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OBLIGATIONS TOWARD FELLOW-MEN – IN THE DECALOGUE.

– *EX. 20:12-17.* – *JULY 20.* –

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." – Mat. 19:9.

AS THE FIRST four commands of the Decalogue note man's first obligation and responsibility to his Creator, so the remaining six mark out his responsibilities toward his fellow-creatures. We can, undoubtedly, gain some valuable lessons in the study of these commands given to Israel at Mount Sinai, constituting the basis of the Law Covenant: nevertheless, it is proper, especially in view of the gross misunderstanding prevalent upon the subject, that in considering these commands Christians should remember that they were not given to them, but to the Jews; that as we have a New Covenant so we have a new law as the basis of that Covenant, as well as a new Mediator. Old things have passed away and all things have become new to the new creature in Christ Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile. The profitable lessons we may learn through the study of these commands given to others, are of the same kind as the lessons we learn in studying the various types and ceremonies of that Jewish Covenant, which the Apostle assures us were but shadows of good things coming after them. (Heb. 10:1.) We have the good things, the spiritual things, the higher things; nevertheless, we learned to appreciate these higher things the more by noticing their types and shadows and by contrasting them with the higher things. For instance, altho we study the things written in the law concerning the typical day of atonement, and its sacrificial ceremonies, etc., we do not do so with a view to repeating those sacrifices of bulls and of goats which can never take away sin; but with a view to seeing the more clearly the full force and meaning of the better sacrifices, the anti-typical, which do take away the sin of the world. So with the Ten Commandments. God would not address these to any member of the house of sons, adopted into his family and

begotten of his spirit, because they would be inappropriate to such, and really be a denial on God's part that they had become sons or that they had his spirit; for "If any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his," and certainly the man begotten of the holy spirit, possessed of the mind of Christ, would no more need to be told that he should do no murder, that he should not steal, etc., than that he should not take God's name profanely. None of these things would anyone begotten of the spirit of God be disposed to do; and, hence, it would not have been appropriate in God to have made that Jewish Law the basis of the Covenant into which he has invited the Church to enter, as children, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ their Lord, if so be that they suffer with him.

The first of these commandments taught the Jew the sacredness of the family relationship – that the children should honor the parents, which implies that the parents should not only so instruct their children, but that, so far as possible, they should strive to live before them such lives as would reasonably call forth such respect, obedience, honor. A promise of long life is attached to this commandment. We may esteem on general principles that children obedient to their parents would be the more inclined to be obedient to the laws of their country and to the laws of their Creator, and that such obedience would be favorable to old age. But we are not certain that there was not more than this intended. The words, "That thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee," would seem to connect this promise with Israel's possession of the land of promise. And if we have reasoned logically that obedience to parents would lead to obedience to God, we may reason reversely that Israel's disobedience to God which resulted in their various captivities, taking them out of the land of promise, and finally in their **[R3045 : page 218]** complete banishment from that land, means that this lesson of obedience to parents was not well learned, and that this reward of continuing in their own land was therefore taken from them.

If we would seek a higher meaning for this commandment, under the law of love, its first meaning to the Lord's people would be that they should honor their Father in heaven, and the Abrahamic Covenant under which they have been begotten to the new nature. (Gal. 4:22-31); and such honor to God and such respect for their covenant with him are certainly the terms upon which they may hope for a share in the heavenly Canaan with its eternal life. And in proportion as God's people reverence him and honor him in word and in deed the influence of such lives upon their children should be weighty, and should call forth their respect. They should seek to rule their own homes in love, remembering, nevertheless, the Lord's admonition, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household." They need not be surprised if, despite their every effort to do good and properly to inculcate duty, the influences of the world and its false views of matters, should make their homes very different from what they would prefer.

"Thou shalt do no murder" – the Revised Version rendering – is much to be preferred to the Common Version, "Thou shalt not kill." Murder is always wrong; killing is sometimes right, sometimes duty. The life of the lower animals was given to man according to his necessities (Gen. 9:3), but we deprecate that which is misnamed sport – the destruction of birds and beasts and fishes wantonly – for no good purpose, but merely to gratify a savage desire to take life. That this command was not intended to prohibit the taking of human life under certain circumstances is evident from the fact that the same law made provision for the killing of murderers.

To the Church, the new creatures in Christ, a still higher law governs on this subject. Our law of Love, the New Command, covers it completely. He who loves his neighbor will surely not murder him. But our Teacher gave a still higher thought respecting this feature of the law, and the way in which we, his followers, should view it, when he declared that for one brother to have hatred toward another was to have the murder spirit – the spirit which, under certain conditions, might lead to murder. According to this definition the person who

angrily wishes that another were dead commits murder in his heart. On the contrary, the spirit of love wishes well to the neighbor – yea, even tho he be an enemy, desires that he may come into harmony with the Lord, and ultimately attain life everlasting, and so desires these things as to seek by word and act to render him any assistance possible.

