
The 10th Law of Life - part 1 of 2

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's" (Ex. 20:17).

We come now to the last of the series. We have completed the circle, and end just where we began. We say that we end just where we began; for the first commandment says, "You shall have no other gods before Me," and in Col. 3:5 we read that covetousness is idolatry.

The Infinite Circle of the Law

The law of God is a complete circle, beginning and ending in God; or, rather, having neither beginning nor end. God inhabits eternity, and the circle of His law encompasses the universe. There is nothing in heaven or earth that does not come within the circle. Its range is unlimited. "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law [literally, "in the law," that is, "within the range, sphere or jurisdiction of the law"]: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" (Rom 3:19).

Going Outside the Law

What is sin?—"Sin is the transgression of the law."

What does "transgression" mean?—It means "a going across." Sin, therefore is the act of going across God's law.

But when one transgressions,—goes outside the bounds—God's law, where can he go? Ah, that is a pertinent question. There is no piece for one to go outside of God's law, except to go out of the universe, that is, to cease to be. "The wages of sin is death." "Sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."

This can be made apparent in another manner. ***The law of God is His life, flowing in an endless stream from His throne.*** Now wherever the word of God has free course, there is perfect life. If we allow ourselves to be simply channels for the river of life, as we are designed to be, the life flowing through us will hold us in life. But what will take place if we put ourselves squarely across the stream? Everybody knows the result of placing any obstacle in the way of a stream of water. The first thing is a damming up of the stream, and when water is dammed up, and becomes stagnant, it breeds death, until the force of the on-coming stream breaks away all the barriers, and the waters flow on again unhindered. But that is the destruction of the thing that placed itself across the

current. It is infinitely better to be in the line of life, in harmony with it,—channels for the stream of life,—than to be obstacles to be swept away.

God's Mercy to Transgressors

You say that there are many people who transgress God's law, and yet live. Yes there are, and that is one of the greatest marvels of the grace of God. Unbelievers rail against God, charging Him with injustice, because sentence of death is pronounced upon the ungodly; but they forget that the infinite mercy of God is manifested every moment in keeping them in life, to allow them opportunity to come into harmony with it, so that they need not die.

This life is but a span, a moment long as it seems to short-sighted men, it is but the twinkling of an eye to God. We do not at once see the results of the transgression of God's law, and men fancy that because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, as they reckon time, they can sin with impunity. "He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Prov. 29:1).

Not Imputing Their Trespasses to them

The reason why men who transgress the law do not instantly die, is that God is still in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, "not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Cor. 5:19). "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared" (Ps. 130:3, 4). God does not now impute sin to men; but takes it all on Himself. He knows that men are foolish and ignorant, and He has "compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray" (Heb. 5:2). Knowing their ignorance, He does not take them at their word, when they say that they do not wish to be kept within the bounds of His life,—that they wish to be free from its "restraints," as they call it, and to live their own lives independently of Him. His long-suffering still waits as in the days of Noah; but by and by there will come a day when sufficient light will have shone to enable every one to make a final choice; and then those who deliberately choose to go outside of God's law, will be taken at their word and allowed to go—where? Where can they go, when God's law fills the universe, and they go outside? For them there will be no future; they will "be as though they had never been."

In the tenth commandment, more than in any other, the unity of the entire law is seen. It summarizes all the commandments, even as the first of them does. It takes in the whole duty of man. "You shall not covet." This precept underlies and is the heart of every commandment. In Rom. 7:7 we read: "I would not have known covetousness (lust) unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."

Someone says, "I thought lust had to do with the seventh commandment." So it has, and with every other one as well. Lust simply means desire; and since in the fall the desire of mankind is only to evil, lust has degenerated into evil desire, it makes no difference for what. A desire for anything that is forbidden is lust, and is contrary to the whole law of God. "Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:15).

So we see that **the tenth commandment strikes at the root of all sin**. The Apostle Paul takes it and, makes it the summing up of the whole law. He who keeps the tenth commandment, cannot so much as think of breaking any other; he cannot have the slightest idea to sin.

