

Loving Your Neighbor in Thought, Word, and Deed

Today we will be finishing our study through the Ten Commandments. Next week we will continue on through the book of Deuteronomy. And you might recall that a few weeks back when we first started looking at the Ten Commandments I started off by telling you how they were organized. The first four have to do with our duty toward God. And the last six have to do with our duty to man. Well, today we will be looking at the last three commandments, and they clearly deal with how we treat our fellow man.

Jesus told us the two greatest commands in the New Testament. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. Those two things are a summary of the Ten Commandments. And if the greatest command calls us to love God with our whole self, our heart, mind, soul, and strength, certainly the second greatest command has a similar idea when it says to love your neighbor "as yourself." We love our entire self. We hopefully take care of our whole self. Certainly we are to love God with our everything. But there's a sense in which we need to have a similar perspective even in our love toward others. That we should also look to love others with our whole self. And so these last six of the Ten Commandments bring this out; how we have a call to love our neighbors in all that we do, say, and think. That's really true for each of the commandments. That they each extend to our thoughts, our words, and our deeds. But I especially think we can see this very explicitly in these last three commandments.

And so let's look briefly at each of these three commandments. The eighth especially address our deeds. The ninth especially addresses our words. The tenth especially addresses our thoughts. And so as we look at these last three commandments, we'll see how we are commanded to love each other with our whole self: in every deed, word, and thought.

Let's think first about the eighth commandment. You shall not steal. Obviously compared to the other two commandments, this one's specifically focusing on a deed; on a physical action that we could take. Now certainly that's true for other commandments like the two just before this as well; the commands to not murder and commit adultery. These are commands that highlight the fact that our physical *actions* can be clearly evil.

The command here for stealing has several ways you can break this in your outward deeds. You can obviously steal someone's property and possessions. That's a very literally application of this command. But another very literal application is the stealing of persons. Like kidnapping, for example. This is one of literal uses of this word in the Hebrew. Back then, man-stealing was also fairly common; where people would capture adults and sell them into slavery. Think of what Joseph's brothers did to him. And so that was something very directly prohibited by this commandment as well. The idea of profiting off of someone else, through selling them or through a ransom was forbidden by this commandment. Nowadays, we still have a problem with this, with human trafficking going on throughout the world. And even things like taking hostages or hijacking airplanes would be something similar today. People trying to increase their worth at the expense of others. Of course, some of the most heinous ways this crime is committed today is when

the stealing is hardly even noticed. When people take advantage of others to their gain and other's misfortune, and you might not even realized you were just ripped off. But in all these things, the most explicit violation of this commandment are evil actions and deeds toward others. That's the most specific focus of this commandment.

The ninth commandment, however, has its focus on our words. Don't bear false witness against your neighbor. We often reduce this commandment to just about lying; well that's certainly one application of this command. But most specifically this is about courtroom testimony. We must not rise up and say false things about our neighbor as an evil witness against them. The idea is that what we say is powerful. We should use our tongues for good, not for evil. James in the New Testament talks about the great power of our tongues. How they can be used for great evil if we don't bridle them. He compares the damage our tongues can do, to forest fire. Just like how a whole forest can be set on fire by a single spark, so our tongues can ignite great damage and destruction with just a few words. And so the ninth commandment calls us to speak truth and not lies, both in the courtroom, and everywhere. But the most explicit violation of the commandment comes in word; by what we say. It calls us most specifically to guard our tongues.

The tenth commandment is a bit different than the other commandments. It clearly has its focus on our thoughts. Don't covet. It deals with what is going on inside of us. We should not lust over what is not ours. We shouldn't be consumed inside us wanting to take from other things that belong to them. Instead, we should be content with what we have. Envy is destructive. If we find ourselves having a good desire for something, then instead of looking to try to steal it from our neighbors, we should look to find legitimate ways to advance our state. For example, there's nothing wrong if you are homeless, to want a home and so you work hard to improve your state so you can get a home. There's a way to have biblical contentment, and concern for what belongs to your neighbor, while at the same time to plan to make positive changes in your life. That's different than how this commandment calls us to guard our thoughts from evil intentions.

