

Answers to Sermon Notes

The Ten Words: The Ninth Word

Deuteronomy 5:20

8/14/22

1. Today we arrive at the 5th of the 6 commandments that God wrote with his own **finger** in stone as a comprehensive **summary** of his will for us regarding our relationships to one another (that is, his **gift** of human life), “You shall not bear **false witness** against your neighbor.”
2. First, let us remember that these 6 commandments comprehensively cover that relationship in this way:
 - a. (5th) The **Structures** of Human Life. “Honor your father and mother.”
 - b. (6th) The **Value** of Human Life. “You shall not murder.”
 - c. (7th) The **Furtherance** of Human Life. “You shall not commit adultery.”
 - d. (8th) The **Sustaining** of Human Life. “You shall not steal.”
 - e. (9th) The **Language** of Human Life. “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”
 - f. (10th) The **Enjoyment** of Human Life. “You shall not covet.”
3. As we live this way as human beings, human life and culture experiences the greatest possible level of **human flourishing** in this fallen world, by God’s common grace.
 - a. These commandments were **made** for **life** in this fallen world.
 - b. They are the definition of what it means to, “**love** your **neighbor** as yourself.”
4. As we examine this commandment, we see that it relates to three important concepts of life in this world: **Justice**, **Journalism**, and **Joy**.
 - a. The first two for **all** people; the third specifically for **God’s** people.
5. **Justice**: The immediate context of this commandment is that of a **court**.
 - a. This underscores that these commandments are indeed **intended** for **life** in this world.
 - b. **Wrong** things need to be made **right**, as much as that is possible.
 - i. God is a God of **justice**.
 - a. **Punishing** the wrongdoer and **protecting** the innocent. (Rom. 13)
 - b. He is **equally** concerned about both. (Prov. 17:15)
 - c. It is impossible for **life** to **flourish** when either is not happening.
 - ii. So, he gave strict **rules** regarding the testimony of **witnesses**. (Deut. 19:15)
 - a. And firm **punishments** for malicious ones. (19:16-21)
 - iii. This is also the reason for his warnings against **bribes**. (Ex. 23:6-8)
 - a. People’s testimony is often determined by their **self-interest**.
 - b. Even the interest of being **welcomed** in the right **group**. (Ex. 23:1-3)
 - iv. But, this same dynamic exists in **less official** courts.
 - a. In the **family**, at **work**, at **school**, at **church**, etc.
 1. Where wrong things are attempting to be **made right**.
 - b. To speak **truthfully** here, too, is just as important.
 1. For this is the **fabric** of the community.
 2. Lies do not **benefit** a child of God. (John 8:42-44)
 - c. No matter how **hard** the outcome, it is a central aspect of **loving** your neighbor as yourself to be a truthful witness.
6. **Journalism**: The broader context of this commandment is the court of **public** opinion.
 - a. One need not be convicted of **criminal** conduct in a court to be effectively convicted through **slander**.
 - i. The formal name for this in journalism is **libel**.

- ii. “Libel is a method of defamation expressed by print, writing, pictures, signs... that is **injurious** to a person's **reputation**, exposes a person to public hatred, contempt or ridicule, or injures a person in his/her business or profession.” (Legal Information Institute)
 - a. But, it happens all around us in both formal and **informal** ways.
 - b. And God **hates** it.
 - b. **Slander** appears in many of the vice lists in the New Testament. (Rom. 1:28-32, Col. 3:5-10)
 - i. And is closely connected to **gossip**.
 - a. An informal journalist, who is usually not **accountable**.
 - ii. **Slander** is a hidden method of **killing**. (Prov. 10:18, Psalm 31:11-13)
 - a. and is very **effective**. (Prov. 18:8, 16:28)
 - c. So, **God** has made it very **clear** what he will do to slanderers. (Rom. 1:32, Col. 3:6, Prov. 19:5)
 - i. As did **David**, the man after God’s own heart. (Psalm 101:5)
 - d. And while one may **deny** that what one is doing is **slander** or gossip, if it is:
 - i. **Negative** or accusatory, (James 4:11)
 - ii. Not objectively **proven**, (II Cor. 13:1)
 - iii. Not intended to build **up** but rather to tear **down**, (Eph. 4:29)
 - iv. it **IS** slanderous gossip,
 - v. It **IS** deadly to that person, and
 - vi. It **IS** deadly to that community. (Prov. 16:28)
 - vii. **Lies** are the language of death; the **truth** is the language of life.
 - viii. It was this way from the **beginning** (Gen. 3:4-5) and will be this way to the **end**.
 - e. The only righteous **practice** for righteous people is to **refuse** to participate.
 - i. Only then, will the broader **effects** of this kind of hateful activity **cease**. (Prov. 26:20)
 - f. The **catechism** summarizes it this way. (HC, Q&A 112)
7. **Joy**: Having **evil** spoken of you for the sake of Christ is the **clearest** sign of your salvation.
- a. It is what was done to **Christ**.
 - b. It is what is done to those who are **in Christ**. (Mt. 5:11-12)
 - c. So, though experiencing this kind of slander is a kind of ongoing **death**, it evidences a genuine and eternal **life**.
8. Let us determine from this moment never to have anything to do with bearing **false** witness, and to consciously allow the experience of such things for the sake of Christ to create in us a **joy** that far exceeds the **pain**.