The Spirituality of the Law

"For we know that the law is spiritual" (Rom. 7:14), and this commandment reveals its spirituality more clearly than any other. Men talk about enforcing the law of God,—about incorporating the divine law into human laws. They fancy that because human laws punish the person who kills another, that they are putting the sixth commandment into effect. They imagine that they are safeguarding the seventh commandment, because there are laws against adultery. It is a very common thing for people to think that they can enforce the fourth commandment. But let them try it with the tenth. How will they succeed?

Well, men have actually been so blindly presumptuous as to try to enforce the tenth commandment. There was only one way, and that was by the Inquisition, invented by the Papacy, which exalted itself to God's place, and even above Him. Men were tortured to wring out of them the secrets of their hearts, and punished for even the thought that they confessed to having harbored. But nobody but God can find out the secrets of men's hearts, and He does not have to find them out, because "all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13). So no human power or wisdom can ever determine when the tenth commandment has been broken. When the thought of sin, which is forbidden by the tenth commandment, goes so far as to manifest itself, it comes under the head of some of the other commandments. To take your neighbor's wife is a violation of the seventh commandment; to seize upon his house or goods, is a violation of the eighth.

So we see that **this tenth commandment deals with that which is all within one's own mind, and is simply the drawing out and summing up of the entire ten**. It shows the breadth and spirituality of the whole law of God; for as we have previously learned, "Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with

her in his heart" (Matt. 4:28). It is not necessary that one shall have carried his wrong desire into execution, in order to violate any one of the commandments. "The devising of foolishness is sin" (Prov. 24:9).

The tenth commandment is no more spiritual than any other; but it makes the spirituality of the law more apparent than the others do, in that **the violation of it is wholly within one's heart**, out of sight from all human eyes; *yet one cannot break any one of the first nine commandments without first breaking the tenth; and as soon as one has broken the tenth, all the rest are broken.*

Thus we see the utter futility of all human attempts to execute the law of God, or to punish transgression of it. Such attempts cannot be made except by those who do not have any sort of just comprehension of the law, and the nature of it; and that is why every effort to enforce or execute God's law results in a perversion of it. It is only a perverted view of the law that men have, who think to take it into their own hands, and so what they enforce is not God's law, but something directly opposed to it.

This appears when we consider all so-called "Sabbath laws." They are of course Sunday laws. Men will in the same breath talk about the sacredness of the fourth commandment, and about the necessity of rest for the body one day in seven, and of securing it by legislation in favor of Sunday. But the fourth commandment contains no reference to Sunday, except to tell all men that in it they may labor, and do their own work, and, moreover, the Sabbath of the Lord is not more physical rest, but is spiritual rest,—God's rest—for God is Spirit.

The tenth commandment, therefore, closes up the circle of the law, and unites the two ends, and then surrounds the circle itself, bidding everybody to keep his hands off from it, and leave God to conduct the affairs of every portion of His universal kingdom, even to putting into us the desires that we ought to cherish.

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The 10th Law of Life - *part 2 of 2*

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's" (Ex. 20:17).

Covetousness is idolatry. This is indicated in 1 Timothy 6:17: "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living

God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.” As you read this, remember the words of Christ: “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). And then follows the story of the man whose ground brought forth abundantly, and whose barns were overflowing, and who proposed to say to his soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” *That man was trusting in uncertain riches, instead of in the living God, who had given him his abundance. Instead of trusting God, whom he could not see, he made a god of that which he could see, and his hands could handle.*

The Love of Money

“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:9, 10).

Mind, the text does not say that money is an evil, or the root of evil. It is the *love of money* that works mischief. There have been very wealthy men, who were also patterns of goodness. Job had the testimony from God Himself that he was a good man, yet he was the wealthiest man in the country. But he did not trust in his riches. He was willing to distribute and the cause which he did not know he searched out; and when his wealth was taken from him in a day he was not in the least upset by it. He still trusted in God who had given it, and who was able to care for him without it.

