19). Could it be that becoming steeped in God's Law produces humility in us? It must not be otherwise. As the Law reminds us how sinful we are, it also reminds us how great and merciful God is in having sent Jesus to fulfill the Law on our behalf. In the light of our need and God's provision, we can become humble – and great.

Do you think the people in your church aspire to be great in the Kingdom of God? Why or why not?

Week 1, Day 7

To Walk in His Sight

But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.¹ John 2.5, 6

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“And, finally, since he wishes to have and hold us in his house, let us walk as in his presence and in his sight, indeed, in such a way that we worship him as our only God, not solely in ceremonies, or in external affirmation, but in our heart, since we know his service is spiritual. In brief, let him possess our bodies and souls, in order that he might be glorified in all and by all.”

Jesus walked in the Law of God in exhaustive detail. He fulfilled it all, as He explained. If this is how Jesus walked, how can we not walk this way ourselves? We do not walk in the Law in order to *earn* His favor, but to *acknowledge* it. Walking in obedience is a work of thanksgiving and faith, which yields the fruit of righteousness, peace, and joy in our lives. When we preach and teach the Law we must hold out to God’s people (1) the reasonableness of walking as Jesus did and (2) the promise of blessing that issues from so doing.

In your own walk with the Lord, how do you experience the blessings that come from obeying the Law of God?

For reflection or discussion

1. To this point in your Christian life, what role has the Law of God played? How often do you consult it? For what purposes? What benefit have you seen from the Law in your life?
2. Meditate on Psalm 1. What benefits accrue to the person who walks in the Law of God? What is necessary for us in order to gain those benefits?
3. Meditate on Ephesians 2.8-10. What would be those good works, ordained from of old, for which we have been saved by grace through faith?
4. Meditate on Matthew 22.34-40. How does the Law relate to the prophets? The teaching of Jesus? And thus, the teaching of the entire New Testament and all of Scripture? Why has God given us the Law?
5. What are your goals for this series of meditations on the Ten Commandments and the Law of God? What do you hope to learn? How do you hope to grow?

Prayer:

Week 2, Day 1

Our Jealous God

Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”? James 4.5

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Now in particular he is called *a jealous God, and God of wrath*...For when he is called, *jealous*, without a doubt it simply means that he will not permit his honor to be violated. And if anyone should take away what properly belongs to him in order to confer it upon creatures, he most certainly will not be so patient as to tolerate such a sacrilege. And therefore though the honor of God, which is befitting to him, may no longer be precious to us, that does not mean that it must be equally disregarded by him. In the end we will see that it is not forgotten by him and that he wishes to maintain his glory as emphasized throughout holy Scripture.”

James seems to be dealing with the sentiment Calvin expresses in this passage. We may be negligent of our spiritual lives, and give ourselves to every kind of worldly passion and lust. But that does not mean God ceases to be jealous toward the spirit He has put in us. We are not our own! We belong to the Lord, and His desire is for intimacy with us. When we neglect that intimacy, we bring dishonor to His name. He will not hesitate at such times to discipline His errant children, so that His purposes of righteousness might be realized in us (Heb. 12.3-11).

How do you teach the people in your care about the Lord’s “jealousy” over their souls?

Week 2, Day 2

Loving God

“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him...?” Deuteronomy 10.12

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Moses wishing to give a summary of the law says: ‘What does your God ask of you Israel except that you love him with all you heart and adhere to him?’ We can never know, I say, what it is to observe the law of God and live by it unless we begin with this love. And why? Because God wants willing submission. He does not solely want us to worship him out of servile fear. Rather he wants us to come to him with a sincere and cheerful heart, so much so that we take pleasure in honoring him. And that cannot be done unless we love him.”

How do God’s people show that they love God? Moses says it is by walking in all His ways and keeping His statutes and commandments. John agrees (1 Jn. 5.1-3), and the Lord Jesus also said as much (Matt. 22.34-40). If we truly love God, we will want to please Him. Keeping His Law pleases Him, because it shows we understand and embrace His program of holiness, righteousness, goodness, justice, and love, and that we want nothing so much as to be transformed into the image of Jesus, the Supreme Law-keeper.

Is it possible for people truly to love God if they do not understand and obey His Law? Explain.

Week 2, Day 3

The Majesty of God

All Your works shall praise You, O Lord,
And Your saints shall bless You.
They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom,
And talk of Your power... Psalm 145.10, 11

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“All we have to do is contemplate heaven and earth and we shall see God everywhere. For what is earth if it isn’t a living image (as Saint Paul says) in which God is revealed. Although he is invisible in his essence, he is still revealed there that we might worship him. But when we turn to the Holy Scripture we find there an image by means of which God more particularly reveals himself to us than he does in the sky or in the earth. Neither the sun nor the moon, albeit they give clarity to the world, reveal the majesty of God as much as the law, the prophets, and the gospel.”