The third of these commands, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," was greatly magnified by our Lord's declaration to the effect that evil desires, tho not accomplished for lack of opportunity, were as really violations of this commandment as tho the act had been committed. How the magnifying glass of the Law of Love enlarges and intensifies the words, the acts, the thoughts, of life! There is in this a lesson of purity of thought which should be profitable to all the Lord's people; for altho we are not in the flesh but in the spirit, as new creatures, and in our trial or judgment, nevertheless, the new mind deals with and operates through the mortal body, and must continually strive to bring it into the fullest subjection possible. Hence, it is valuable for us to know just how the Lord esteems such matters, that we may put the greater guard upon the very thoughts and intentions of our hearts. We may be sure that it was not of accident that the Apostle wrote respecting the wisdom from above, "first pure." Our own purity, in the sense of our justification by faith, comes before we can have any standing or relationship with the Lord or be begotten into his family; and this same purity which is made the foundation of the new life, and given to us reckonedly, must be appreciated by us and lived up to as closely as possible. And the clearer view we get as to what constitutes impurity in the Lord's sight, the better will we be able so to regulate and govern our mortal bodies, our acts, our words, our very thoughts, as to bring them into as close conformity to the will of God as possible.

Another thought in connection with this command, is given to us as new creatures. We have been betrothed to our Lord, and to him as our Bridegroom we owe full allegiance – whether we regard this from the standpoint of the Church as a whole, or from the standpoint of each individual united with the Lord. From this standpoint, as the Lord's

betrothed we are to be uncontaminated, unadulterated – separate from the world. "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world;" "I have chosen you out of the world."

The fourth of these commands, "Thou shalt not steal," is of much greater depth and breadth than many are inclined to suppose. In the light of the New Covenant and its law of love, stealing may properly be understood to apply to the defrauding of a neighbor, friend or enemy, in any manner – depriving him of his rights or liberties as well as of his money or property. It would apply also to the stealing of a good name from another, as Shakespeare has pointed out. This command would be infringed, in the light of the Law of Love, by any transaction in which a neighbor would be worsted in a bargain, provided anything had been secreted or any deception calculated to warp his judgment in the making of the bargain had been practiced. From this standpoint there is a great deal of "respectable" stealing done today; – not only by misrepresentation of the goods by shopkeepers and by untruthful advertisements, but also amongst dealers of stock exchanges who, directly or indirectly, throw out wrong information to mislead, and by others in fraudulent organizations whose financial standing, etc., is often grossly misrepresented to enable the organizers to steal from those who become the purchasers of the stock at more than its real value.

The Law of Love is very difficult to apply to business under present conditions; but it always insists upon absolute fairness and truthfulness in respect to all statements made. It is not incumbent upon us, however, after making known the facts in any matter, **[R3045 : page 219]** to either directly or indirectly force upon others our opinions or judgment in respect to the value of the facts explained. We may safely allow other men to use their judgment, while we use ours, when we have told them frankly the truth in regard to any matter.

The fifth of these commands, altho it does not directly prohibit false statements, does necessarily prohibit any statement which would

mislead a neighbor to his injury, and herein we see a superior wisdom in the light of this command. I might make a declaration that at a certain hour I will do a certain thing. I am at full liberty to change my mind and not to do that thing, provided my conduct in this shall not injure my neighbor in any sense or degree. To whatever extent our testimony on any subject would be inclined to lead friends or neighbors or anyone to take any course which would be injurious to themselves or others, and which they would not otherwise have taken, to that extent we are bound under the Law of Love. We may do all the good we please to a neighbor, but we may do him no injury. This is the spirit of the Apostle's injunction that we say, "If the Lord will" we will do thus and so. We are to consider the Lord's will in all we undertake, and his will in brief, is that we honor him and do good, not evil to fellow men.

False witness applies to the telling of lies, but it goes deeper than this and applies to any misrepresentation, whether it be by direct statement or indirectly by such a statement as would permit a wrong inference to be drawn. Indeed, amongst refined people this subterfuge, by which they palliate their consciences, and at the same time gratify their spiteful hearts, is very common. One may even bear false witness by the nod of his head, by the shrugging of his shoulder, or by silence – if a misstatement be made in such a connection that silence might be understood to mean consent. If a Jew, a member of the house of servants under Moses, the Mediator of the Law Covenant, was required to be particular upon this point, how much more particular should all be who essay to be members of the house of sons, under the New Covenant and the New Mediator! Does not the New Covenant Law of Love go still deeper on this point? It surely does. It prohibits in specific terms, not only the speaking of untruths in respect to a neighbor, but the speaking of anything concerning him that would be to his discredit, even tho it were true – unless under certain circumstances which Love could fully endorse – if the testimony were required by a court of law, or if the testimony were necessary for the protection of another from injury. And even in such cases as little of

derogatory truth as possible should be uttered, and it only in love. The Apostle's word on this subject is, "Speak evil of no man."