As we think about each of these three commandments, it's interesting to realize that often these sins come together as a package. It can be hard to separate these sins from one another in real life application. Just take one example: fraud. Which commandment is it breaking? If you commit fraud against someone, probably all three commandments were broken. You probably started by coveting something from someone in your thoughts, say some money. Then you devised a lie in order to steal that money from the person in fraud. You then tell them the lie, using words to deceive them on the fraud. Finally you act on your fraud; you take their money, because they gave it to you in trust on what you had sold them. Fraud is one example among others where your whole self comes to play in order to sin against your neighbor. You sin against them in thought, word, and deed, breaking literally all three of these commandments in the most direct way possible.

Let me make sure you understand my point in all this. I've not spoken in depth about these commandments; I've only just touched on them. But I've tried to show how each of these last three commandments draws our attention to one part of our person that can sin against our neighbor. We're called to love our neighbor as ourselves. These three commandments remind us that our deeds can sin against someone, our words can sin against someone, and our thoughts can sin against someone. Of course, this is true in all of these commandments. It's not like the eighth commandment is the only one that

deals with our deeds. Or the ninth with our words, or the tenth with our thoughts. No, we can break each command in thought, word, or deed. Jesus said you could break the sixth commandment about murdering by *saying* evil words to each other. Jesus said you could break the seventh by *thinking* adulterous thoughts. You could even break the 10th commandment by your deeds, like if you unsuccessfully attempted to take something from your neighbor; that's your covetous thoughts put into action. In other words, all the commandments need to be kept with our whole person. We need obedience in our thoughts, words, and deeds.

Thinking about all the different ways we can sin against our neighbor in thought, word, and deed, I hope reminds us of an important doctrine of Scripture. It's the doctrine of total depravity. That doctrine says that our entire selves are affected by sin. This is not to say that we are each as evil as we could be. No, we thank God that that's not the case. Many of us, even non-Christians, actually live pretty respectable lives. And yet as we think about how we sin against others with our whole selves, this reminds us that every part of us has been affected by sin. We are, in fact, totally depraved. That's the effects of sin in our lives.

And yet, though our entire beings are affected by sin, there is a certain primacy of our heart. What I mean is that Scripture shows us that the root of sin lies deep inside us. Jesus said, for example, in Matthew 15:19, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man unclean." Sin really starts in the heart.

That's what I think James is getting at when he talks about the progression of sin in our lives, in James 1:13-15. Go ahead and turn there if you have your bibles open. James chapter 1, verse 13. "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." Do you see James point? He's finding the root of sin deep inside us, similar to what Jesus said. The root of sin begins within. We first start to detect it when we find evil desires rising up in our thoughts, tempting us to live out our lusts through different sins of word or deed. Instead of taking every evil thought captive, we entertain those thoughts welling up from our hearts and let them turn into sin.

I think this is why it is so fitting that the Ten Commandments ends with this command about coveting. This last commandment really humbles us, doesn't it? Even if we've found ways to change our behavior, that doesn't mean that we've solved our issue of total depravity. You see, the Pharisees did that, at least they thought. They really focused on whitewashing the outsides of their life. They tried to paint a picture to others that their words and deeds were so much holier than others. They'd even attach a lot of ritual to their actions to try to make this as clear as possible; ceremonial washings, for example. But Jesus said that the real problem lies on the inside, not the outside. We need to be concerned not just with outward behavior. We need to be concerned with the inward heart. That's the problem parents often have in raising their children. We can find ourselves raising them to be good Pharisees. We can teach them only through consequences to their actions. That's obviously the easiest thing to address. But often our children can become good at knowing what they have to do, in order to not get in trouble. But that's different than them actually have a heart change.

They can do something not to get in trouble, not because they really have a changed heart that wants to do good things.

