

The Ten Commandments

And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God...

1

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

2

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

3

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

4

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

5

Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Part Two ~~~~~ A. W. Pink

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8. The Sixth Commandment

“Thou shalt not kill” (Exod. 20:13). In the first five Commandments we have seen how God safeguarded His own glory; in the second five we are to behold how He provides for the security and well-being of men. First, for the protection of man’s person; second, for the sanctity and good of his family: “thou shalt not commit adultery;” third, for the safety of his estate and substance: “thou shalt not steal;” fourth, for his reputation or good name: “thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.” Finally, as a strong fence about the whole Law, God not only prohibits outward crimes, but inward motions of evil in our thoughts and affections: “thou shalt not covet.” It is the first of these regulations which specially relates to our neighbour that we shall now consider: “thou shalt not kill.”

This Sixth Commandment prohibits that barbarous and inhuman sin of murder, which is the firstborn of the Devil, who was “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). It is the first crime we read of after the fall of Adam and Eve, wherein the corruption transmitted to their descendants was fearfully displayed by Cain: his rancour and enmity goading him to slay Abel, because his brother’s “works were righteous and his own evil” (1 John 3:12). But this Commandment is not restricted to forbidding the actual crime of murder, it prohibits all the degrees and causes of it: as rash anger and hatred, slanders and revenge, whatever may prejudice the safety of our neighbour or tempt us to see him perish when it is in our power to relieve and rescue him.

Let us begin by pointing out that every killing of a man is not murder. It is not so in the execution of justice, when the magistrate sentences a slayer, for he is vested with lawful authority to put capital offenders to death, and if he fails to do so then God will charge it upon him as his sin. “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” (Gen. 9:6) states the general and unchanging principle. “Thine eye shall not pity, but life shall go for life” (Deut. 19:21), is God’s order to the magistrate. Nor is the shedding of blood in a righteous war chargeable with murder. It is lawful to take up arms against an invader and to recover what has been unjustly taken away: thus David pursued the Amalekites who had carried away his wives captive. So, too, for the punishing of some great injury or wrong: David made war upon the Ammonites for their outraging of his ambassadors (2 Sam. 10).

As there are some who decry this assertion and denounce all war as unlawful in this Christian dispensation, let us point out: when soldiers came to Christ’s forerunner for instruction saying “What shall we do?” (Luke 3:14), he did not say, Fight no more, abandon your calling, but gave them directions how they should conduct themselves. When the Centurion came to the Saviour and drew arguments from his military calling, our Lord did not condemn his profession or rebuke him for holding such an office: instead, He highly commended his faith (Luke 7:8, 9). When examined by Pilate, Christ declared, “My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36). Those words clearly imply that though carnal means were improper for advancing Christ’s spiritual kingdom, yet had not His state of humiliation prevented His assuming the royal sceptre, His followers might lawfully have fought to defend His title.

There is one other exception, namely, accidental slaying, which is not chargeable with murder: when life is taken without any intention of so doing. Such a case we find mentioned in Scripture, as when hewing wood the axe should slip and undesignedly kill a neighbour (Deut. 19:5). For such innocent slayers the Lord appointed cities of refuge, where they could find safe asylum from

the avenger of blood. But let it be pointed out that we must be employed about lawful things, otherwise if we are engaged in what is unjustified and it leads to the death of another, this cannot be excused from murder (see Exod. 21:22-24).

Next we consider cases of murder. Suicide is *self-murder*, and is one of the most desperate crimes which can be committed. Inasmuch as this sin precludes repentance on the part of its perpetrator, it is beyond forgiveness. Such creatures are so abandoned by God as to have no concern for their eternal salvation, seeing they pass into the immediate presence of their judge with their hands covered in their own blood. Such are self-murderers, for they destroy not only their bodies but their souls, too. The murdering *of another* is a most heinous crime. It torments the conscience of its perpetrator with fearful affrights, so that often he gives himself up to justice. Those who are *accessory* are guilty of murder: as those who counsel it to be done (2 Sam. 12:9), or consent thereto (as Pilate), or conceal it (as in Deut. 21:6, 7, by clear implication).

This Commandment not only forbids the perpetration of murder, but likewise all causes and occasions leading to it. The principal of these are envy and anger. Envy has been well described as “the rust of a cankered soul, a foul vice which turns the happiness of others into our own misery.” Cain first enviously repined at the success of his brother’s sacrifice, and this quickly prompted him to murder. So, too, unjust and inordinate anger, if it be allowed to lie festering in the heart, will turn into the venom of an implacable hatred. Such anger is not only a cause, but it is actually a degree of murder, as is clear from the teaching of Christ in Matthew 5:21, 22.