Hoarding Means Poverty

“There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty” (Prov. 11:24). It is a law of God’s universe that that which is hoarded up withers away, and that which is scattered abroad increases. It is not money, that is the evil, but the love of it which leads one to hoard it up merely to look at, or as a fancied security against future need. **Hoarding up wealth not only tends to poverty, but it is a sign of it.** The miser has a constant sense of lack. The old epitaph on a miser who had heaped up thousands, ended thus:—

**“Yet this poor man, with all his store,
Died in great want,—the want of more.”**

The man of small means, who freely divides what he has with others, is the real rich man. His action shows his recognition of the fact that he is in connection with a

boundless store of wealth. A small stream of water constantly flowing is far better than thousands of barrels of it stored up in a cistern.

Riches Not Robbery

There seems to be in this age a special onslaught against rich men, as though to be rich were synonymous with being a robber. Corrupt practices are not to be defended; but we are not warranted in attributing all evil to men of means. There is just as much covetousness among the poor as among the rich. The man who covets wealth, and succeeds in getting it is certainly no worse than the one who covets it, but fails to grasp it. *It is covetousness, not the possession of wealth that is idolatry. It is not how much one has, but how one uses it, that determines his character.*

Content with Food and Raiment

The word "covetousness" is translated from a number of different words, but as used in our study it means to desire more than one needs. If a man has no coat, it is not a sin for him to desire it sufficiently to make the effort to get it; that this is compatible with perfect content, for content does not mean lazy indifference.

"Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content." The evil arises from this, that people think that they must specify just how much and what kind of food and clothing they shall have. *The principal thing for us is contentment*; God has charged Himself with the task of seeing that we have food and clothing sufficient for our needs. He made the first clothing that man ever wore (Gen. 3:21) and it filled every requirement; it supplied covering and warmth, God is zealous for the carrying out of His own laws; and since He has ordained that every creature should have a covering suited to its state, we may be sure that He will not neglect the creatures whose need is greatest and most apparent.

Just a word with regard to clothing. Do not forget that its true object is comfort and decency, and not adornment. It should simply be that which is suitable, and then one need have no fear of its being in bad taste. When one is especially noticeable because of what one has on, that is just as bad taste as to be noticeable because of a lack of clothing. One should be noticed, if noticed at all, for what one is, and not for what one has or has not. The clothing, that is no part of the individual, it is altogether secondary to the clothing which grows on one as the result of the Spirit within. A knowledge of the relative value of things, and that God Himself, who gives us life, and who thereby shows that it is His business to supply the things necessary for its proper sustenance, and that He alone can do it, will bring constant and perfect contentment.

Contentment is not Laziness

Someone may say, "That doctrine will tend to laziness; if the stimulus of the necessity to earn one's own living be taken away,—if men get the idea that God will provide everything for them,—they will not labor." Not so; the man who serves the living God can never be lazy. *We have learned that man is not to work for money, but because he owes his best service to the world.* The man who knows the Lord, and who understands his relation to Him, will work just as hard and as diligently without any prospect of wages, as he will for a large salary, knowing that it is his business to give his strength to the world, in the service of Christ, and it is the Lord's business to sustain his life.

Discontentment and Worry is Covetousness and Idolatry

Look again at what constitutes covetousness. We have all thought that it consisted in not desiring a rich man's possessions, but we shall see that it comes much closer to us than that. Jesus says: "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? "Therefore do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things" (Matt. 6:30–32).

We see from this that anxiety for food and drink and clothing, is the characteristic of the heathen, and is therefore idolatry. So again we are brought face to face with the truth that covetousness is idolatry, "You cannot serve God and mammon." We cannot be worrying over what we have not, or over the loss of something that we had, and at the same time be serving God. Everything in this world belongs to somebody; therefore if we covet something that we have not we are coveting what belongs to somebody also wishing to deprive some other person of something in order that we may be pleased. But that is not to love our neighbor as ourself, and so is a violation of the whole law. Or, if it be claimed that there is a great deal that is not in the possession of anybody, and which is therefore open to all, we must still admit that it belongs to the Lord, who will put us in the way of getting it, if it be right for us to have it; and if we complain because we have it not, we are manifesting a lack of trust in God's loving care for us.