God reveals Himself in the Book of Scripture and in the Book of Creation. Jesus is the focal point and prism of all divine revelation. Thus, we should expect knowing Him to illuminate our ability to understand the revelation of God in both Books. And we should discover, as we read and study both books, more of the majesty, beauty, wisdom, might, and goodness of the Lord Jesus Christ. God’s people should be encouraged to delight in His Word and His works, so that they might draw closer to Him through Jesus by studying and delighting in each.

How do you teach your people to “contemplate heaven and earth” so that they might know and love the Lord better and “speak of the glory” of His Kingdom and power?

Week 2, Day 4

The Rule of God’s Spirit

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Galatians 5:16-18

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Because of his Holy Spirit we can renounce the world and even ourselves to the extent that our carnal affections no longer dominate us. And although we are full of rebellion, nevertheless the Spirit of God will rule over them and repress them and hold them in check.”

We are not “under the Law” as to salvation, as we have already observed. However, the Spirit God has given us works to transform us increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ in the classroom of the Law of God (2 Cor. 3:12-18; Ezek. 36:26, 27). If we neglect the Law, claiming we are no longer “under” it, then we quench the Spirit’s power to teach us how to love God and our neighbors. Neglecting the Law, we also make it difficult to understand the whole counsel of God in Scripture, of which the Law is the cornerstone. God’s Spirit can give us victory over our carnal affections, but He will only do so as we learn from Him the beauty and wisdom of God’s Law.

Meditate on Ezekiel 36:26, 27. What are the implications of this text for your own ministry of the Word?

Week 2, Day 5

Repairing the Divine Image

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3.18

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“What then is required now, seeing that this image has been effaced by sin, except that it be repaired? That is how we must take hold of our perfection: by conforming ourselves to our God and his will, by inquiring about his work to the end that we might do the same.”

Only in eternal glory will we be completely like our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 3.2). Yet, in anticipation of that day, we daily strive, by the Spirit and Word of God, to purify ourselves as Jesus is pure, that we might become more like Him (1 Jn. 3.3). How can we do this apart from the whole counsel of God, including His Law? Calvin insists we cannot, for the Law is the starting-point for learning to love God. And, as we grow in love for Him, we will desire the more to be like Him.

How do the shepherds of your church work to help church members grow in the Lord “from glory to glory”? Are you confident they are indeed growing?

Week 2, Day 6

Resting with and in the Lord

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that *you* may know that I *am* the LORD who sanctifies you.’” Exodus 31.12, 13

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“God...was not content to command men to rest, but he showed the way. For after having created the world and all that it contains, he rested, not because he had to, or was in need of rest, rather its purpose was to invite us to contemplate his works that we might concentrate on them and nevertheless conform ourselves to him. Do we therefore wish to keep the spiritual rest? Everything that is said about God desisting from his works also applies to us, for we must so conduct ourselves as to cease doing whatever seems good to us and what our nature craves.”

The desecration of the Lord’s Day continues unabated, and church people are willing participants in this subterfuge. We give the morning to the Lord and the rest of the day is ours, to do with as we please. How do we justify this? There is only one statute in all of God’s Law that begins with the phrase, “Above all...” and that is the commandment to guard and observe the Sabbath. What the seventh day was for ancient Israel, the first day has become for the Church, from the earliest days of the Christian movement. Can we risk forfeiting this day to the carnal affections of the age?

Suggest some creative, restful, enjoyable ways the members of your church might keep the Lord’s Day.

Week 2, Day 7

Focused on God?

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy... For *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth...”

“Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy... And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out...” Exodus 20.8, 11; Deuteronomy 5.12, 15

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“What is necessary then? That we should strive toward a higher end than this rest here; that we should desist from our works which are able to impede us from meditating on the works of God, from calling upon his name, and from exercising his Word. If we turn Sunday into a day for living it up, for our sport and pleasure, indeed how will God be honored in that? Is it not a mockery and even a profanation of his name?”

Well, apparently a good many Christians don't think so. But on what grounds? Perhaps if pastors taught more carefully how to keep the Lord's Day, so that real rest and spiritual refreshment could be gained, God's people would discover and delight in the rest He intends for them, more than in their personal pleasures and pastimes. “Remember” means “attend carefully to”; “Observe” is literally, “guard.” Why? Because God is our Creator and our Redeemer. Construct a matrix with the two activities on the top – remember and guard – and the two rationale down the side (creation and redemption). Then brainstorm ways of “resting” on the Lord's Day that will allow you to fulfill and enjoy all the promise of the fourth commandment.

Will you do this exercise?

For reflection or discussion

1. Review the first four of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20.1-11 and Deuteronomy 5.1-15). Why does the Law of God begin with such a firm focus on God and our relationship to Him?
2. God intends that, by keeping His Law, we will grow I love for Him. Review the first four commandments. What kinds of actions, expressing love for God, are suggested by the verbs used in giving these commandments?
3. What does it mean to be restored to the image of God? How does the Law help with that? What is the Spirit's role in enabling us to grow “from glory to glory” into the image of Christ?
4. Can we expect to grow in love for God or the image of Jesus Christ if we neglect reading, studying, and meditating on the Law of God? Why not?
5. In what ways do you find your attitude toward the Law of God beginning to change?