It should be pointed out that anger is not, as envy, simply and in itself, unlawful. There is a virtuous anger, which so far from being sin, is a noble and praise-worthy grace: see Mark 3:5. To be moved with indignation for the cause of God when His glory is degraded, His name dishonoured, His sanctuary polluted, His people vilified, is a holy anger. So there is an innocent and allowable anger when we are unjustly provoked by offenses against ourselves, but here we need to be much on our guard that we “sin not” (Eph. 4:26). A vicious and sinful anger, which darkens the understanding and

makes one act as in a frenzy, is one which is without cause and without bounds. Jonah 4:1 gives an illustration of a groundless anger. Immoderate anger is when it is violent and excessive, or when it continues to boil: “let not the sun go down on your wrath” (Eph. 4:26)—if it does, the scum of malice will be on your heart next morning!

In closing, let us give some rules for restraining and repressing anger. 1. Labour and pray for a meek and humble spirit. Think lowly of yourself and you will not be angered if others slight you. All contention proceeds from pride (Prov. 13:10). The more you despise yourself the easier it will be to bear the contempt of your fellows. 2. Think often of the infinite patience and forbearance of God. How many affronts does He bear with from us? How often do we give Him occasion to be angry with us, yet, “He hath not dealt with us after our sins”—let this great example be ours. 3. Beware of prejudice against any, for it is sure to misinterpret their actions. Fight against the first risings of envy and anger: when injured, put it down to ignorance or as unintentional. 4. Shun angry persons (Prov. 22:24, 25): fire quickly spreads.

9. The Seventh Commandment

“Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exod. 20:14). The virtues of purity are the basis of the domestic relations, and as the family is the foundation of human society, the class of duties here involved are second only to those which preserve man’s existence. Hence it is that immediately following the Commandment which declares the sacredness of human life, there is that which is a hedge about the highest relationship of creaturehood—safeguarding the holy function of the procreation of life. Nothing is more essential for the social order than that the relationship upon which all others are subsequently based should be jealously protected against every form of attack. The Commandment is a simple, unqualified, irrevocable, negative: “thou shalt not.” No argument is used, no reason is given, because none is required. This sin is so destructive and damning that it is in itself sufficient cause for the stern forbidding.

This Commandment plainly intimates that God claims *the body* as

well as the soul for His service. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof . . . if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom. 6:12; 8:13). “The body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body . . . Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid . . . glorify God in your body, and in your spirit” (1 Cor. 6:13, 15, 20). For a Christian this foul sin is sacrilege: “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you!” (1 Cor. 6:19). If Christ was indignant when He saw the house of God turned into a den of thieves, how much more heinous in His sight must be that wickedness which debases the temple of the Holy Spirit into a filthy sty!

“Thou shalt not commit adultery.” This prohibition is designed to guard the sanctity of the home, for strictly speaking “adultery” is a crime which none but a *married* person can commit—“fornication” being the name of it when done by one who is single. As the One with whom we have to do is ineffably pure and holy, He requires us to depart from all uncleanness. This Commandment respects more especially the government of the affections and passions, the keeping of our minds and bodies in such a chaste frame that nothing impure or immodest may defile us. It requires the proper discipline of those inclinations which God has implanted in order to the increase of the human species. Therefore are we to avoid everything that may be an occasion of this sin, using all proper means and methods to prevent all temptations thereto.

How *God* regards sins of uncleanness has been made clear by many passages in His Word. This sin, even on the part of an unmarried man, is called “great wickedness against God” (Gen. 39:9): then how much more inexcusable and intolerable is it on the part of a married person! The temporal punishment meted out to it under the civil law of Israel was no less than death—the same that was meted out to murder. Job calls it “a heinous crime, a fire that consumeth to destruction” (31:11, 12). Much of this wickedness is

practiced in secret, but though its perpetrators may escape the judgment of man, they shall not escape the judgment of Heaven for it is written “whoremongers and adulterers God shall judge” (Heb. 13:4) “Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9, 10).