You see, what we see in our children sometimes, and what we see in the Pharisees, is exactly the issue for all of us. We all spend so much time looking to make our outward actions look respectable and godly. But the tenth commandment reminds us that what others can't see, God knows. God knows even our lustful thoughts; even the ones we'd never admit to anyone. You see, what we really need is a heart change. We need to be cleansed on the inside. We need God's image renewed and restored inside us. We need to be made alive again, because apart from Christ we are dead in our sins. Well, the bible has a name for this. It's called being born again. And this is a work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and it's founded upon the work of Jesus in history. As Christians, we've been born again by the Spirit coming inside us and working faith in our lives. That's the process of being born again - that Spirit-work to revive our hearts and lead us to faith in Jesus. After we are born again, then God begins to work in our hearts true love for our neighbors. Yes, it will be imperfect in this life. But we are growing in this love for others.

But this work of the Spirit in our lives could only be possible because of Jesus. He himself not only loved his neighbor with his whole self, he also bore the sins of people like you and me who didn't love their neighbors. Let's think first about how Jesus himself loved his neighbor. On earth, he loved his fellow man with his whole self, in thought, word, and deed.

Think about his thoughts. Scripture clues us in at points at what Jesus was thinking during his earthly ministry. And in those places where we see his thoughts, we see love for others. Like in Matthew 9:36, it tells us that when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, for they were like a sheep without a shepherd. Or in John 11, when Jesus went to see his friend Lazarus who had died, it says that when he saw Mary weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. That was just moments before Jesus himself started to weep. Obviously this emotional response clues us in on the inner thoughts and feelings of Jesus. It tells us about the thoughts of love and compassion he was having for others in their loss. In terms specifically of coveting, we learn a little about the sorts of desires Jesus had when we read a passage like Matthew 9:13 where Jesus tells us to desire mercy over sacrifice. Or in a passages like where he calls us to seek first the kingdom of God and to aspire after heavenly treasure over earthly treasure. These are the sorts of thoughts and desires Christ had. And I think the incarnation was a grand testimony of Jesus' desires and thoughts. Paul tells us the mind of Christ in Philippians 2:6 when he says that though Jesus was by nature in the very form of God, he did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, by being born into this world as a man to live and die for us. That's radical love for your neighbor in your thoughts - not coveting power, which in his case was actually rightly his, but planning to radically give up what he had to love us humans. That's loving your neighbor at its best, and fulfilling the 10th commandment.

And then think about Jesus' words. These too demonstrate his love for his neighbor. Jesus' words showed loved for others. Obviously his words were truth, and he taught truth. He spoke encouraging words to people, like for example Jairus, when his daughter died and he seemed to lose hope, Jesus lovingly told him, "Do not fear, only believe." Of course that's not to mean that Jesus always had easy things to say to people. Sometimes the most love

you can show someone is by telling them the truth. Think of when Mary and Martha had Jesus over for dinner. Mary was sitting at Jesus feet while Martha was busy cooking away. Martha got upset that her sister wasn't helping, but Jesus lovingly admonished Martha. "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." That was truth said in love. And then of course you have some of the harsh things that he told the Scribes and Pharisees. In Luke 10, he said "woe" to them, and then said that they were like whitewashed tombs, looking clean on the outside but full of death on the inside. Jesus didn't mince words. But he spoke in truth. And when he spoke harshly like that, it was for a good reason. Out of genuine concern for people. Jesus loved his neighbors through words. This culminates I think in the title given to him in Revelation 1:5. There he's called the faithful witness. That's what you want in a witness. Not a false witness. A faithful one. One you can trust. Jesus spoke the truth, and most importantly he spoke the truth about eternal life through himself. That's loving your neighbor at its best, and fulfilling the 9th commandment.

Finally, think about Jesus' deeds and actions. Jesus loved his neighbor through his actions. Every act of kindness. Every healing. Every exorcism. But of course, we know the greatest act of love he did was to give up his life for us. John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." That's love in action to the fullest. The eighth commandment requires that you not steal, including stealing human beings. We ought not to hold them at ransom, for example. But Jesus gave up his life as a ransom for many. That's again a radical keeping of this commandment. Instead of looking to use someone else's life for gain, Jesus gave his life for our gain. That's loving your neighbor at its best, fulfilling the 8th commandment.

