

Good Behavior (Exodus 20: 13-15)

I The 10 Commandments describe the holiness God demands of men. (We have pointed out upon several occasions that the 10 Commandments do not describe our righteousness, but our unrighteousness. No one but Christ has ever been able to obey all of the Law of God perfectly, therefore to establish His Righteousness by what the New Testament calls *works*. No one else will ever be saved by works; as we read in Ephesians 2:8-9, *by grace ye are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, and not by works, lest any man should boast*. So let us use these commandments as a kind of mirror, in which we see ourselves as God sees us. We will never be saved by our own righteousness; the only righteousness that any of us will ever have is the righteousness of Christ, as He lives in us. Now either He lives in us, that is, we were born again with eternal life by the Holy Spirit of God, or else Jesus does not live in us, and our lives do not fulfill the Will of God, which is to reveal His Glory in us, that is, the glory of the only begotten Son of God, in exact proportion to our conformity to His image.)

A The first Four describe how God expects us to honor Him. (We noted that the First Commandment prohibition of idolatry describes the attitude of true believers. We also noted that in far too many cases, the foolishness that passes for religion in contemporary churches is idolatry in an ecclesiastical costume. We can only obey the First Commandment by rendering all of our moral allegiance to God, and that means, we must not trust *anything* else for life, either in this world or the world to come. The Second, Third, and Fourth Commandments describe *how* God *wants* men to honor Him. The First Four Commandments, taken together, teach us how to give God our moral allegiance *by withholding* it from other attitudes and *activities*.)

B The last Six are about our relationships with other people. (Just as God began the Decalogue by establishing His own supremacy as the only correct object of our moral allegiance, and then told us how to demonstrate honor for Him, there comes a

transition, of sorts, from the authority of God to the authority of human institutions in which God has vested some of His authority. The home was the first human institution that God ordained, followed by human government and the church. God invests some of His authority in the leadership of these human institutions, so that the leaders (parents, government officials, and church ministers) can make their institutions serve the purposes for which God established them. As we noted last week, the home *used to be* the basic unit of society, and that all other social activity should begin in the home; and that the failure of parents to use the homes as God intended them to be used is at the heart of all other social, cultural, economic, and ecclesiastical problems. By the Fifth Commandment, God established the authority of parents over children in the same way the First Commandment established His own authority over all humanity. Now we turn to how the last five Commandments describe proper relationships between people and people, just as the 2^d, 3^d, and 4th Commandments describe proper relations between people and God.)

II We can generalize honor for parents into honor for all godly authority. (Parents, of course, are the first human authorities in *all* of our lives. Parents are responsible to God to teach God's Law to their children. Now we may remember that no one is perfect, which means that no parent will be a perfect parent and no child will be a perfect child. The New Testament has plenty to say about how the Grace of God is the all sufficient remedy for all of our imperfections, so how will the children *learn* that it is? By making mistakes, of course, and being corrected for their mistakes; and then the time comes when it is proper to teach the child about forgiveness too, but certainly not before *godly sorrow worketh repentance* (2 Corinthians 7:10). Then, as soon as children step outside of the home, the authority of human government begins to regulate their behavior. This is really the point of the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th Commandments. God ordained human government for the purpose of protecting us from people who do not obey His Commandments, especially Nos. 6, 7, 8, and 9.

Last week we saw how the business of the church is to help parents to *train up a child in the way he should go* (Proverbs 22:6), and we say again that it is the church, not the government schools, which ought to do this. One other observation seems to be very important in that regard: parents have the right, and the choice, to delegate some of their authority to a Christian day school; the government gives the parent no choice, but circumscribes the rights and privileges of parents with compulsory school attendance laws. This is because the devil has a very different agenda for your children than God has, and his agents in ungodly governments use every means at their disposal, including public schools, to indoctrinate your children with the philosophy of secular humanism. The end of the story is that we ought to look *unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith* (Hebrews 12:2) for the Grace of God, and stop looking to government programs to provide social services that are not part of the role God assigned to human government in the first place.)

