



# Keeping It Simple

The 7<sup>th</sup> Word

August 13, 2023

Prelude - Praise the Lord Ye Heavens Adore Him by Young Oceans  
Welcome/Announcements (Work & Faith Survey)

## CALL TO WORSHIP | Nehemiah 1:5-11

"God, God-of-Heaven, the great and awesome God, loyal to his covenant and faithful to those who love him and obey his commands:

Look at me, listen to me. Pay attention to this prayer of your servant that I'm praying [this day] in intercession for your servants, the People of [Christ City Church], confessing the sins of the People of [Christ City Church]. And I'm including myself, [my and our] ancestors, among those who have sinned against you.

"We've twisted life with you: We haven't done what you told us, haven't followed your commands, and haven't respected the decisions you gave to Moses your servant.

All the same, remember the warning you posted to your servant Moses: 'If you betray me, I'll scatter you to the four winds, *but* if you come back to me and do what I tell you, I'll gather up all these scattered peoples *from wherever they ended up* and put them back in the place I chose to mark with my Name.'

"Well, [here we] are—your servants, your people whom you so powerfully and impressively redeemed. O Master, listen to me, listen to your servant's prayer—and yes, to all your servants who delight in honoring you..."

Song #1 - Anchor of Hope by Ellie Holcomb

Song #2 - Lesser Loves by Porters Gate

Dismiss Kids

## PRE-SERMON READING | 1 Corinthians 6:9-12

Or don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's Kingdom? Don't be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor extortionists, will inherit God's Kingdom.

A number of you know from experience what I'm talking about, for not so long ago you were on that list. *But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Just because something is technically legal doesn't mean that it's spiritually appropriate. If I went around doing whatever I thought I could get by with, *I'd be a slave to my whims.*

## SERMON |

We've said that the "Ten Words" are not so much a set of dos and don'ts arbitrarily handed down by some authority (even The Authority, as it were). That is, they are not law in the legal sense. Of course, Israel would contextualize and codify the Ten Words into the legal parameters of their wondering nation; that's the book of Leviticus. But in their first speaking, the Ten Commandments, as they are more popularly known, are given not as legalese but stated as "natural law," like that of gravity, a **law that governs reality, setting its limitations and potential**. Or, as one author notes,

"God's general will concerning all of human life is revealed in the form of the Ten Commandments, even when this revelation needs contextualizing in varied social-cultural environments." (J. Daryl Charles)<sup>1</sup>

Specifically, our living in right relationship with the Ten Words governs our experience of life as either free or enslaved, life in the promised land which God created for and leads us, or life in the chaos of choices (ours and other's) and chance. The essential, fundamental, atomic nature of "the law" that the Ten Words reveal is testified to by the apostle Paul in his letter to the faith family in Rome—a primarily non-Jewish community trying to integrate a Hebrew history into their everyday Greek worldview.

When outsiders [Gentiles] who have never heard God's law follow it more or less by instinct, they confirm its truth by their obedience. They show that God's law is not something alien, imposed upon us from without, but woven into the very fabric of creation. There is something deep within them that echoes God's yes and no, right and wrong. (Romans 2:14-15a)

Because "the work of the law [is] written on [our] hearts" (Rom. 2:15a, *ESV*), as one translation puts it, is why we feel the weight (sometimes uncomfortably so) of the Ten Words, especially as we press further into their structured sounding. Let me quickly explain.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Daryl Charles, *Our Secular Vocation*, 262, n15.

It has long been understood that the Ten Words speak first to life with God:

I. No other gods besides ME. (**life begins** with God) [ and so we..]

II. No images to serve [but look to the living God for our way to live now and forever]

III. No twisting/making false I AM [by taking His word and character for granted, loss of awe/fear, and so maintaining that awe in wonder by]

IV. Sabbath...and work (**life continues** in rhythm with God's good design & destiny) [resting in God's work and doing the work God made us for]

The next six words then, speak to life with others:

V. Honor father and mother (**life begins** relating well to those who we are given) [our life in the free land is not determined by what is done to us, but by how we relate/treat/honor others, which is no easy task considering how easily we are angered by others/circumstances.]

VI. No taking life [protect it, care for it, be angry, and don't sin as we said last week]

VII. No adultery

VIII. No stealing

IX. No False-Witnessing

X. No Coveting (**life continues** relating well to what we have been given)

It is in the middle of these truths (where life begins and how it continues) that we feel the apple landing on our heads, the pangs of gravity's law most specifically. In some ways, we can ascent but not submit to the big truths. They are, after all, cosmic and internal, hidden in the heart or the heavens, and thus more easily assumed, avoided, or excused. God's people have a long history of serving two masters, messing up the Sabbath, an unbalanced approach to parental and child relationships, and dismissiveness to wanting what others have. But in the details between, in the minutia of daily living with God and others, we can neither hide from nor help but feel the reality of gravity's grounding.