“The sin of adultery is scarcely less enormous than that of murder. The latter destroys man’s temporal existence, the former destroys all that makes existence a boon. Were all to take the license of the adulterer, men would, in due time, be reduced to the degradation of wild beasts” (R. L. Dabney). To prevent this sin, God has instituted the ordinance of marriage: “to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband” (1 Cor. 7:2). The sin of adultery is therefore the violation of the marriage covenant and vow, and so adds perjury to infidelity. Immorality is a sin against the body: 1 Corinthians 6:18. God’s displeasure against this sin is seen in the fact He has so ordered it that nature itself visits the same with heavy penalties in every part of man’s complex being: “Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption” (Gal. 6:7, 8).

Though marriage be the Divinely appointed remedy for the sin of sexual uncleanness, that does not grant man the license to make a beast of himself. “Let it not be supposed by married persons that all things are lawful to them. Every man should observe sobriety towards his wife, and every wife, reciprocally, towards her husband; conducting themselves in such a manner as to do nothing unbecoming the decorum and temperance of marriage. For thus ought marriage contracted in the Lord to be regulated by moderation and modesty, and not to break out into the vilest lasciviousness. Such sensuality has been stigmatized by Ambrose with a severe but not unmerited censure, when he calls those who in their conjugal intercourse have no regard to modesty, the adulterers of their own wives” (Calvin).

Let no man flatter himself with the idea that he cannot be charged with unchastity because he has abstained from the actual deed while his heart is a cesspool of defiling imaginations and desires. Because

God's Law is "spiritual" (Rom. 7:14) it not only forbids the gross outward acts of filthiness, but it prohibits and condemns unchastity of heart as well—all unlawful imaginations and contemplations. As there is such a thing as heart murder, so there is *heart adultery*, and he who commits speculative uncleanness and prostitutes his thoughts and imaginations to the impure embraces of lust is guilty of transgressing this Commandment. "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). Therefore we find the Apostle did not content himself with saying that it is better for a man to marry than pollute himself with a harlot, but "it is better to marry than to *burn*" (1 Cor. 7:9)—harbour consuming passion.

Although the sin of "adultery" is alone specifically mentioned in this precept, the rule, by which these Commandments are to be interpreted obliges us to understand that all other kinds of uncleanness are prohibited under that of this one gross sin. Everything that defiles the body is here forbidden: adultery is expressly mentioned because all other moral pollutions tend thereto. By the wickedness of that which all men know to be wrong, we are exhorted to abominate *every* unlawful passion. As all manner of chastity in our thoughts, speeches and actions is enjoined by the perfect rule of God, so whatever is in the least contrary and prejudicial to spotless chastity and modesty is here prohibited. *Every other sexual union save that of marriage is accursed in God's sight.*

This Commandment forbids all degrees or approaches to the sin prohibited, as looking in order to lust. Its force is, You shall in no way injure your neighbour's chastity or tempt to uncleanness. It requires that we abstain from immodest apparel, indelicate speech, intemperance in food and drink which excites the passions, everything which has any tendency to induce unchastity in ourselves or others. Let young people especially fix it in mind that all unclean conduct *before* marriage on the part of man or woman is a wrong done *against* the marriage to be. Though this commandment be expressed in the form of a negative prohibition, yet positively it enjoins all the opposite duties, such as cleanliness of the body, filling the mind with holy objects, setting our affection

on things above, spending our time in profitable occupations.

Rules and Helps for avoiding such sins: (1.) Cultivate a habitual sense of the Divine presence, realizing that, “The eyes of the LORD are in *every* place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3). (2.) Keep a strict watch over the senses: these are the avenues which instead of letting in pleasant streams to refresh, only too often let in mud and mire to pollute the soul. Make a covenant with the eyes (Job 31:1). Stop the ears against all filthy conversation. Read nothing which defiles. Watch your thoughts, and labour to promptly expel evil ones. (3.) Practice sobriety and temperance (1 Cor. 9:27). They who indulge in gluttony and drunkenness generally find their excess froth and foam turn into lust. (4.) Exercise yourself in honest and lawful employment: idleness proves as fatal to many as intemperance to others. Avoid the company of the wicked. (5.) Be much in earnest prayer, begging God to cleanse your heart (Psa. 119:36).