Prayer:

Week 3, Day 1

A Work of God's Spirit

"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them." Ezekiel 36.27

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

"Thus from our perspective the law may well be impossible to do, but it is possible for God to engrave it upon our hearts and to govern us by his Holy Spirit, indeed, so much so that it will seem like a gentle and light burden to us, involving no hardship which we cannot bear."

Learning and obeying God's Law is the path to greatness in God's Kingdom (Matt. 5.17-19). All believers should aspire to this. The Holy Spirit brings the Law as a "core curriculum" for Kingdom living. But if we never show up in the classroom where He is teaching the Law, what good will His presence there do us? The psalmist extolled the virtue of daily and ongoing meditation in the Law of God (Ps. 1). Let us strive to emulate that high calling.

What would you suggest as a workable regimen for reading and meditating in God's Law?

Week 3, Day 2

Two Principal Articles

Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." Matthew 22.37-40

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

"For there are two principal articles in the law of God: the one concerns what we owe him; the other what we owe our neighbors with whom we live. Everything that concerns our life is grounded here."

"Everything that concerns our life..." Can the Law of God possibly be that comprehensive and important? Calvin thought so. So did the prophets, and the Lord Jesus. And the Apostles. If we attend diligently to learning and obeying God's Law, our lives will be increasingly rich in love for Him and for our neighbors. And love is the mark of the true believer (Jn. 13.35).

Can the people you serve expect to grow in love for God and neighbor apart from the Law of God?

Week 3, Day 3

Self? Or God?

But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. Romans 6.17, 18

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Now this counsel must always serve us as a goad to induce us to follow what God commands us. For the primary thing which prevents us from regulating and submitting our life in obedience to God is the conviction that being slaves to ourselves is more to our advantage.”

Talk about hubris! We prefer to serve ourselves, to be slaves to our finite and puny minds, our fickle affections, and our sometimes questionable consciences, rather than to submit to the holiness and righteousness and goodness and wisdom of God, which He reveals to us in His Law and all His Word. Are we insane? No pastor can be thought to be fulfilling his charge who allows his people to be slaves to themselves rather than to God. For only slavery to God through Jesus Christ and His Law can set us free to really live (Jn. 8.32).

What evidence do you see to help you know whether the people you serve are slaves to themselves or to the Lord?

Week 3, Day 4

If Only...

Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul... 1 Peter 2.11

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Now if we could only be persuaded just once that God watches over us and that he foresees all our necessities, certainly we would not be so mired in our earthly concerns, we would not be led astray from serving him, we would not be prevented from meditating on the spiritual life, so much that we would pass through this world and make use of created things as if not to use them at all, because we would know that it is forever necessary to hold to more than this.”

I used to teach time management seminars for business people. One exercise I gave them was to keep track of their time in 30-minute blocks for a week, writing down a summary of all they do. Then, at the end of the week, tally up the total amount of wasted time and talk with the Lord about it. Invariably, the exercise would be greeted with scorn: “We don’t waste time! We’re business people!” “Humor me,” I would say. Equally invariably, these friends would discover, not minutes, but hours of time frittered away in meaningless trivia and mere self-indulgence. How easy it is for us to give in to our fleshly passions. If only we knew God’s Law and loved Him more...

Is there wasted time in your schedule? How do you know? What can you do to improve your time for the Lord and His Kingdom?

Week 3, Day 5

To Train Us for Purity

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. 2 Corinthians 7.1

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Therefore let us carefully note that our Lord wills to train his people in complete purity to the extent that those who profess to be Christian may not only abstain from evil, but insofar as possible, my equally refuse to tolerate it at all.”

Bringing “perfecting holiness in the fear of God” is the calling of every believer. The Law of God is holy. The Holy Spirit teaches the Law of God. We will not make progress in holiness except according to the teaching of God’s Law. As a pastor, you will not equip your people for this high calling apart from teaching the Law and helping your flock to be grounded in it. Let us strive to help all our people be able to exclaim with the psalmist, “Oh, how I love Your Law! /It is my meditation all the day!” (Ps. 119.97)

What will it take for you to be able to pray that prayer with the psalmist? How can you best help your people to that end?

Week 3, Day 6

Restoring Respect and Civility

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” Ephesians 6.1-3

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“God not only wants to be worshiped in his majesty, but when we are obedient to those who rule over us, in brief, he tests our obedience by this means. Therefore, insofar as fathers and mothers, magistrates and all who exercise authority, are lieutenants of God and represent him, certainly if we despise and reject them, it’s as much as if we should declare that we don’t want to obey God.”