There is no point, or feature, of the entire Law of Love, as it bears upon our relationship to fellow-creatures, that needs more of our attention than this point. It seems difficult for Christians to learn thoroughly the Master's lessons, that, if they have anything unpleasant to say respecting a brother or sister, any criticism of the private life or affairs to offer, it should be offered to him or her alone and not to others.

Perhaps on no other score does the Adversary succeed so well in doing mischief amongst the Lord's people – in planting roots of bitterness, producing misunderstanding, anger, malice, hatred, strife and other works of the devil. Let us permit love to do her perfect work in this relationship to our fellows.

A difference is to be observed in respect to criticisms of doctrines publicly uttered. The criticism of an error should be as publicly made as the error was publicly set forth, if it be of importance. The thing then to determine would be our liberties and responsibilities, and we might have neither. But if we possessed both our criticisms should be only in love, not in boastfulness but in humility; desiring only to serve the truth and the brethren. Humility will suggest, too, that we be sure we are right before proceeding to criticize. Even then some points of truth can generally be approved while the points of error are being criticized.

The sixth of these commandments, and the last of the whole, deals with covetousness. As the last it stands in an important place, and when fully appreciated **[R3046 : page 219]** is seen to have a bearing upon all the other commandments. Covetousness implies discontent. It, therefore, generally lies at the bottom of slander, false witness, theft, adultery, murder, and disobedience to parents. Indeed, in some respects we may suppose that it lies at the bottom of any disloyalty to

God also. Was it not covetousness on the part of Satan which first led him to disloyalty and sin?

In becoming new creatures in Christ we are supposed to eradicate from our hearts everything that could in any sense of the word develop into covetousness – by the consecration of our wills, our hearts, to the Lord, by the acceptance of his will as instead of our own. From this standpoint, as the Apostle declares, "Godliness with contentment [absence of covetousness] is great gain." Indeed, viewed from the proper standpoint of the new creature, we have nothing to covet, because in becoming the Lord's we have become joint-heirs with our Redeemer to all the riches of divine grace, so that the Apostle could say, "All things are yours...and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

But let us as new creatures, remember that covetousness can come into a heart otherwise pure, and defile the whole, as we see illustrated in the case of Satan, so that of all the things which we need to guard against most carefully this is one of the chief. All the graces of the spirit are opposed to covetousness – meekness, gentleness, brotherly kindness, love, all forbid that we should covet the things of our brethren or the things of the world. Rather, thankfulness should so fill our hearts – gratitude for the manifold mercies and blessings already received, that there will be no room for a covetous thought. True, the Apostle, in our Common Version, is made to say, "Covert earnestly the best gifts" (I Cor. 12:31), but it would be a great mistake to suppose that the Apostle taught that the Lord's people were to covet positions of influence in the Church. We are indeed to desire **[R3046 : page 220]** to have, to enjoy and to use in the Lord's service, as many talents and gifts as possible, but we find the very reverse of the Apostle's thought and teaching that we should covet the honors or possessions of one another. This seems to be a danger point with many, and when we remember that it has proven to be the wreck-rock for many, it behooves us to be extremely careful to covet merely the Lord's favor and the gifts and talents by which we can best serve one another and not ourselves.

THESE MANY YEARS.

– DEUT. 8:2. –

"These many years! What lessons they unfold
Of grace and guidance through the wilderness,
From the same God that Israel of old
In the Shekinah glory did possess.
How faithful he, through all my griefs and fears
And constant murmurings, these many years!

"God of the Covenant! From first to last,
From when I stood within that sprinkled door
And o'er my guilt the avenging angel passed,
Thy better angel has gone on before;
And naught but goodness all the way appears,
Unmerited and free, these many years!

"Thy presence wrought a pathway through the sea;
Thy presence made the bitter water sweet;
And daily have thy hands prepared for me
Sweet, precious morsels – lying at my feet.
'Twas but to stoop and taste the grace that cheers,
And start refreshed, through all these many years!

"What time I thirsted and earth's streams were dry,
What time I wandered and my hope was gone,
Thy hand has brought a pure and full supply,
And, by a loving pressure, lured me on.
How oft that hand hath wiped away my tears
And written 'Pardoned!' all these many years!

"And what of discipline thy love ordained
Fell ever gently on this heart of mine;
Around its briars was my spirit trained
To bring forth fruits of righteousness divine;

Wisdom in every check, and love appears
In every stroke throughout these many years!

"Lord, what I might have been my spirit knows –
Rebellious, petulant, and apt to stray:
Lord, what I am, in spite of flesh and foes,
I owe to grace that kept me in the way.
Thine be the glory! Merit disappears
As back I look upon these many years.

"Thine be the glory! Thou shalt have the praise
For all thy dealings, to my latest breath;
A daily Ebenezer will I raise,
And sing Salvation through the vale of death –
To where the palm, the golden harp appears,
There to rehearse thy love through endless years."

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