While most of the time, we live in the reality of the "natural law" with little thought; there are moments when we experience the effect of the Ten Word's inescapable certainty. Usually, the feeling is discomfort of varying sorts. Whether it is our willful or ignorant attempt to defy gravity or finding ourselves under a falling object of another's making, the law becomes unnervingly real. I suspect, at least for most of us, myself included, that we felt gravity's discomfort when \_\_\_\_\_ was reading Paul's words to the faith family of Corinth. Because, in some way or another, we've all found ourselves (and those we love) somewhere on the other side of "but":

And such were some of you. **But** you were washed...sanctified...justified in...Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:11)

The truth is, we'll find that like the women and men of faith in Corinth, we've all, in some way or another, willfully, ignorantly, in response to desire or circumstances, attempted to defy the gravitational force of the Ten Words. And there is no place where the law's reality is felt more immediately and intensely, and intimately than in bonds of trust: **in covenant and community**. Look again at the construct of the final six of the Ten Words:

V. Honor father and mother

VI. No taking life

VII. No adultery

VIII. No stealing

IX. No False-Witnessing

X. No Coveting

See how they move from relationships chosen for us (parents in the Fifth Word, siblings (Cain & Able, 1 John 1, 4 (hate your brother) in the Sixth Word—who are the people we “hate” first in life if not our siblings!) to relationships that require volition (marriage, community/neighbor-ness) and thus spoken bonds, relationships that necessitate trust and fidelity (faithfulness demonstrated by continuing loyalty and support). At the shared center of this construction is the Seventh Word:

You shall not commit adultery. (Exodus 20:14)

Here at the center, we are taken directly into what is meant to be the most fundamental for flourishing human relations: *marriage*. As we see in Genesis 2, even before sin could separate and destroy, God said,

It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper corresponding to him...So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man and...took one of his ribs and...made it into a woman and brought her to the man...Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:18, 21-22, 24)

**From the beginning, God crafts us for covenantal bonds.** Life whole and holy cannot be experienced in isolation, whether a chosen physical/emotional separation or in acculturated and practical individualism. We are made not only for intimacy but intimacy in a trusting and committed relationship. And while we won't all, like Jesus, experience marriage as the manifestation of this covenantal bond, nevertheless, we all, like Jesus, are to bind ourselves to God and others for mutual flourishing and live in a way that nurtures and respects that bond. In a word, we are to live with **fidelity: faithfulness to a person, cause, or belief, demonstrated by continuing loyalty and support.**

Like “You shall not murder,” as Chaz mentioned last week, “You shall not commit adultery” has a larger scope than the physical act of adultery. Theologians often call this “the rule of categories” and contend that “each

commandment applies to every sin of the same kind.”<sup>2</sup> So, like the first half of Paul’s list from 1 Corinthians chapter 6, the reach of the Seventh Word expands beyond the particular act of adultery into the summarizing descriptor common in our scriptures: “sexual immorality.”

If you were to say read [the remainder of I Corinthians chapter 6](#), which I won’t do for the sake of our younger company—but strongly encourage you to do—you’d see how our physical existence and our spiritual existence have been fundamentally intertwined from our beginnings, and not merely individually but in communion with another, and most essentially in committed and intimate communion.

And so, just like with the Sixth Word, the Seventh Word is not merely a prohibition against what even us Gentiles know in our hearts to be something fundamentally destructive and dishonoring—adultery in no time and place has ever been promoted, even if its “punishments” no longer immediately and mortally cost the offenders their lives as it did in Leviticus. **The Seventh Word is a directive to nurture the bonds of commitment, to be against anything within or around us—as individuals and a community—that would diminish the relationship(s) we are bound (covenanted).**

Fundamentally, the Seventh Word tells us to consider the essential nature of trust<sup>3</sup> in living well and free with others and to act and behave in a trustworthy, loyal, and relationship-strengthening manner. For, as one author notes, when our bound relationships erode, life cannot flourish.

“Social trust is a measure of the moral quality of a society—of whether the people and institutions in it are trustworthy, **whether they keep their promises and work for the common good.** When people in a church lose faith or trust in God, the church collapses. When people in a society lose faith or trust in their institutions and in each other, the nation collapses.” (David Brooks)<sup>4</sup>

What is true societally is true at the foundation of society, the covenantal bonds of family and faith. When trust erodes, the world, as we experience it, collapses. We’ve all experienced this, haven’t we? We’ve all felt the crushing sensation of broken trust. Trust broken by another, and trust we have broken.

While some modern commentators narrow in on the sexual component of adultery, and thus the many implications for and connections between our sexuality and spirituality (topics which are undoubtedly relevant to our cultural moment), **at the heart of the Seventh Word is how we are keeping our promises and working for “the” good in our bound/committed relationships**, or living in a manner that severs those bonds and in doing *so attaching ourselves*—be entangled—to something/someone else.

There is a reason why adultery specifically became the metaphor for life lived in duality, lived with God and other gods, in self-sacrifice and selfishness, and in loyalty and lust. When describing what led the people of Israel to be exiled from the promised land and thus once again under the yoke of slavery, God uses the imagery of an adulterous relationship, of broken trust that is more than a failure to do something and more a choice to be with someone/something else:

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Ryken, *Exodus: saved for God’s glory*, 630.