The plague of incivility which has settled on our society has its source in failing to respect those who have authority over us, and beyond that, failing to love God. Parents, teachers, pastors, seniors, magistrates – all these are invested with dignity and authority by God and deserve respect – if not always emulation – simply because of their place in the social structure. Civility and respect begin in the home and church, where parents and church leaders work to help children learn to desire the promise of the fifth commandment and to pursue it through everyday acts of deference, respect, and civility.

Why do you think we have allowed the practice of deference, respect, and civility to fall on hard times? How can the Church begin to restore these virtues?

Week 3, Day 7

God First and Always

But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men. Acts 5.29

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“...the authority that belongs to men should in no way obscure God’s glory. Therefore let us carefully mark that when we are commanded to be obedient to our superiors, the exception remains that nonetheless this [commandment] must not detract from any of those prerogatives which belong to God, which have already been treated in the first table.”

Are pastors free to preach the whole counsel of God? To equip their people for every good work? Right now certain pastors are testing the limits of what government will enforce. Can they preach political messages? Messages that deal with “alternative lifestyles” – without being branded as purveyors of “hate speech”? The apostles would not accede to the demands of local authorities that they desist from preaching Jesus. We’re free to preach Jesus, for now; but if we give in on any of our freedom to preach all the counsel of God in Scripture, we may ultimately find ourselves being instructed to cease talking about the Lord as well.

Do you feel under constraint – whether by civil authorities or members of your congregation – to stay away from certain topics in your preaching? Is this a good thing?

For reflection or discussion

1. What should we teach children about honoring their parents? Their teachers? Civil authorities?
2. How are children ultimately the biggest losers when we fail to instruct them fully in the doctrines of the fifth commandment?
3. Part of honoring civil magistrates is fulfilling our duties as “we the people” (in the US). What kinds of citizenship responsibilities does the fifth commandment require of believers?
4. Can people truly honor those deserving of honor if they do not first honor God? Explain.
5. Should the Ten Commandments be included in a basic discipleship curriculum? Why or why not?

Prayer:

Week 4, Day 1

Humility and Obedience

He has shown you, O man, what *is* good;
And what does the LORD require of you
But to do justly,
To love mercy,
And to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6.8

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Now because the main point cannot be totally resolved here, in summary we retain [the argument] that in order to serve God well, we have to subdue all pride and presumption in ourselves. [For] although by nature we possess this wretched tendency to want to elevate ourselves – for ambition dominates the great and the small – nevertheless, in order for us to prepare to worship God, it is essential that such ambition be overcome. And why? Because the point at which we must begin true obedience is humility.”

Humility begins in recognizing our need of God to help us in the way of righteousness – not just to teach us His Law, but to empower and enable us by His Spirit, so that Jesus Himself lives out His righteousness in us. If we ever think that we, by keeping God’s Law, can attain to some measure of righteousness, we have missed the starting-point of humility and shall have to go back to the beginning and plead with the Lord for humility. He will grant it.

What are some of the keys to teaching the people of God to “walk humbly” with their God?

Week 4, Day 2

Submitting to Men and God

“You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD.” Leviticus 19.32

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“And although children may obey their fathers and mothers, and people obey their magistrates, and in each home we find the order which God approves, along with its various [social] grades, may this motivate us [still] higher, to the end that we grasp that God, who possesses the world’s highest sovereignty, must preside over every creature and in brief over our entire life. Thus in this way we see that all obedience that is rendered to mortal creatures ought to tend toward this goal, that God is purely worshiped.”

When Pope Gregory’s missionary to the Celtic Christians, Augustine, failed to stand when they entered his presence, it told them he did not honor the Lord. If he would not honor them according to God’s Law, and show proper deference to the elected elders of God’s churches, then he must not honor God. The Celtic Church remained outside the Roman fold for almost another 100 years. The deference and submission we show to our fellow human beings ultimately reveals the nature of our submission to God.

Is your church making any effort to restore some of the civility which, while grounded in God’s Law, is being lost in our day? How?

Week 4, Day 3

To Rule Our Heart

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”
Deuteronomy 6.5

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Now do we abstain from all wrong? Have we ever caused our fellowmen any offense? We have to come to the heart [of it]. For God did not merely provide a civil law in order to make us live honestly, but he provided a law in conformity with his nature. We know that he is Spirit and wills for us to worship him in spirit and truth. That being the case, it is crucial for us to realize that he has not only ordered our hands and our feet, but also our affections and thoughts.”

Obedience that brings true blessing begins within. If we do not love God and His Law, we will not learn it, much less obey it. If we do love Him and His Law, with all our heart, mind, and strength, then nothing will be able to keep us from living out the requirements of His Law in humble obedience. The pastor’s job is so to proclaim the greatness and beauty and wonder of our God as to entice the people to desire Him. For when they truly desire Him, then they will willingly take up the study of and obedience to His Word.

In what specific ways of late have you helped the people of God to gain a clearer vision of His greatness and beauty?

