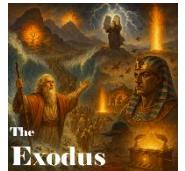




The Horizontal Relationships: Loving Your Neighbor as Yourself

Exodus 20:12-26
(Lesson #21)



Thoughts and observations around the review of the archeological evidence from Jabal al-Laws:

20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

In the fifth word, Yahweh transitions from the "vertical" focus of the first four commandments (our direct duty to God) to the "horizontal" focus (our duties toward fellow man).

It is significant that honoring parents is placed first in the horizontal list; it suggests that respect for earthly authority in the home is the training ground for respecting divine authority.

The Hebrew verb for "honor" is **Kabad**, which literally means "to be heavy" or "to give weight to." To honor one's parents is to treat their position with gravity and significance, rather than lightly or with contempt.

While the application of this command shifts as a child matures—moving from functional obedience (Eph 6:1) to lifelong honor and care—the obligation remains constant.

This is the first commandment accompanied by a specific promise: a sustained life within the land of inheritance. This "long life" refers not just to individual longevity, but to the corporate stability and endurance of the nation.

If the family unit collapses through the dishonoring of parents, the nation's stay in the Promised Land would be cut short.

The Penalty of Disobedience

The gravity of this command is underscored by the judicial penalties found later in the Mosaic Law. Under the Old Covenant, **striking** (Exodus 21:15) or **cursing** (Exodus 21:17) a parent were **capital offenses**, punishable by death.

“Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death.” (Exodus 21:15 ESV)

“Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.” (Exodus 21:17 ESV)

In the ancient Near Eastern context, "cursing" (**qalal**) meant more than just using bad language; it meant to treat someone as "trifling" or to repudiate their authority entirely.

By treating the source of their life with such violence or disdain, the rebellious child effectively cut themselves off from the community of the living.

The New Covenant Perspective

The Apostle Paul reaffirms this in Ephesians 6:1–3:

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” (Eph. 6:1–3, ESV)

Paul bridges the Old and New Testaments by labeling it "the first commandment with a promise." While the "land" now translates to the broader sphere of God's providential care in the world, the moral principle remains.

Jesus provides the definitive New Testament interpretation in Mark 7:9–13:

“And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, ‘Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban’’ (that is, given to God)—then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”” (Mark 7:9–13, ESV)

Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for the practice of Corban (an offering dedicated to God), which they used as a legal loophole to avoid financially supporting their aging parents.

Jesus clarifies that true "honor" includes tangible, material support for parents in their old age. For the New Covenant believer, honoring parents is not a "tradition of men" to be bypassed by outward piety, but a fundamental expression of a **heart transformed by the Gospel**.

Vs 13 "You shall not murder.

This command is famously brief—only two words in the original Hebrew—yet it serves as the foundation for the sanctity of human life. It is vital to distinguish between "killing" and "murdering." The Hebrew verb used here, **Ratsach**, refers specifically to the intentional, malicious taking of an innocent human life.

The Torah differentiates this from other forms of killing, such as capital punishment, self-defense, or "just" warfare. The Bible recognizes that while all life belongs to God, not all killing is a violation of this law.

For instance, the provision of Cities of Refuge (Num 35) offered a legal safe haven for those who caused a death through "manslaughter" (unintentional killing), proving that God accounts for the **heart's intent**.

Because man is made in the **Imago Dei** (the Image of God), to murder a human being is to strike at the **image of the Creator Himself**.

The gravity of murder is reflected in its penalty:

This judicial response was not an act of "murder" by the state, but a requirement of justice based on the Noahic Covenant:

“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed” (Genesis 9:6).

Under the Mosaic Law, the shedding of innocent blood "**polluted the land**," and only the blood of the murderer could cleanse it (Num 35:33).

The New Covenant Elevation:

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus performs a "radical" reinterpretation of this command. He does not merely prohibit the physical act; He exposes the spiritual seed:

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire." (Matthew 5:21-22 ESV)

Jesus declares that "everyone who is angry with his brother" or harbors contempt (**Raca**) is liable to the same judgment as the murderer.