“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” (James 4:4). This refers to the sin of *spiritual adultery*: it is love of the world estranging the heart from God, carnal lusts enticing the soul and drawing it away from Him. There is more than enough in God Himself to satisfy, but there is still that in the believer which desires to find his happiness in the creature. There are *degrees* of this sin, as of the natural: as there may be physical adultery in thought and longing which terminates not in the overt act, so the Christian may secretly hanker after the world though he become not an utter worldling. We must check such inclinations when our hearts are unduly drawn forth to material comforts and contentment. God is a jealous God, and nothing provokes Him more than that we should prefer base things before Himself, or give unto others that affection or esteem which belongs alone to Him. Leave not your “first love” (Rev. 2:4), nor forsake Him to whom you are “espoused” (2 Cor. 11:2).

10. The Eight Commandment

“Thou shalt not steal” (Exod. 20:15). The root from which theft proceeds is *discontent* with the portion God has allotted, and therefrom a coveting of what He has withheld from us and bestowed

upon others. With his usual accuracy Calvin hit the nail on the head when he pointed out, “This law is ordained for our hearts as much as for our hands, in order that men may study both to protect the property and to promote the interests of others.” Like the preceding one, this precept also respects the government of our affections, by the setting of due bounds to our desires after worldly things, that they may not exceed what the good providence of God has appointed us. Hence the suitability of that prayer, “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny Thee, and say Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 30:8, 9).

“Thou shalt not steal.” The positive duty here enjoined is: you shall by all proper means preserve and further both your own and your neighbour’s estate. This Commandment requires proper diligence and industry so as to secure a competence for ourselves and families, that we may not through our own default expose ourselves and them to those straits which are the consequence of sloth and neglect. Thus we are to “Provide things honest in the sight of all men” (Rom. 12:17). But more: this Commandment is the law of love with respect to our neighbour’s estate. It requires honesty and uprightness in our dealings one with another, being founded upon that first practical principle of all human converse: “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Matt. 7:12). Thus this Commandment places a sacred enclosure around property which none can lawfully enter without the proprietor’s consent.

The solemn and striking fact deserves pointing out that the first sin committed by the human species consisted of *theft*: when Eve took of (stole) the forbidden fruit. So, too, the first recorded sin against Israel after they entered the land of Canaan was that of theft: when Achan stole from among the spoils (Josh. 7:21). In like manner, the first sin which defiled the primitive Christian church was theft: when Ananias and Sapphira “kept back part of the price” (Acts 5:2). How often this is the first sin committed outwardly by children! and therefore this Divine precept should be taught them from earliest infancy. Years ago we visited a home and

our hostess related how she had that day secretly observed her daughter (about four years old) enter a room in which was a large bunch of grapes. The little tot eyed them longingly, went up to the table and then said, “Get thee hence Satan, It is written thou shalt not steal,” and rushed out of the room.

“Thou shalt not steal.” The highest form of this sin is where it is committed against *God*, which is sacrilege. Of old He charged Israel with this crime: “Will a man rob God? yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation” (Mal. 3:8, 9). But there are other ways in which this wickedness may be committed besides that of refusing to financially support the maintenance of God’s cause on earth. God is robbed when we withhold from Him the glory which is His due, and we are spiritual thieves when we arrogate to ourselves the honour and praise which belong alone unto Him. Arminians are great offenders here, by ascribing to free will what is produced by free grace. “Ye have not chosen Me,” said Christ, “but I have chosen you” (John 15:16). “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us” (1 John 4:10).

Another way in which we rob God is by an unfaithful discharge of our stewardship. That which God has entrusted to us may be just as really outraged by our mismanagement as if we interfered with another’s trust or plundered our neighbour’s goods. This Commandment then requires from us that we administer our worldly estate, be it large or small, with such industry as to provide for ourselves and those dependent upon us. Idleness is a species of theft: it is playing the part of the drone and compelling the rest of the hive to support us. So prodigality is also a form of theft: extravagance and wastefulness being a spending of that substance which God has given unto us, in “riotous living.” He who remains in secular employment which requires him to work on the Lord’s Day is robbing God of the time which ought to be devoted to His worship. Ere passing on it should be pointed out that one who obtrudes himself into the Gospel ministry without being called of God, so as to obtain an easy and comfortable living, is “a thief and a robber” (John 10:1).