Week 4, Day 4

Two Sides of the Coin

“So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.” Luke 10.36, 37

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Nevertheless, it is still necessary for us to go further than that. For it is not enough for men to abstain from doing evil, for they are created for the purpose of helping each other and of supporting each other. Therefore God, in forbidding us to murder, shows us the opposite, that we must hold our neighbor’s life dear, that we must go to the trouble of both maintaining and preserving it as long as we possibly can.”

The priest and Levite in Jesus’ parable could have argued a case for their actions by saying they were not responsible for the beaten man’s plight and certainly did nothing to add to it. But the Law of God is not mere letters to which we must conform. It is lively and spiritual, and, under the tutelage of the Spirit, they who truly learn the Law learn to love like the Good Samaritan. The letter of the Law sets up the premise and principle for humble obedience. Only the Spirit can teach the true meaning of the law and empower us to be willing and able to obey it (Ezek. 36.26, 27; Phil. 2.13). The Commandments are a coin with two sides, telling us what we must not do, and engaging us with God’s Spirit to discover what love requires. We are truly learning the Law when we learn it from both sides of the coin.

What would be an example of your teaching the Spirit, rather than the letter, of the Law to your congregation?

Week 4, Day 5

On Murder and Anger

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.” Matthew 5.21, 22

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“God does not want us to be lazy in the world. He did not simply create us to abstain from evil. Rocks and trees and other unconscious things achieve that quite well. Rather it is crucial for men to give and apply themselves to accomplishing good. Therefore let us understand that when our Lord wills for the life of our fellowmen to be precious and dear in our sight, he shows that, as far as he is concerned, each time we fail to help our neighbor in need, we kill him. For we are not only murderers when we harbor ill will and secretly hate our neighbors, but even when we do not help them in their need and do not attempt to engage ourselves in their behalf when they need our help, we are guilty before God.”

Jesus showed the true Spirit of God’s Law. He intends His Law to move us to become employed in good works of love (Eph. 2.10). Thus, even as the Law forbids certain actions, it requires others, as the many civil laws illustrating the Ten Commandments make clear. But murder in our hearts can prevent us from showing our neighbors the kind of love and care the Gospel requires. We must keep a close watch on our hearts, therefore, for from it flow all the issues of life (Prov. 4:23).

How can we teach the people of God to be zealous for good works apart from teaching the Commandments of God? What might work for you regularly to incorporate teaching from God’s Law into your preaching and teaching?

Week 4, Day 6

All Lascivious Intentions

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Matthew 5.27, 28

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Men are satisfied when they cannot perceive their faults, but God who fathoms our hearts sees the truth, as Jeremiah explains. He not merely wanted to restrain our bodies in his law, but above all he considered our souls. Consequently, let us note that God has not simply forbidden the act that would in effect violate marriage or break it, but he has forbidden all lascivious and wicked intentions. And that is why our Lord Jesus Christ says that when a man looks upon another man’s wife with lust, he is an adulterer in God’s eyes.”

In our day of widespread sensuality and easy-access pornography, such instruction seems quaint. That’s precisely the problem. The Lord’s attempts to guard His people from the ravages of sexual license are not quaint; they are quintessentially important to the preservation of all things good and decent and true. We compromise everything about our faith whenever we give in to the temptations of lust. That man who does not have a strategy for resisting the devil at this point is headed for a shipwrecked faith when the sirens of sensuality lure him onto the rocks of sexual ruin.

What is your strategy for discipling the men in your church to resist the sexual temper of the times?

Week 4, Day 7

That Four-letter Word

You who love the LORD, hate evil! Psalm 97.10

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“But in order to grasp clearly the will of God, let us note that, in the same way he earlier explained murder and adultery, he now uses this word *thief* in order to make us regard with hate all fraud, graft, and any kind of wrong that we know we could do against our neighbors.”

What would be the evidence that someone “hated” evil? How would you expect to see that in their lives? We don’t tend to think of “hate” as a positive affection, but the Lord has given us the ability to hate in order to help keep us in the path of righteousness and on the course of love. It’s not that we should not ever hate. Rather, we must learn *what* to hate and then *practice* hate for everything the Lord hates. The Law of God is of enormous help in this regard for all who make use of it.

Is it possible to hate sin without first recognizing it? Is it possible to recognize sin without learning the Law of God?

For reflection or discussion

1. Review the fifth, sixth, and seventh commandments (Exodus 20.12-14, Deuteronomy 5.16-18). How many different ways do these commandments teach us to love our neighbors?
2. How do these commandments teach us to hate sin?
3. What does it mean to love from the heart? How can practicing love *outwardly* help us actually to improve love in our hearts?
4. In what ways can you see that our society is off the path indicated by the fifth, sixth, and seventh commandment. Does this matter to God? What recourse is available to us to coax our society back onto the right path?
5. How is your attitude or appreciation of the Law of God being affected by these meditations?