The Apostle John echoes this:

"Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." (1 John 3:15, ESV)

By making this connection, Jesus claims an authority higher than that of a mere teacher; He speaks as the Lawgiver Himself.

He reveals that while the Old Covenant focused on the hand, the New Covenant focuses on the heart. For the believer, "not murdering" is not just about refraining from violence—it is about the **active presence of love and the removal of malice**. Jesus here performs an amazing reinterpretation for the New Testament believer.

Vs 14 "You shall not commit adultery.

In the Old Testament, marriage was far more than a social arrangement; it was viewed as a **sacred covenant**—a "binding contract" witnessed and protected by God Himself.

Adultery was categorized as a "great sin" (Gen 20:9) because it violated this covenantal bond and struck at the very foundation of the family unit, which is the building block of the theocratic nation.

The Hebrew term for adultery, **Na'aph**, refers specifically to sexual relations between a married person and someone other than their spouse. By prohibiting this act, God was not merely regulating behavior, but protecting the integrity of the home and the lineage of His people.

The Penalty of Disobedience

The gravity of this sin in the Old Covenant is seen in its judicial consequence:

"If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death." (Leviticus 20:10, ESV)

This capital penalty served as a "purging of evil" from Israel (Deut 22:22). It reflects the biblical truth that sexual sin is not a private matter; it is a **breach of communal holiness** and a **betrayal of the neighbor**.

The New Covenant Transformation

As He did with the prohibition of murder, Jesus takes this commandment and radically internalizes it in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus declares:

"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 lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."
(Matt 5:27-28, ESV)

Jesus is not merely redefining, he is adding a new law, in fact one might argue, He is revealing the "Law of Christ" (I Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2) where the heart is the primary battlefield. The shift is profound: the Old Covenant demanded restraint of the body, but the New Covenant demands transformation of the spirit.

This is the fulfillment of the promise in Jeremiah 31:33:

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people." (Jeremiah 31:33, ESV)

In the New Covenant, the Law is no longer an external "check" on behavior, but is written on the heart.

By reinterpreting the Decalogue with such absolute authority, Jesus once again reveals His divine identity as the Lawgiver of Sinai.

Vs 15 "You shall not steal."

While this appears to be a straightforward prohibition against taking what belongs to another, the scope of this law in the Old Covenant was comprehensive. It wasn't just about physical theft; it protected the "economic dignity" of the neighbor.

This included a prohibition against "rigged measurements"—using dishonest scales to cheat customers (Proverbs 11:1)—and the "theft" of a worker's livelihood by withholding wages (Leviticus 19:13).

The Hebrew verb for steal, **Ganaub**, implies a **"stealthy"** taking of property, but it also carries the theological weight of violating **God's sovereign distribution of resources**. Since the Earth is the Lord's, to steal from a neighbor is to reject God's provision and attempt to bypass His timing and will for our lives.

The Penalty of Disobedience: Restitution over Incarceration

Unlike many modern legal systems that focus on imprisonment, the Old Covenant judicial system focused on restitution. The goal was to make the victim **"whole"** again. The penalty depended on the circumstances: if a man stole livestock and sold it, he was required to pay **back four to five times the value** (Exodus 22:1).

If the animal was **recovered alive**, he **paid back double** (Exodus 22:4).

However, the Law reserved its **harshest penalty** for **"man-stealing"** (**kidnapping for slavery**), which was a capital offense:

"Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death."
(Ex 21:16, ESV).

This demonstrates that while property is sacred, the value of a human person is infinite.

The New Covenant Perspective

In the New Covenant, the Apostle Paul takes this command and transforms it **from a negative prohibition into a positive lifestyle of generosity**:

"Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need." (Ephesians 4:28, ESV)

In (Ephesians 4:28), the command is not just "don't take," but "give." Paul argues that the thief shouldn't just stop stealing; he should labor with his hands so that he has *"something to share with anyone in need."*

Under the New Covenant, the heart of the "non-thief" is not measured by what he refrains from taking, but by what he is **willing to give**. This reflects the **character of Christ**. (2 Corinthians 8:9).