God has appointed that men should earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, and with that portion which we thus honestly obtain, we must be satisfied. But some are slothful and refuse to labour, while others are covetous and crave a larger portion, and hence many are led to resort to the use of force or fraud in order to gain possession of that to which they have no right. Theft, in general, is an unjust taking or keeping for ourselves what is lawfully another's. He is a thief who withholds what ought to be in his neighbour's possession as much as he who takes from him his property. Hence this Commandment is grossly violated both by capital and labour. If in the past the poor have been wronged by inadequate wages—the scales have now turned in the opposite direction, by employees often demanding a wage which industry cannot afford to pay them. If on the one hand it is right that a fair day's work should receive a fair day's pay, it holds equally good that a fair day's pay is entitled to a fair day's work—but where loafing prevails it does not receive it.

“Thou shalt not steal.” Lying advertisements are a breach of this Commandment. Tradesmen are guilty when they adulterate or misrepresent their goods, and also when they deliberately give short weight or short change to their customers. Profiteering is another form of theft: “that no man go *beyond* and defraud his brother” (1 Thess. 4:6). The contracting of debts to support luxury and vanity is theft, as also is the failure to pay debts incurred in procuring necessities. A man is a thief in the sight of God who transfers property to his wife just before he becomes bankrupt, and so also is any bankrupt who later on prospers financially and then fails to pay his creditors to the full. That man or woman is a thief who borrows and returns not. This Commandment is broken by tenants who heedlessly damage the property and furniture of the owner. Evasion in paying taxes is another form of theft: Christ has set us a better example (Matt. 17:24). Gambling is still another form of theft, for by it men obtain money for which they have done no honest work.

There is an old saying—“Whatever is gotten over the Devil's back goes under the Devil's belly.” Certain it is that God sends a curse upon what is obtained by force or fraud: it is put into a bag with holes and under Providence soon wastes away. God, by His

righteous judgment, often makes one sin the punisher of another and what is gained by theft is lost by intemperance and a shortened life. Therefore it is written, “the robbery of the wicked shall destroy them” (Prov. 21:7). And again—“As the partridge sitteth on eggs and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool” (Jer. 17:11). Many times God raises up those who deal with them as they have dealt with others. The fearful increase of this crime in modern society is due to failure to impose adequate punishment. If the reader be conscious of having wronged others in the past, it is not sufficient to confess this sin unto God: at least a twofold restitution must be made (Luke 19:8 and compare with 2 Sam. 12:6)—if the owner be dead, then to his descendants, if he has none, then to some public charity.

Here are a few suggested helps and aids to the avoidance of the sins prohibited and to the performance of those duties inculcated by this Eighth Commandment. 1. Engage in honest labour, or if a person of means, in some honourable calling, seeking to promote the public good: it is idle people who are most tempted to mischief. 2. Strive against the spirit of selfishness by seeking the welfare of others. 3. Counter the lust of covetousness by giving liberally to those in need. 4. If your Saviour was crucified between two thieves that the gift of salvation might be yours, bring no reproach upon His name by any act of dishonesty. 5. Cultivate the grace of contentment. In order thereto, consider frequently the vanity of all things temporal, practice submission to Divine providence, meditate much on the Divine promises (such as Heb. 13:5, 6), be temperate in all things, set your affection on things above, remind yourself daily of the earthly lot of Christ.

11. The Ninth Commandment

“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour” (Exod. 20:16). Take these words simply at their face value and they prohibit only the horrible crime of perjury or the giving of false testimony in a court of law, but as with the previous Commandments, so here: much more is implied and inculcated than is specifically stated. As we have so often pointed out, each of the

Ten Commandments enunciates a general principle, and not only are all other sins forbidden which are allied to the one named and prohibited, together with all causes and tendencies thereto, but the opposite virtue is definitely required, with all that fosters and promotes it. Thus in its wider meaning this Ninth Commandment reprehends any word of ours which would injure the reputation of our neighbour, be it uttered in public or in private. This should scarcely need any arguing, for if we restrict this Commandment to its literal terms it would have no bearing on any save that small minority who are called upon to bear witness in a court of justice.

In its widest application this Commandment has to do with the regulation of our *speech*, which is one of the distinguishing and ennobling faculties that God has bestowed upon man. Scripture tells us that “death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Prov. 18:21), that “a wholesome tongue is a tree of life” (Prov. 15:4), and that an unbridled one is “an unruly evil and full of deadly poison” (James 3:8). That our words are not to be uttered lightly or thoughtlessly is made clear by that unspeakably solemn utterance of our Lord’s, “But I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matt. 12:36, 37). O how we need to pray, “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (Psa. 141:3). The duties concerning our tongues may be summed up in two words: our speech must always be true and spoken in love (Eph. 4:15). Thus, as the Eighth Commandment provides for the security of our neighbour’s property, so this one is designed to preserve his good name by our speaking the truth about him in love.