Prayer:

Week 5, Day 1

Refrain, and Do

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:21

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Thus, let us understand that if we intend to obey our God, it is essential for us to maintain the honor of our neighbors as much as we can. For since he has forbidden [us] to mar the reputation of anyone, in the opposite sense he equally wills for us to endeavor to protect the honor of everyone. For it is not enough to refrain ourselves from doing evil without at the same time also procuring good.”

Calvin repeatedly emphasizes the twofold intention of the Law: by it we understand and refrain from evil, and by it we do what is good. The Law thus alerts us to sin, that we may abhor it; and it guides us in the paths of righteousness, that we may be true followers of Jesus Christ, loving God and our neighbors (1 Jn. 2:1-6). The Law is, like all the Word of God, a two-edged sword.

How might you approach meditating in God's Law (Ps. 1) so as to gain this “double benefit” of each of His commandments?

Week 5, Day 2

To Correct and to Support

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. Ephesians 4:29

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Let us carefully note, then, that the Holy Spirit wants us to engage neither in flattery, nor lying, nor promoting our neighbors' vices, rather he wants us to strive to correct their vices as much as we possibly can and, at the same time, to support them without discouraging those who have erred.”

The Law not only forbids lying; it counsels us to use our tongues for the purposes of truth. Listen to the conversations that go on around you during the day. How much of real edification and support do you hear? How much is just trivial, matter-of-fact, or simply mindless? Our words have power to communicate the grace of God! But we must use our tongues according to God's Word and train them to obey His Law. We'll have to think and pray about this beforehand, if we really want to edify others and stimulate them to love and good works (Heb. 10:24).

What opportunities does your church provide for the people of God to exercise their tongues in praising the Lord and edifying their neighbors?

Week 5, Day 3

Fear not to Offend

Then one of the lawyers answered and said to Him, “Teacher, by saying these things You reproach us also.” And He said, “Woe to you also, lawyers!” Luke 11.45, 46

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“...all that we have thus far shown under the guise of covering sins implies that we must not tolerate flatteries or lies. Equally, we must not call ‘black’ ‘white’ under the pretext that we are forbidden to offend anyone. And this is readily observed. For there are a number who would especially like to see nothing condemned and who would even approve of disguising the language. [For example], a thief should be called by another title and crimes should not be condemned under their proper names.”

Wait a second: I thought Calvin lived in the 16th century! His teaching sounds eerily relevant to our own day, when “tolerance” is the watchword of many and offending others by our right use of speech is simply not the thing to do. But truth must be told, and always in love. We cannot fulfill the teaching of Scripture concerning the right use of our tongues if we fail to indict evil and promote what is good.

Is it wrong for you to preach in such a way as to give offense to those who hear you? Explain.

Week 5, Day 4

A Higher Principle

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2 Corinthians 3.5, 6

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Now if we want to observe what this text contains, we need to consider a higher principle, that is to consider why God created our tongues, and why he gave us speech, the reason being that we might be able to communicate with each other. Now what is the purpose of human communication if it isn’t our mutual support and charity? Consequently, then, it is essential for us to learn to bridle our tongues to the extent that the union which God commands us may constantly be nurtured as much as possible.”

The Law of God is designed to give life and to lead us in the way of love for God and neighbors (Lev. 18.1-5; Matt. 22.34-40). We must always keep this “higher principle” in mind when we are seeking to understand and practice the Law. In our day – in this age of grace and the Spirit of God – the way we understand certain aspects of the Law will reflect our determination to make room for grace and love to do their work (cf. 1 Cor. 5 and Paul’s application of excommunication in a place where the Law requires capital punishment). The higher principle of the Law is to bring out the fruit of the Spirit in us, the first of which is love (Ezek. 36.26, 27; Gal. 5.22, 23). We must always preach and practice God’s Law with this higher principle in mind.

Go through each of the Ten Commandments and see how many positive exhortations to love you can derive from them.

Week 5, Day 5

Purge and Binge

But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4.20-24

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Now let us apply what we have discussed to our use and benefit. In the first place, then, let us realize that in order to serve God well, it isn’t simply a matter of our desiring to do good and to derive profit from it, rather we have to purge ourselves of all wicked affections and all corrupt thoughts to the extent that everything within us directs us toward the goal of fully surrendering ourselves to God.”

The Christian life consists in purging ourselves of everything that is wicked and contrary to the holiness of God, and binging on the Word of God so that we might be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. The Law of God lays a foundation for discovering our sins and directing us toward the righteousness of Jesus. But only the Spirit can convict and cleanse us of sin and teach and enable us to walk in the ways of the Lord. All our growth in the Lord is His work, not ours. Our work is to seek Him; His is to bear fruit in us.

How do you experience this work of “binge and purge” in your own walk with the Lord?

Week 5, Day 6

He Tears Us Down to Build Us Up

“Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.
See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms,
To root out and to pull down,
To destroy and to throw down,
To build and to plant.” Jeremiah 1.9, 10

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Consequently whenever the law of God confounds us, not only because our lusts are without number, but [equally because] we are buried under them as if covered by vast mountains, if God seems to deal with us harshly, let us realize that God does not intend to leave us in despair, but as quickly as we are struck down, he helps us up. When he sees our frailty, he extends us his hand and calls us to himself, and wants us to be comforted, insofar as by his loving kindness our sins are not counted against us.”