A The Sixth Commandment forbids more than just first degree homicide. (God forbids us to dishonor, hate, wound, or kill our neighbor either by ourselves or by an agent, either in thought, word, gesture, *or* deed. In forbidding murder, God also teaches us that He abhors the causes of it, such as envy, strife, hatred, anger, and desire for revenge. Jesus summed it up for us fairly well in Matthew 5:21-22: *Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.* Here we may note that even a murderer can repent and be forgiven, but that suicide is the one sin we cannot repent (if we repented it, we would never be guilty of it). To understand the mind of God on this matter we must distinguish clearly between love and hatred, because while hatred seeks to destroy its object, *love worketh no ill to his neighbor*

(Romans 13:10). So we shall return to this distinction momentarily.)

B The Seventh Commandment is the basis for godly marriage. (Adultery is generally understood to mean that one or both partners in a sexual relationship is married to someone other than the immediate partner. Married people must live chastely and temperately; but unmarried people are required to respect marriage too. In God's eyes, *they are no more twain, but one flesh* (Matthew 19:6). Godly marriage is a union, which stands as a symbol by which we can represent the union of Christ and the Church. God forbids the adulteration of marriage, in the form of fornication before marriage, just as much as He forbids having multiple partners after the union is consummated. We defer to Jesus again: *What God hath joined together let no man put asunder*. If God did not make the union then no one else can make it, no matter what civil laws say; and if God *did* make the union, then no one can break it either. The Bible makes no provisions for annulments, and the only Biblical justification for divorce is (sorry, ladies) adultery on the part of the woman before she was married. Civil laws cannot change God's mind about this, either.)

C All kinds of theft are forbidden by the Eighth Commandment. (Robbery in any form, whether petty larceny or grand theft, is forbidden. Also theft by deception (i.e. dishonest weights and measures) deprives someone of his property unjustly. Any trick or device, designed by one party to appropriate, or expropriate, the property of another unjustly, is stealing, even if the thief is a government that steals prosperity with an income tax. Now let us note two New Testament principles with regard to the 6th, 7th, and 8th Commandments. First, God forgives sins that we repent and forsake. Part of repentance may also include restitution; but the point is that Jesus died on the Cross so that we need not burn in hell for our sins. The other is that attitude is an important part of behavior. It is entirely possible, according to Jesus, to kill without taking someone's life, or to commit adultery without ever

entering a bedroom. It is also possible to steal without removing someone's possessions, and we need to spend a little time discussing these ideas too.)

III Most people make excuses for sins they don't want to repent and forsake. (At the very heart of the issue, human pride is the most obvious, and best concealed, culprit in all sins. We all want to feel good about ourselves, and the liberals even tell us that God *wants* us to feel good about who and what we are. Aside from the obvious error of failing to distinguish born-again believers from impenitent sinners, the liberal position fails to acknowledge the source of all evil, or that only *by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil* (Proverbs 16:6). Pride makes man want to feel good about himself in his un-regenerated condition. Therefore man resents the person who makes him feel bad about anything. His resentment turns to bitterness if he can't prevail over his adversary, and bitterness turns to hatred—the desire to destroy the object which we hate. Similarly, un-regenerated people are not content to have just one partner, they want what is forbidden to them, and if the prohibition cannot be evaded, then they lose respect for the authority that imposed it (God, in the case of the 7th Commandment), and for the arrangement by which it is enforced (the marriage). Rich men are seldom content to have more money than they need to meet their needs, they want to get more money than other rich men, and as long as there is one other man who is still richer, they will do what they must to get ahead. The power of God restrains the believer; the unbeliever is goaded on by his pride.)

A We should evaluate love and hate by the Golden Rule. (If we truly loved our neighbor as we love ourselves, then, how would we love him? Or, if we turned it around and loved ourselves the way we love our neighbor, what would that do to our self-esteem? We want what is best for ourselves, and the most noble among us would agree that God's definitions for good and bad should be ours as well. So, if we want God's best for our neighbor, we would do everything possible for the Grace of God to reach our neighbor as well. Petty quarrels about whom to include

or exclude from our circles of friends would become as meaningless as which child gets to watch what he wants to watch on TV, or which songs get sung or not in a church worship service. Our attitudes, arising as they do from our human pride, cause our problems in interpersonal relationships. Repenting one sin or another, or even one attitude or another, will only frustrate us if we don't repent pride as well. In a similar thought, if we loved ourselves only as much as we love our neighbors, there should be plenty of love left in our life for God. We dishonor God by only pretending to love Him, when in fact we only love ourselves too much. Pride is the culprit, the motive for everything that leads to murder, in thought or in action.)