Negatively this Ninth Commandment forbids all false and injurious speeches respecting our neighbour: positively it inculcates the conservation of *truth*. “The end of this Precept is that because God, who is Truth itself, execrates a lie, we ought to preserve the truth without the least disguise” (Calvin). Veracity is the strict observance of truth in all our communications. The importance and necessity of this appears from the fact that almost all that mankind knows is derived from communications. The value of those statements which we accept from others depends entirely on their

verity and accuracy: if they are false, they are worthless, misleading, evil. Veracity is not only a virtue, but it is the root of all other virtues and the foundation of all right character; and therefore in Scripture, “truth,” is often synonymous with “righteousness.” The godly man is “he that speaketh truth in his heart” (Psa. 15:2). The man that “doeth truth” (John 3:21) has discharged his duty. It is by the Truth the Holy Spirit sanctifies the soul (John 17:17).

The positive form of this Ninth Commandment is found in “speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour” (Zech. 8:16): thus the first sin prohibited therein is that of *lying*. Now a lie, properly speaking, consists of three elements or ingredients: speaking what is not true, deliberately doing so, and doing so with an intent to deceive. Every falsehood is not a lie: we may be misinformed or deceived and sincerely think we are stating facts, and consequently have no design of imposing on others. On the other hand, we may speak that which is true and yet lie in so doing: as when we report what is true yet believe it to be false and utter it with an intention to deceive; or when we report the figurative words of another and pretend he meant them literally, as was the case with those who bore false witness against Christ (Matt. 26:60). The worst form of lying (between men) is when we maliciously invent a falsehood for the purpose of damaging the reputation of our neighbour, which is what is more especially in view in the terms of the Ninth Commandment.

How vile and abominable this sin is appears from the following considerations. It is a sin which makes a person most like the Devil. The Devil is a spirit, and therefore gross carnal sins correspond not unto his nature. His sins are more refined and intellectual, such as pride and malice, deception and falsehood. “He is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44), and the more malice enters into the composition of any lie, the more nearly it resembles him. It is therefore a sin most contrary to the nature and character of God, for He is “the LORD God of truth” (Psa. 31:5), and therefore we are told, “lying lips are an abomination unto the LORD” (Prov. 12:22). As Satan is a liar and the father of lies, and as God is the Lord God of Truth, so His children resemble Him therein: “seeing they are My people, children that will not lie” (Isa. 63:8). God has threatened a most fearful punishment upon them: “all liars shall have their part in

the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone” (Rev. 21:8).

Alas, to what fearful heights has this sin risen. It has become so common that few indeed have any conscience thereon, until we have to lament, “truth is fallen in the street” (Isa. 59:14). First, truth departed from the pulpits. A whole century has passed since the lie of evolution captivated the scientific world and then was taken up by thousands of unregenerate preachers—a lie which strikes at the very foundations of Truth, for it repudiates man’s Fall, and sets aside his need both of redemption and regeneration. For the same length of time the so-called “higher criticism” of German neologians has been peddled throughout the English-speaking world by thousands of godless ministers who wished to be looked up to as men of superior intellectuality. Once Truth departed from the pulpits it was not long before it departed from the halls of legislation and the marts of commerce, until we now live in a world where confidence between nations is nonexistent and where the word of our fellows is no longer to be relied upon.

How deeply important it is, then, that a sacred regard for the truth should be constantly pressed upon the young and that they should be taught that lying is the inlet of all vice and corruption. Equally important is it that those who have charge of the young, particularly their parents, should set before the little ones a personal example of what they teach, and not neutralize the same by making promises to them which they fail to fulfil or utter threats which they never carry out. It is the part of wisdom and prudence that each of us should be very slow in making an unconditional promise, but once it is made it must be kept at all costs, unless the keeping of it compels us to sin against God. The prohibition of bearing false witness against my neighbour equally forbids me to bear false witness about myself, which is done when I pose as being holier than I am or when I pretend to be more humble or more anything else than is actually the case.