Pastors are called, like the prophet, to tear down and to build up. We know that experience in our own lives, as God exposes, confronts, and cleanses us of sins. We must not fear to bring this ministry to those entrusted to our care. Where tearing down is necessary, God’s Word is up to the task. But let us be careful to tear down and build in the same exertions – whether in preaching, teaching, disciple-making, counseling, or everyday conversation. We are called to build Christ’s Church, after all, even though sometimes the wrecking ball of truth must precede the mortar of love.

What are some things that remain to be “torn down” in your church? What will you seek to build in their place?

Week 5, Day 7

To Profit from God's Word

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. James 1.21

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Moreover, what should be done if we want God to help us profit in his Word? Let us be humble and meek, for it is not in vain that he has promised to instruct the humble. Therefore let us not confide in our own strength, coming [before him] with presumption and pride, believing [ourselves] to be sufficiently capable of passing judgment on what is said to us, but rather let us ask God to open our eyes and to extend us his hand, and let us acknowledge that we do not possess the dexterity to benefit in his school unless he makes it possible.”

All true learning is from the Lord, according to His Word and by His Spirit. As we come to His Word, whether to read and mediate or to preach and instruct, we must do so in utter dependence upon Him, relying not on our wits or skills, but on His indwelling and transforming power. We are but earthen vessels, frail and foolish. His Word is alive and powerful; His Word is Spirit and life (Heb. 4.12; Jn. 6.63).

How would you counsel a new believer to practice humility and meekness in coming to the Word, whether to read or to hear it?

For reflection or discussion

1. Review the Ten Commandments as given in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Have you begun to see the Law of God in anything of a different light as a result of these meditations? Explain.
2. The Law of God addresses the heart but most often speaks of outward behaviors. What is the relationship between the heart and the life when it comes to following Christ (cf. Prov. 4.23)? Do believers grow primarily inside-out or outside-in? Explain.
3. Calvin emphasizes the “higher principle” of interpreting the Law of God. What does he mean by this, and how should we apply this when making use of the Commandments?
4. What difference does it make in interpreting God's Law that we now live, unlike ancient Israel, in the age of the Spirit and grace?
5. In ancient Israel the Law was entrusted to judges – not just one judge – who met together in the gates of the city to consider how the Law applied to particular situations (cf. Ruth 4). Why is it important that interpreting and applying God's Law be the work of a judges and not just one person? How should this apply to a Christian community in our day?

Prayer:

Week 6, Day 1

Day and Night

Blessed *is* the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight *is* in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night. Psalm 1.1, 2

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“[Now] by this we are admonished that it is insufficient to give one day’s attention to what our Lord willed to be published in his name, rather our meditation must continue on it. Consequently, let each one [of us] so engage our life, both morning and evening, that we might not cease to call to mind what our Lord reveals and explains to us. For were we to employ our entire life to this end, it would be all we could do to complete half our journey.”

The Scriptures clearly commend meditating on the Law of God on a regular basis. This applies not only to the Law, of course, but to all of God’s Word. But, beginning with the Law, each of us must discover some means of taking the Word to heart and embedding it in our minds, so that it will have the highest value and priority in our souls. Then our words and ways will fall into line with the will of God much more readily and consistently.

How do you practice the discipline of meditating on God’s Law? Does this satisfy what the Scriptures require?

Week 6, Day 2

Engraved on Our Hearts

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*.” Ezekiel 36.26, 27

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Now it is nevertheless truth that the law of God would still not render a marked service if it were only engraved on stone, but it is imperative for it to be engraved upon our hearts...In the same way then God wrote his law on two stones with his finger, that is with his miraculous power, he must today write on our hardened hearts of stone by means of his Holy Spirit. For [this is what] the prophet teaches...”

God is holding school in our souls. He has sent His Spirit to instruct us. The Spirit has brought the curriculum – the statutes and rules of God, together with all the rest of His Word. The bell has rung, and we should be in our seats, facing forward – all the time. A disciple is, first of all, a “learner.” And what God wants us to learn begins with His Law, expands through the prophets and writings, focuses in Jesus Christ as explained by the Apostles, and is given to change our lives for His glory.

What counsel would you give to a new believer, or to new people joining your church, concerning how they must participate in the “Lord’s school” in their souls?

Week 6, Day 3

Work, and Be Worked On

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure. Philippians 2.12, 13

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“When we have learned that the law’s righteousness is too high for us and that for our part we are so debilitated that it’s a pity, then we shall learn to groan before God and readily apprehend that we are under compulsion to do what he ordains. Yet we shall [need] to ask him for strength, for him to help us through his Holy Spirit, and not simply for him to make up for our frailty, but for him to begin and perfect everything in us, for him to grant us both the will and strength and even constancy, and then add the power to achieve what we long for.”

