

PASTOR'S NOTES. Thoughts on the nature of Sin, part 5.

When your children ask you in time to come, "What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the LORD our God has commanded you?" then you shall say to your children,

"We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. The LORD displayed before our eyes great and awesome signs and wonders against Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his household. He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors.

Then the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case. If we diligently observe this entire commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, we will be in the right."

(Deuteronomy 6:20-25 NRSV)

In the previous articles I offered this definition of **SIN: the fracturing or breaking of a relationship**. Does this mean I reject John's definition of sin as *lawlessness* (1 John 3:4)? No, because as the passage above reminds us, the law was a gift from God for our benefit. This is why Jesus is able to say "the Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27) and be understood. Do we ever stop to think that God could have been completely arbitrary in His commandments, but instead, even in the oldest parts of the Bible, He is acting for our good. This is different than most other religion's views of divine, and I am amazed at how many Christians don't seem to realize this.

So it seems right to me to revisit the commandments with our "relational definition" in mind. We find them in Exodus 20:3-17 and Deuteronomy 5:7-21. Let's use this popular summary:

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| 1. You shall have no other gods before Me | 6. You shall not murder |
| 2. You shall make no idols | 7. You shall not commit adultery |
| 3. You shall not take the Name in vain | 8. You shall not steal |
| 4. Keep the Sabbath day holy | 9. You shall not bear false witness |
| 5. Honor your father and mother | 10. You shall not covet |

We generally see the first four commandments as pertaining to our relationship with God, and the last six as pertaining to our relationships with other people. This is not exactly the case. In the previous articles I have tried to show that breaking any of the last six commandments fractures our relationship not only with the individual, but with God. On the one hand, this is obvious because God gave us the command and we have disobeyed it. But we can also say that hurting another person is a direct slap at the One who forgave them and sealed the forgiveness with His life.

So commandments 6-9 speak to doing no harm to another. Commandment 5 is similar, but it is framed more positively. When we realize that the primary audience of these commands were the adult males of the community, this command would have been mostly about reiterating the responsibility adults have toward their elderly parents. So all of these express the idea of loving your neighbor. Notice that commandment 10 takes it a step further: we are to not covet anything that (or anyone who) belongs to another. When Jesus says "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery

with her in his heart (Matthew 5:27-28), He is not saying something radically new; this was already part of the commandments. Even back then they recognized that envious or disparaging thoughts already fracture our relationship, even if we never make them public. I can't recall anything in the rest of the law (Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy) that tries to regulate covetousness, but even if the neighbor never knows our ill intent, God knows, and our relationship with Him suffers.

What about commandment 4: to keep the Sabbath? By Jesus' time this had developed into an elaborate system of rules for what you were not allowed to on the day. I have already mentioned Jesus saying in Mark 2:27 that the Sabbath was made *for us*. Is Jesus proposing something new? Again, if we remember that the primary audience of the commandments were the adult males of the community, imagine how they heard this:

But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

(Deuteronomy 5:14-15 NRSV)

To me, the Sabbath here sounds less like a commandment restricting me from working, and more like a command to not overwork others. In other words, because you were delivered from slavery, don't treat others as slaves. It was not typical for a culture of the time to have any rules about the treatment of slaves and others in a man's household. Here again, obeying the commandment maintains our relationships with God and with other people.

Commandment 3 is about misusing the name of the Lord, and while that can mean using the name carelessly, more likely it means to use God's name for our own purposes. To claim God's blessing on our actions or ideas without at least a measure of humility is definitely a fracturing of our relationship to God, but it is also likely to be reflecting in our treatment of others:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’”

(Matthew 7:21-23 NRSV)

Finally, the first two commandments are about our devotion to God over any other. And what would be the alternative? A trust in our own solipsistic worldview, or choosing another God who commands arbitrarily for His own purposes, instead of One Who “lays down His life” (John 10:11; 10:15; 15:12-13) for us... As Peter said, “*Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life*” (John 6:68). It sounds like a no-brainer to me.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'Ken' written in a cursive style.