It remains for us to point out that we may violate this Ninth Commandment even when we speak the truth, if we speak it unnecessarily and from improper motives. “We injure the character of our neighbour when we retail his real faults without any call to divulge them, when we relate them to those who have no right to

know them, and when we tell them not to promote any good end but to make him lose his estimation in society . . . Nay, we transgress this precept when we do not speak at all, for by holding our peace when something injurious is said of another we tacitly give our assent by concealing what we know to the contrary” (John Dick). Flattering a person is another form of violating this precept: to compliment another merely for the sake of pleasing him or gratifying his vanity is to perjure your soul and imperil his safety. So also to give a false testimony of character or to recommend a friend to another when we know him to be unworthy of the testimonial is to bear “false witness.”

The following directions, through the grace of God, may be helpful in preserving from these common sins. 1. Be not swayed by party spirit if you would be kept from slandering others. The spirit of sectarianism begets prejudice and prejudice makes us unwilling to receive and acknowledge good in those who walk not with us and ready to believe the worst of them. How often writers are guilty here: denominational bigotry has caused many a man to misinterpret those who differ from him and to impute to him errors which he does not hold. 2. Be not busy in other men’s affairs: attend to your own business and leave others for God to attend to. 3. Reflect much upon your own sinfulness and weakness: instead of being so ready to behold the mote in your brother’s eye, consider the beam in your own. 4. Shun the company of talebearers and tattlers: idle gossip is injurious to the soul. 5. If others slander you, see to it that you have a conscience void of offense toward God and man, and then it matters not what others think or say about you.

12. The Tenth Commandment

“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant; nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour’s” (Exod. 20:17). That which is here prohibited is concupiscence or an unlawful lusting after what is another man’s. In our exposition of the previous Commandments we have pointed out that while their actual terms are confined to the forbidding of outward acts, yet the scope of each one takes in and reaches unto the condemnation of

everything which has any tendency or occasion to lead unto the overt crime. Here in the final precept of the Decalogue we find clear confirmation of the same, for in it God expressly imposes a law upon our spirits, forbidding us to so much as lust after whatever He has forbidden us to perpetrate. The best way to keep men from committing sin in act is to keep them from desiring it in heart. Thus while the authority of each of the first nine Commandments reaches to the mind and the most secret intents of the soul, yet the Lord saw fit to plainly and literally state this in the Tenth, where He specifically reprehends the first motions of our hearts toward any object He has fenced, and therefore it is the bond which strengthens the whole.

Evil concupiscence consists of those secret and internal sins which go before the consent of the will and which are the seeds of all evil. Concupiscence or lusting is the firstborn of indwelling depravity, the first risings and expressions of our corrupt nature. It is a violent propensity and inclination unto what is evil, unto that which is contrary to the holy will and command of God. The soul of man is an operative and vigorous creature, ever putting forth activities suitable to its nature. Before the Fall, the soul of man was drawn forth unto God as its supreme Object and the End of all its exercise, but when man apostatized and turned from God as his only Good or satisfying Portion, his soul became enamoured with the creature. Thus the soul of fallen man being destitute of Divine grace and spiritual life, craves sinful objects to the slighting of God, and inordinately lusts after things which in themselves are harmless, but become evil because he neither receives them as from God nor uses them for His glory. Concupiscence, then, is that irregular disposition of soul which is here termed “covetousness.”

The Puritan Ezekiel Hopkins (to whom we are indebted for much in this article, as also for many helpful points in the preceding ones) has pointed out that there are four degrees of this sinful concupiscence or coveting. There is the first film and shadow of an evil thought, the imperfect embryo of a sin before it is shaped in us or has any lineaments or features. These are what the Scriptures term “every imagination of the thoughts” of our hearts, and they are expressly declared to be “evil” (Gen. 6:5). Such are the first risings

of our corrupt nature toward those sins which are pleasing unto our sensual inclinations. They are to be steadfastly watched, hated and resisted—stamped upon as the sparks of a dangerous fire—for as soon as they begin to stir within us they pollute the soul. Just as the breathing upon a mirror sullies it, leaving a dimness there, so the very first breathings of an evil desire or thought within our breasts defiles the soul.

A farther degree of this concupiscence is when these evil motions of our corrupt nature are *entertained* in the mind with some degree of complacency. When a sinful object presents itself before a carnal heart there is an inward response that affects it with delight and begets a sympathy between them. As in natural sympathy a man is often pleased with an object before he knows the reason why he is so, so in this sinful sympathy or response the heart is taken with the object before it has time to consider what there is in it which so moves and affects it. At the very first sight of a person we many times find that we are more drawn to him than to a whole crowd of others, though all may be equally unknown to us. So the very first glimpse of a sinful thought in our minds reveals that there is that in us which works a regard for the same before we have leisure to examine why it is so. This second form or degree of concupiscence is harder to eject than the former.