For the believer, the eighth commandment is fulfilled when we move from being takers to contributors in the Kingdom of God.

Vs 16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Yahweh next articulates the **ninth commandment**: **"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."** While we often summarize this as "do not lie," the Hebrew terminology is specifically judicial.

The phrase **"bear false witness"** refers to a witness standing in a formal legal assembly. In ancient Israel, where forensic science—such as DNA, fingerprints, or video—did not exist, the entire weight of the justice system rested on the integrity of the spoken word.

A conviction required the testimony of at least two or three witnesses (Deut 19:15). Therefore, a "false witness" wasn't just lying; they were **weaponizing the justice system**.

To give false testimony was to commit a form of **"legal murder"** or **"judicial theft,"** using the name of God (before whom all oaths were taken) to destroy another person.

The Penalty of Disobedience: Mirror Justice

The penalty for this offense was **uniquely severe but perfectly balanced**:

"If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days. The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." (Deut. 19:16–21, ESV)

According to Deuteronomy 19:16–21, if a witness was found to be lying, the judges were to **"do to him as he had meant to do to his brother."**

If the false witness intended for the accused to be executed, the witness was executed; if they intended for the accused to be fined, the witness paid the fine. This **"lex talionis"** (law of retaliation) was designed to **"purge**

the evil" from the midst of the nation. It ensured that the risk of lying was exactly equal to the harm intended, forcing every witness to **"hear and fear."**

The New Covenant Perspective

In the New Covenant, the application of this command expands from the courtroom to every facet of human interaction. The Apostle Paul instructs believers:

"Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another." (Eph. 4:25, ESV)

We are to *"put away falsehood"* and *"speak the truth"* because we are *"members one of another."*

Under the New Covenant, lying is not just a legal violation; it is a **contradiction of our new nature**:

"Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." (Col. 3:9–10, ESV)

Since we are being renewed into the image of Christ—deception is a return to the "old self" (Col. 3:9–10).

For the believer, the ninth commandment is not just about **avoiding perjury**; it is about **reflecting the character of a God who cannot lie**. Truth-telling becomes the "social glue" of the Body of Christ.

Vs 17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

Yahweh concludes the Decalogue (Ten Words). While the previous commandments focused primarily on outward actions, this command shifts entirely to the **internal world of human desire**.

The Hebrew word used here is **Chamad**, which describes a strong craving or a "pleasantness" that draws the heart toward an object. It is important to distinguish between a healthy aspiration (like wanting to work hard for a nice home) and covetousness.

Coveting is the disordered desire for that which specifically belongs to another. It is the belief that one's happiness is dependent upon possessing someone else's property, spouse, or status.

Because this sin is purely internal, it acts as the **"root"** or **"genesis"** of all other sins. By the time a hand reaches out to steal or a tongue moves to lie, the tenth commandment has already been broken in the heart.

The Penalty of Disobedience: The Judicial Silence

A fascinating detail of the Mosaic Law is that there is no human court-ordered penalty for coveting. While there are clear punishments for theft or murder, no earthly judge can *"subpoena"* a thought or fine a feeling.

However, when coveting "conceives" and gives birth to action, the **consequences are devastating**. A prime example is Achan (**Joshua 7**), whose confession follows a lethal progression:

20 And Achan answered Joshua, "Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did: 21 when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver,

and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath.” (Josh. 7:20-21, ESV).

Achan’s internal craving for the silver and gold led to Israel’s defeat and eventually his own execution.

The New Covenant Perspective

The New Testament does not treat covetousness as a "lesser" or "merely mental" sin; it elevates its seriousness to the highest level:

“But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.” (Ephesians 5:3 ESV)

The Apostle Paul groups it alongside **"sexual immorality and all impurity,"** stating it should not even be named among the saints. Furthermore, Paul identifies the theological core of this sin in Colossians 3:5, where he calls covetousness idolatry.