B Everyone should measure their behavior by Romans 14:13. (Now let us apply the lessons of the Golden Rule to pride, with respect to the 7th Commandment. The pride of men is only part of the problem in sexual misconduct. Vanity in women is another part, and it is here that we should refer to the wisdom of Romans 14:13. (Let's read that verse together.) Now we would all recognize the error in tempting an alcoholic with liquor; we might even generalize the principle to say that we should not make a big deal out of whether or not to eat pork, or to go to church on Saturday or on Sunday. Can we also see that men are tempted to commit sin by women's immodesty? (Why should teenage girls worry about the size of their eyes when no man can see anything but their legs?) Of course, men must exercise enough discipline so as to avoid indulging sensual carnality; but let us be fair: there are too many cases in which women incite lust by their conduct and costumes (or lack of costumes). We must leave it to God to decide who has the greater sin; in the case of believers, we should avoid the sin altogether, and avoid the creation of, and exposure to, temptations to commit sin, too. Let us help one another to become better Christians, and not lay some stumbling-block in our brother's way.)

C Pride in positions or possessions motivates thieves. (There is a good, proper, and Biblical way to improve one's station in life. As God told Adam, *earn thy*

bread by the sweat of thy brow. We must not resent, and then hate, and then kill someone for succeeding better than we did; nor make laws about redistributing wealth so that others may *succeed* as well without *working* as well. Lying and cheating to improve our positions or possessions is equally dishonest. Again we point out that human pride is the culprit behind the sin, and behind every attitude that ends in the sin. Now the opposite of pride is humility, and our model for humility is Jesus, Who said, *the foxes have holes and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head* (Matthew 8:20). If our attitude is to imitate the behavior of Christ, then there is no place in our lives for the pride that comes from having more or better of anything than someone else has. Of course we should work for what we want in life until we earn the wherewithal to get it, or at least earn the goodwill of a benefactor who will share with us some of the excess of his own possessions; we must not try to take it from him by force or by deception. Also, we should note that if our attitude is other than to imitate the behavior of Christ, then we need to repent a lot more than the actions that reveal our attitudes.)

IV Some tricky social questions arise from reading the 10 Commandments with a New Testament perspective. (We are social creatures after all, and God has seen fit to leave us marooned in a very materialistic world, surrounded by people who will certainly do to us anything they can imagine, in the service of their own pride. So let us seek the wisdom of Scripture, and address a few of these questions, and hopefully, to become *wise as serpents and harmless as doves*, as Jesus told us in Matthew 10:16. We shall see at once just how far humanity has got away from the righteousness of Christ; and we shall see all the more clearly why we, as believers, must minister the Grace of God to those who need His mercy, and don't know it.)

A Are capital punishment and war outlawed by the Sixth Commandment? (The short answer is, No, they are not; but the explanation is a little more complicated. We can love ourselves perfectly without ever indulging any of the passions by

which most people live. We do so by disciplining ourselves to behave well, and by reading the Bible to learn what God requires of us and praying for His help to avoid sin. We should note that the person who has too little respect for God to receive His Grace puts himself outside that grace in deliberate rebellion against the sovereignty of God. So when the overt behaviors of sinners begin to injure the lives and damage the property of other people, society has a perfect right, even a Biblical duty, to protect their members against murderers, rapists, and thieves. (The Biblical duty arises from Deuteronomy 17.) Forgiveness must always be considered, especially where restitution can be accomplished; but capital punishment remains the one certain prevention of recidivism in the criminal justice system. Now war is an extension of protection against crimes to an entire cultural context. Just as people in a society have the right to expect governments to protect them against crimes by their neighbors, so governments have the right to expect their citizens to protect them against crimes by other governments. We must distinguish clearly between just and unjust wars: wars of conquest, or of genocide, are clearly violations of God's Law on the part of governments; but wars to *recover* what was conquered or to *stop* genocide are not cases of murder, but rather of a collective form of capital punishment. Certainly parents have God's authority to teach their children to be humble by punishing them; and by extension then, a godly government has the right to punish the ungodly government of another country in self-defense of the state.)