If such evil motions are entertained by us then follows *assent* and approbation of the sin in the practical judgment which being blinded and carried away by the strength of corrupt and carnal affections commends the sin to the executive faculty. The understanding is the trier of every deliberate action so that nothing passes into action which has not first passed trial there. Whether this or that action is to be done is the great question canvassed in that court and all the faculties of the soul await what definite sentence will be here pronounced and so passed accordingly. Normally two things appear and put in their plea to the understanding or judgment about sin: God's law and God's vicegerent, the conscience—the law condemns and the conscience cites the law. But then the affections step in and bribe the judge with promises of pleasure or profit, thereby corrupting the judgment to give its vote and assent unto sin. Note how all of this receives illustration in the colloquy between

Eve and the Serpent before she partook of the forbidden fruit.

When any sinful motion has thus secured an allowance from the judgment, then it betakes itself to the will for a decree. The understanding having approved it, the will must now resolve to commit it, and then the sin is fully formed within and lacks nothing but opportunity to bring it forth into open act. “But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed; then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth (open) sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:14, 15). Thus we have endeavoured to show what concupiscence or coveting is, and the several degrees of it—the first bubblings up of evil thoughts in our hearts, our delighting in the same (and it is altogether against corrupt nature not to love these firstborn of our own souls), the assent and allowance of our judgment, and the resolution of our wills. Each of these is expressly forbidden by the Tenth Commandment, and if the sin proceeds any further, then it exceeds the bounds of this Commandment and falls under the prohibition of some of the former ones, which more specifically forbid the outward acts of sin.

This final word, then, utters its solemn protest against sin in the inner life. Therein we may behold and adore the boundless dominion or sovereignty of the great God. He proclaims His rights over the hidden realm of desires. His authority reaches to the soul and conscience and lays an obligation upon our very thoughts and imaginations, which no human laws can do. It would be vain for men to impose statutes upon that of which they can take no cognizance, and therefore our desires and lustings are free from their censure, except so far as they discover themselves by overt acts. But though they escape the commands and notice of men, yet they escape not the scrutiny and sentence of God, for He sees not as men see, neither judges He as men judge. The secrets of all hearts are open and naked before His eyes—not the least breath of a desire can stir in our souls but it is more distinctly visible to Him than the shining of the midday sun is to us.

God’s Law, like His knowledge, reaches unto the most secret recesses of the soul, searches every corner of the heart, judges those lusts which no human eye can espy, and if they be harboured and

approved of, condemns us as a transgressor guilty of eternal death, no matter how fair our external deportment may be. Then how vain it is for us to content ourselves with an outward conformity to God's Law! How we should labour to approve our hearts in sincerity and purity before God—otherwise we are but Pharisaical hypocrites who wash merely the outside of the cup while within we are still full of unclean lusts. How many there are who suppose God's Law reaches only to the outward man and that though they entertain and cherish wicked desires and evil purposes in their hearts, so long as these break not forth into external crimes they will not be charged to their account. But the day of judgment will show it is far otherwise. How very few reflect upon *heart* sins! How very few pray, "Cleanse me from secret faults O God!" Be not deceived, God is not mocked, and cannot be imposed upon by external shows.

See here the wisdom of God in setting this Commandment at the close of the Decalogue, as a fence and guard to all the rest. It is from inward defilements of the soul that all the visible sins of our acts and lives have their rise. All Sabbath-breaking proceeds from the restlessness which is born of unholy desire. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries" etc. (Matt. 15:19). Observe well that Christ places "evil thoughts" in the front, as the leader of this vile regiment! "Thou shalt not covet"—you shall not set your heart upon or have the least hankering after what belongs to another. An objector may say: it is impossible to prevent the desire for what we admire. Very true, yet in that fact is revealed the fallen condition of man, the desperate wickedness of his heart, and that such desire is sinful *and damning* is only discovered in the light of this Commandment. He who honestly faces this final word of the Decalogue must be convicted of his sinfulness and brought to realize his helplessness which is its ultimate design: the Law is given to demonstrate that our case is *hopeless* in ourselves—to shut us up to Christ!

The second of two booklets.

The Ten Commandments

6

Thou shalt not kill.

7

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

8

Thou shalt not steal.

9

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

10

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

Exodus 20:1-17