<sup>3</sup> For a helpful way of nurturing trust in or everyday work roles, see David Brooks *New York Times* article, “How to Build Trust: A Practical Guide” accessed here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/10/opinion/distrust-respect-safety.html>

<sup>4</sup> David Brooks, from the *Atlantic* article “America Is Having A Moral Convulsion,” accessed here: <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/10/collapsing-levels-trust-are-devastating-america/616581/>

Surely, as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so have you been treacherous to me, O house of Israel, declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 3:20)

Behind the door and the doorpost you have set up your memorial; for, deserting me, you have uncovered your bed, you have gone up to it, you have made it wide; and you have made a covenant for yourself with them, you have loved their bed, you have looked on nakedness. (Isaiah 57:8)

Adultery is the manifestation of a heart divided against itself—against the other whose bond is necessary for flourishing, for being whole and holy (i.e., Genesis 2). That’s why Proverbs says,

He who commits adultery lacks sense (“is a brainless act”); he who does it destroys himself. (Proverbs 6:32)

Fundamentally, adultery is the breaking of covenant, a severing of the bond between the one(s) whom life is made and who we make a good life with, **through an entanglement with something/someone**. And while adultery (in all its forms) does not always lead to an immediate end of a covenant (as the story of Hosea so painfully and graciously attests), when trust is eroded at this most bound and intimate level, the damage takes significant time and effort to heal, which is why, no adultery, is the seventh foundational word. The implication of breaking covenant reverberates, though, as our story of scripture testifies, not completely and not forever.

Similar to murder, adultery does not usually begin where it ends, but develops in ways of living with others **that do not intentionally cultivate the thing we live in: covenantal/bound relationships through mutual submission one to another out of reverence of Christ**. Here is how the apostle Paul explains it:

**Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another.**

Wives, **understand and support** your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ. The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to his church, not by domineering but by cherishing. So just as the church submits to Christ as he exercises such leadership, wives should likewise submit to their husbands.

Husbands, **go all out in your love for** your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church—a love marked by giving, not getting. Christ’s love makes the church whole. His words evoke her beauty. **Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her**, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness. And that is how husbands ought to love their wives. They’re really doing themselves a favor—since they’re already “one” in marriage.

**No one abuses his own body, does he? No, he feeds and pampers it.** That’s how Christ treats us, the church, since we are part of his body. And this is why a man leaves father and mother and cherishes his wife. No longer two, they become “one flesh.” This is a huge mystery, and I don’t pretend to understand it all. **What is clearest to me is the way Christ treats the church. And this provides a good picture of how each husband is to treat his wife, loving himself in loving her, and how each wife is to honor her husband.** (Ephesians 5:21-33)

Whether we are bound in marriage or in friendship, in covenant or a faith community, each of us finds ourselves joined to others in significant ways. Likewise, we are, as the apostle Paul says, bound to Jesus, who willfully bound himself to us, **showing us how we might live with fidelity—faithfulness demonstrated by loyalty and support, to staying together and bringing out the best in one another to the glory of our Father.**

## REFLECTION |

Allowing the Spirit to examine your heart in your most bonded relationships:

- How am I nurturing (going all out in love for) the relationship(s) *and* failing to do so?
- Who is encouraging and challenging me to remain faithful?
- Who can I do the same for?

## COMMUNION INSTRUCTIONS |

Jesus' body broken *for* us, for our breaking of covenant and our restoring of relationship. Jesus' life poured out as a sign of a new covenant, one that cannot be broken because our lives are forever lived *with* Him. This is how we live bound to God and one another. Because we were on the list, BUT we were washed, were sanctified, were justified; given a fresh start by Jesus, our Master, our Messiah, and empowered to live by our God present in us, the Spirit.

**PLEASE STAND AND MAKE YOUR WAY DOWN TO RECEIVE THE COMMUNION ELEMENTS.**

Song #3 - Let This Heart Not Wander by Young Oceans

# COMMUNION & TEN WORDS|

His body, broken for our sins. His life poured out as a forever promise of life with Him.

Because we have been freed and are no longer enslaved to whims (our own and another's) but life whole and holy with God and others, we say together the highlighted Ten Words:

Then God spoke all these words:

"I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from...the place of your slavery.

"Have no other gods.

"Make no images to serve.

"No twisting who I AM.

"Sabbath...and work.

"Honor others...especially those to whom you were given.

"Do not take life...protect and care for it.

"Do not break covenant...nurture it.

"Do not steal.

"Do not lie about your neighbor.

"Do not covet."

Song #4 - Found It All by Leslie Jordan

Song #5 - Yet Not I, But Through Christ in Me by CityAlight

## BENEDICTION | Galatians 5:1, 13 Lighting the Candle

As we conclude the day made for us, we enter into the work for which we are made [**LIGHT THE CANDLE**], remembering that:

Christ has set us free to live a free life. So take your stand! Never again let anyone put a harness of slavery on you...

It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don't use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom. Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that's how freedom grows.