B Is conversion to Christianity grounds for divorce and remarriage? (Liberals contend that conversion to the faith justifies changing marriage partners; but they have very little respect for the Word of God in any context. In His comments on the matter, Jesus referred to Deuteronomy 24. Only adultery on the part of the woman could justify divorce; and in Matthew 19:8-9 He said, *Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.* (So we gather that God would prefer forgiveness.) Jesus

continued, *And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.* The Apostle Paul commented on the matter in 1 Corinthians 7: *And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife* (10-11). We should note that Calvin allowed for divorce in cases of desertion, on the grounds that a deserting husband might not live long enough to repent, and that the state of communications was such that the deserted wife might never know if her husband had died. That sounds fair to a woman, but it is still an unscriptural position. The Biblical pattern is one-to-the-customer, *until death doth them part.*)

C Can we ever justify clever evasions of rules and regulations? (More to the point, is it ever O.K. to cheat? There are certainly occasions when a traffic light is red for a long time after there is no traffic to yield to; and when reading a rule one way benefits a tax-collector but reading it another way benefits the tax-payer. In such cases we note that justice is ill-served by such laws, but that scofflaws ignore them at their own peril. Yet there are some much more immediate and pragmatic issues at stake here. For example, academic integrity is imperiled by students who cheat on exams. The student who takes a higher score than they deserve to have by cheating has stolen integrity from every honest student; and when he behaves as if he really deserved the higher marks he is a liar as well. The point is that the 8th Commandment forbids stealing anything from anyone, and the 9th Commandment forbids lying about it. Schools which allow such behavior to go on unpunished are complicit in the deception even if they are theological seminaries; and employers who smile indulgently at inflated grades and resumes only encourage the fraud, especially when the employer is the church and the cheater is the churchman's son.)

V The implications of the Commandments prohibit more than the words do. (As we have shown, attitude as well as behavior is regulated by the Word of God. That is to say, even if one were capable of following the letter of the Law in every case (and only Jesus was able to do that), he would still be guilty of murder if he ever expressed anything but love for his neighbor, and of adultery, if he ever gave his imagination license to fantasize about immodest women, or if the woman ever created the possibility for the fantasy. Similarly, pride of position and possession motivate theft by deception and fraud, just as much as by a literal theft of property.)

A So we should understand the Commandments as God's description of perfect holiness. (We have said enough, and heard enough, to understand that the perfection described by the 10 Commandments is an ideal, and an impossibly high standard to attain to. Yet they stand, as Commandments, and Commandments are to be obeyed. We are not permitted to excuse our misbehavior or our bad attitudes either. So we see the 10 Commandments as both a teacher, of sorts, and as a judge. As Teacher, the Decalogue reveals our sinfulness; as Judge, the Commandments condemn us all, for our failure to exhibit Godliness in all our attitudes and actions. So we should conclude, with the Apostle Paul, *O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?* (Romans 7:24). The answer is, Jesus shall.)

B We must use the Commandments as an opportunity to preach forgiveness, rather than an occasion for judgment. (Even if and especially when we are the ones who need to be forgiven, we ought not to despair: *All have sinned and come short of the Glory of God* (Romans 3:23); but *while we were yet sinners Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8). Surely we should evaluate our spiritual condition using the Bible as our standard of measure; and having done so we must conclude that we are neither perfect as we are, nor capable of becoming perfect by our own determination to do better. This is called repentance in the Bible. Having repented sin, we turn to God, *Who is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness*

(1 John 1:9). It is good for us to evaluate ourselves thus; thereby we realize how utterly unspiritual we are, and the Holy Spirit then renders us a little more like Christ than we ever were before. Also, if we ever come to understand just how desperately we need Jesus to be righteous for us, and how much we need God to forgive us for the parts of our lives that are not yet as holy as God is, we soon see some amazing changes in our attitudes toward other people, too. If we ever actually repent and forsake sin, we will understand how important it is for everyone else to do that too, and we stop accepting their excuses for not doing so (just as God stops accepting excuses). If we ever see ourselves to be as unworthy as God sees us all, then we understand a little better what forgiveness means, and we are better able to forgive someone else for their offenses against us, personally. And once we truly understand these things about our Heavenly Father, our excuses for *not* sharing His Grace with others start to disappear, and we start to become *useful* servants in His eternal Kingdom.)