Absolute Trust in Our Father

See how this commandment teaches us absolute trust in God, which is the perfection of Christianity. The Lord knows what we have need of before we ask Him, and He has provided it before we become conscious of our need, just because He is our Father. We have much to learn from the relation between parent and child. We are to receive the kingdom of God as little children; and the child is the perfect example of trust and content, yet it is not lazy. The unspoiled child, or the child yet too young to have learned any of that worldly wisdom that consists in worry (dignified by the title of "looking out for

the future") expects as a matter of course to have its wants supplied, and is content with what is received. It never thinks of food until it is hungry, and then it receives the necessary supply, because the parents have anticipated the little one's needs. Why cannot those parents learn a lesson from themselves? Why should they think that they are better than their Father?

Trust is not Idleness

But the child is not idle; far from it. There is nothing more active than a healthy child. The father does not work so many hours a day, nor apply himself so persistently as his child does. It will work the whole day for nothing. To no purpose, do you say? Oh, no; it is obeying the Scripture injunction, "Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." *Laziness is an acquired habit*, the result of wrong training by parents. It is only the man who thinks that the responsibility of the world rests upon him, that works to no purpose; for he goes about his tasks with a drawn, set face, and a look of anxiety, which reflects no credit whatever upon the God whom he may be professing to serve; and remember that **the sole business of man on this earth is to glorify God.**

Saying, "There is no God"

People become sad and moody under their self-imposed burdens. That is equivalent to saying that there is no God. The fool says in his heart, "There is no God," and he acts as though there were none, and that the weight of the world, and the responsibility for conducting its affairs properly, rested on him. Having an abundance of goods in one's possession, and trusting in them, is not a whit worse than worrying over the lack of them. The one who does this, shows that he would do just as the rich fool did, if he were but situated in the same way.

The Truest Happiness

The rich man does not have all the pleasures of life. The best things in the world are those that money cannot buy; and the possession of great wealth actually hinders one from enjoying some of the most delicious pleasures. One of these is the pleasure of self-denial, of going without a thing that one might lawfully possess. There is the pleasure of royalty in finding oneself independent of things which most people deem necessary. The real king is not the one who has everything at command, but the one who can command himself to be content with little, and can cheerfully obey.

The Sum of the Matter

The sum of the whole matter is to trust God, and be satisfied with the fatness of His house, even though to the man, who blindly burrows in the earth like a mole, it may

seem leanness. This absolute trust in the Lord is absolute righteousness, the very opposite of heathenism.

"Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness" (Ps. 119:36). *Covetousness, therefore, is the desire for anything contrary to the commandments, anything except God's life that we may desire with our whole soul.* The man who can say to the Lord, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You" (Ps. 73:25), is safe from the transgression of the tenth commandment, and so from the commission of any sin.

Satisfaction in Service

The commandments of the Lord are life everlasting, "and in keeping them there is great reward." *Not for keeping them, mind you, but in keeping them.* The reward is the pure, perfect, simple life that they bring. Take heed, beware of covetousness even in the service of God. Beware of thinking that you would serve God, keep His Sabbath, for instance, if you were situated financially so that you could. There would be no virtue in your service even if you did keep it under such conditions. What kind of god is it that you propose to serve? Is it one who needs your service? or one whom you need to serve whom is rich reward? The answer to this marks the difference between heathenism and Christianity.

The satisfaction of serving Christ indeed, of knowing Him, and feeling His life in us, impelling us to action, is so great that with it one cares for nothing else. The deliciousness of perfect trust, of resting in the everlasting arms, and by that very resting partaking of their intense activity, is greater than the possession of all riches. He who has, and appropriates, the fulness of God's life is so far from desiring anything else, that he would spurn the offer of anything that would rob him of any of that which is his by faith. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32) and he who has all things, and knows that he has them, is absolutely shut off from the possibility of covetousness.

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