To covet is to tell God that **He is not enough**, and that an object or a person is more necessary for our joy **than He is.**

For the New Covenant believer, the antidote to coveting is not just willpower, **but contentment:**

“Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” (Hebrews 13:5 ESV)

This concludes the giving of the ten commandments. Although we are very familiar with these, I hope you have seen something or considered something that you have never seen or considered before.

Vs 18-19 Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off 19 and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die."

After the delivery of the Ten Commandments, the narrative shifts from the content of the Law to the terrifying atmosphere of its delivery.

As Yahweh descended upon Mount Sinai, the people were witnesses to a **sensory "overload"** of divine power: the crashing of thunder, flashes of lightning, a smoke-filled peak, and a trumpet blast that grew increasingly louder.

The response of the Israelites was not one of comfort, but of profound dread; they **"trembled and stood far off."** This reaction validates the warning Moses had previously given the people in Exodus 19:21–25, where they were cautioned not to "break through" the limits set around the mountain.

Now, having experienced **the raw holiness of God**, the people have no desire to draw near. They plead with Moses, saying, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die."

They recognized that the gap between a holy God and a sinful people was too vast to cross without a **representative.**

Theological Significance: The Great Mediator

In this moment, Moses officially takes on the role of the Mediator. The people effectively resign their right to direct communication with God, choosing instead to receive the Word through a human middleman. This is not merely a historical anecdote but a profound "type" or shadow of things to come.

While Moses served as the mediator of the Old Covenant, his ministry was designed to point forward to the **"one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"** (1 Timothy 2:5).

Unlike the Israelites who stood "far off" in terror, the New Covenant believer is invited to **"draw near with confidence to the throne of grace"** (Heb. 4:16) because our Mediator has already stood in the fire for us.

This terrifying "Theophany" (a visible manifestation of God) was intended to instill a lasting "fear of the Lord" that would keep them from sinning, as Moses explains in the very next verse.

Vs 20 Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin."

In response to their terror, Moses offers a statement that seems contradictory at first glance, but Moses is distinguishing between slavish fear (dread of punishment or death) and filial fear (holy awe and reverence).

He commands them to abandon the paralyzing terror that makes them want to flee from God's presence, but encourages the sustained **"fear of the Lord"** that serves as a moral compass.

Moses explains that this terrifying display was a divine "test" The goal was not to consume the Israelites, but to "burn" the reality of God's holiness into their memories.

This reverence was intended to be a **preventative measure**—a **spiritual hedge**—against sin. When a person truly perceives the weight and power of the Lawgiver, the **temptation to break His Law loses its appeal**.

Theologically, this verse shows that the Law was never meant to be merely a set of cold rules on stone; it was to be accompanied by an encounter with the Living God. The "fear" Moses speaks of is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7).

In the economy of God, the Law creates a "boundary of awe." While the Israelites wanted Moses to be their mediator because they were afraid to die, God used their fear to show them how to live.

Vs 21 The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

The scene concludes with a **striking visual contrast**: the nation of Israel "stood far off," retreating in apprehension, while **"Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was."**

Once again, this moment highlights the unique, heroic nature of Moses's role as the mediator. While the people were paralyzed by the outward displays of smoke, fire, and noise, Moses was compelled to enter the very center of the storm.

The **"thick darkness"** represents the hiddenness and mystery of God. Even when God reveals Himself, He remains "veiled," signifying that His full glory is too intense for human eyes to behold directly.

Moses's willingness to step into the darkness demonstrates a level of **intimacy and trust** that set him apart from the rest of the congregation. He did not go because he was fearless, **but because he was summoned**.

Vs 22-23 And the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the people of Israel: 'You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven. 23 You shall not make gods of silver to be with me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold.

Following the terrifying theophany, Yahweh provides Moses with a summation of the requirements for proper worship.