And so Jesus fully loved his neighbor as himself, even in the most radical ways. In thought, word, and deed he showed love. That's part of why Jesus can now work this radical love in our life. But there's more. He can also do this because of the way that he himself bore the sin of people hating their neighbors. Just thinking in light of these three commandments, and the final moments before Jesus death, we see this. Jesus bore the brunt of people breaking the eighth commandment when he became the ransom for many. And not only that, but Caiaphas the high priest in John 11 had said that it was better that Jesus die than the whole nation of Israel perish. Caiaphas was right, but that was not for him to decide to put Jesus to death just so that they could benefit. That's just like the man-stealing prohibited by the eighth commandment, advancing your own self at the expense of others. Jesus bore the brunt of people breaking the ninth commandment as well. That's the emphasis Mark shows us during his trial before the religious leaders; that they were bringing in false witnesses to falsely accuse him. But Jesus remained silent, patiently tolerating the sins of man, because that is what he came to do. Jesus bore the brunt of the tenth commandment as well. We learn in Mark's gospel that Pilate had some sympathy toward Jesus because he knew that the religious leaders had turned Jesus in because of envy. Well, envy, of course, is a type of coveting. And so right as Jesus is about to suffer the cross for us, we see him facing the burden of men who are totally depraved doing the exact opposite of what they should be doing. Instead of loving their neighbor, Jesus in this case, they are hating him.

Isn't all of this a picture of how Jesus has saved us? His complete loving of his neighbor in these radical ways is what we call Jesus' active

obedience. He earned the righteousness we could not. He did what we could not, in terms of righteousness, that it would be credited to us who believe in him. And all the ways that he suffered people showing hatred to him, all the sin that he suffered at the hand of the religious leaders and the Romans, is what we call Jesus' passive obedience; his suffering obedience. He suffered the penalty for our sins. That's illustrated by his willingness to suffer the sins of sinners at their very hands. The sins against him that directly resulted in sending him to the cross. But is this really any different than what we already knew? Sin sent Jesus to the cross. And that includes our sin.

Brothers and sisters, if we have come to faith in Jesus, that is because we have been born again. The Spirit has worked new life in us. But the Spirit could only do that because of the active and passive obedience of Jesus Christ. Jesus won our new life on the cross. Now, we who have struggled to love our neighbor with our whole selves are being enabled more and more each day to do this.

And so may we as Christians, really strive to love our neighbor with our whole selves. May every thought, word, and deed be captured and submit to the Lord Jesus Christ. May each be used to love one another.

As much as God wants us to chiefly love him, is it any surprise that he calls us to love each other? Isn't that such a repeated commandment in the New Testament? Think especially of great chapters like John 15 and 1 John 4. Places where such emphasis is placed on this commandment, to love one another. But we are not surprised about this emphasis when we remember how much hatred Christ took in for our sake, and how much he in turned loved one another.

1 John 4:20 says that we can't we love God if we don't love others. And so let's look to him who purifies our whole souls to enable us to live to that end. Of course, one of the hardest times to love people, is when people aren't nice to you. Mean people are frankly hard to love. But do you see why we're called even to love unlovable people? Even people that hate us? Even to people that don't deserve to be loved. Because that's what Jesus did to us. Jesus knows about loving others who hate him. Because he loved us, even when were yet enemies. His love to us transformed us from enemies to friends. Who know what effects your love might have toward others? Even toward others who don't like you, as you learn to show this sort of radical, sacrificial, love that Christ showed you. Let's all pray for Christ's love to transform our love; to transform our every thought, word, and deed.

Surely this sort of radical love will require wisdom at times. For example, if you are a victim in an abusive relationship, seek counsel on how to live this out. Showing radical love toward others doesn't mean that you shouldn't speak out if someone is abusing you. As we said, Jesus spoke the truth in love, even though that involved some tough words at times. And so if you are struggling to know how to show Christ's love to someone, get some help! Talk to your pastor or one of the elders. Don't go through it alone.

But, if we love others in this radical way, then surely it is a start to show God how much we love him. God showed his love for us by dying for us. He wants us to show our love for him, even by what we're willing to do for others. Let's pray now even for the grace to accomplish this.

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