Sanctification is God’s work in us, at which we must work daily if we are to realize the fruit of the Spirit and the full and abundant life in Christ. God brings forth the fruit, as His Spirit teaches us His Word and transforms us by His glory. But we must apply ourselves in the direction of His teaching, taking the steps of obedience, in every area of our lives, that will find the members of our souls and bodies bending toward the inward work of God’s Spirit. And yet even that must be God’s work in us; therefore, brethren, let us pray and groan for the Lord to sanctify us wholly.

How would you explain sanctification – God’s work and ours – to a new believer? How would you counsel him to begin taking up his part in this work?

Week 6, Day 4

Subject to God?

“Therefore you shall be careful to do as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.” Deuteronomy 5.32

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Once again our Lord reveals here that he does not intend for his law simply to be honored by men’s mouths (a means by which we love to acquit ourselves), rather he shows that he has published his law in order to hold us under his subjection and in his service and wants his law preached even today. For that is the means by which he wills to prove whether he will rule over us, as over a peaceful people who are subject to him.”

Calvin actually seems to have believed that Christianity was about *us* serving *God* rather than *God* doing for *us*. Huh? Could it be we’ve got it wrong? And would this help to explain why contemporary Christians seem to have little inclination to study or practice the Law of God? By His Law God intends to subdue and subject us to His wisdom and love. We don’t much cotton to that kind of talk. We prefer, in effect, to subdue and subject God to meet our needs and make us happy. We’ll never know true happiness, lasting fulfillment, or eternal life in Christ as long as this is our view of the Christian faith. How shall we begin to remedy this misunderstanding? Be believing that God “wants his law preached even today.”

How can you tell when someone has begun to hold to a wrong understanding of the Christian faith?

Week 6, Day 5

Ready to Walk?

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments...But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. 1 John 2.3, 5, 6

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“What’s at issue then? Let each [person] prepare himself to walk in my commandments, to think on them with all his effort. May you be diligent to that [end], filled with zeal and vigor, on the lookout lest you be turned aside. May you be that attentive.”

Paul wrote that believers have been saved *by grace, through faith, unto* good works (Eph. 2.8-10). The life of redemption is borne out in good works. But which good works? Those which God “before ordained that we should walk in them.” Which are those? Well, the most complete list of good works, ordained by God prior to the days of the Apostle Paul, is to be found in the Law of God. Jesus said learning, obeying, and teaching those commandments is the way to Kingdom greatness (Matt. 5.17-19). John said it’s the way of discipleship.

Can a person “work out” his salvation and “abide” in Jesus apart from the Law of God? What are the implications of this for your own work of disciple-making?

Week 6, Day 6

Stay the Course

I thought about my ways,
And turned my feet to Your testimonies.
I made haste, and did not delay
To keep Your commandments. Psalm 119.59, 60

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Therefore let us be on guard lest we take the right hand road and be turned from the path which God shows us. And why? [Because] the right hand road symbolizes our ambition to be wise, and above all righteous, and our supposing that it is good to do more than the commandments limit us to do. For when we do so, we become the devil’s servants, for God disclaims anything we might add to his Word: he repudiates such lies.”

When the Law of God is, through study and meditation, being engraved on our hearts and embedded in our minds, we will be sensitive to whenever we might begin to stray from the path it marks out. By listening to the Spirit, throughout the day (Ps. 139.23, 24), we may expect to know when we are turning away from God’s Word or going beyond what it prescribes. What is called for then is confession of sin, repentance from it, and seeking out the path of God once again. Without this discipline in place, no Christian can expect to grow in his experience of the transforming grace of God.

In what ways do you include teaching about confession and repentance in your ministry?

Week 6, Day 7

Hearts Surrendered to God

I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes
Forever, to the very end. Psalm 119.112

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Moses explains that, first of all, in order to serve God properly, our hearts must be surrendered to him, as it is insufficient to suppose that an external appearance can contain all the virtues which can be conceive; rather affection must precede [everything else].”

If we cannot say with the psalmist, “Oh how I love your law!” (Ps. 119.97), we will never take up the practice of meditating in or obeying the Law of God. Surrendering our hearts to God is a daily discipline – indeed, hour by hour. So many are the temptations that seek to lure our hearts away from loving God, that, unless we are continuously vigilant and determined to follow the Lord, we can quickly fall into one form of idolatry or another. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...” This is first.

How does this happen? How does a person grow in love for the Lord and Law, from the heart?

For reflection or discussion

1. How has your view of the Ten Commandments and the Law of God changed as a result of these meditations?
2. Have you begun making meditation on the Law of God a more daily practice? Are you seeing any fruit from this?
3. What place should the Law of God have in the work of disciple-making?
4. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from these meditations?
5. How are you working to incorporate that lesson into your daily walk with and work for the Lord?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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