He begins by reminding Israel of the unique nature of their experience: **"You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven."**

This is a significant theological claim; while other ancient religions claimed their gods lived in statues or temples, Yahweh emphasizes that His voice came from "heaven"—a place beyond human reach and control.

Because the Israelites "saw" the unseeable God only through His **Word** and His **Voice**, they were strictly forbidden from attempting to capture Him in physical form.

The prohibition against "gods of silver" and "gods of gold" is a direct application of the Second Commandment. Having heard the true and living God, any attempt to manufacture an image would not only be a lie but a demotion of the Creator to the level of a mere commodity.

Theological Significance: The Invisible Reality In the New Covenant, this reaches its climax in Jesus Christ, who is the *"image of the invisible God"* (Colossians 1:15). We no longer need silver or gold to "see" God because we now "see" Him in the person and work of His Son.

Vs 24 An altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you.

Having forbidden the manufacture of golden idols, Yahweh provides specific instructions for the construction of an altar.

This command highlights a profound spiritual principle: true worship is **defined by the God who is worshipped**, not by the **extravagance of the architecture**.

By requiring an altar of simple earth (or unhewn stones, as mentioned in the following verse), God ensured that the Israelites' focus remained on the sacrifice and the covenant, rather than the **skill of the craftsman**.

This altar was the designated place for **Burnt Offerings**, which symbolized total dedication, and **Peace Offerings**, which celebrated communal fellowship with God.

Yahweh promises that in every place where He causes His name to be **"remembered"**, He will not only be present but will bring a blessing. This shows that God's presence is not "trapped" in a gold statue, but is freely given to those who seek Him according to His humble design.

Vs 25 If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it you profane it.

Yahweh expands on the instructions for the altar, stating that if stone is used instead of earth, it must not be "hewn" or carved.

The Hebrew instruction is blunt: if a human tool—specifically an iron chisel or blade—touches the stone, the altar is "profaned"

In the eyes of the surrounding nations, a beautiful, polished, and carved altar was a sign of devotion and skill.

However, Yahweh rejects this "artistic" contribution. By forbidding the use of tools, God ensures that the altar remains in its natural, God-created state.

The altar was to be a place where the focus was entirely on the sacrifice for sin, not on the craftsmanship of the builder.

To "wield a tool" on the stone was to suggest that human effort could somehow enhance or "finish" the work of God, a concept that God views as a defilement of His sacred space.

Theological Significance: Grace vs. Works

This prohibition serves as a powerful "type" or shadow of the Gospel. It teaches that we cannot "dress up" or "improve" the way we come to God through our own works or cleverness.

Just as the stones of the altar had to be accepted exactly as God formed them in nature, our salvation is a "gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9).

To try to "carve" the stones was an act of pride, implying that God's creation wasn't good enough for His worship. It reminds the believer that the "altar" of our salvation—the Cross of Christ—was a place of raw, unpolished reality, not a monument to human achievement.

Vs 26 And you shall not go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness be not exposed on it. ”

The concluding instruction for the altar is a practical and moral one: "*And you shall not go up by steps to my altar.*"

In the ancient Near East, pagan priests often ascended high, tiered platforms or ziggurats to perform rituals, sometimes wearing short tunics or even performing rites in a state of ritual nudity.

Yahweh, however, demands a standard of modesty that reflects the dignity of the priesthood and the holiness of the sacrifice.

By forbidding steps, God ensured that the priest would not be elevated in a way that would "**expose his nakedness**" to those below or to the altar itself.

This was a direct rejection of the "fertility cults" of Egypt and Canaan, which often sexualized religious worship. God's altar was to be a place of atonement for sin, not a stage for the display of the human form.

This final command reinforces the theme of the entire chapter: **worship must be done on God's terms, emphasizing humility, simplicity, and purity.**

Although we wrap up here today, God is by no means done. Yahweh has much more to say to His people! Lord willing, we will pick back up here next week.
