

The Father's Ten Good Words: Treasure My House

Exodus 20: 1-2, 17; Matthew 6:19-21, 25-34

Maybe some of you have been listening to these sermons and thinking “You know, Pastor Andy is kind of stretching it with these commandments. When it says, simply, “you shall not commit adultery,” is it really also saying “change the gaze of your eyes so that you communicate generosity instead of possessiveness”? Can we really go from “you shall not steal” to “don’t try to take from the Lord when he wants to give you his own inheritance”?

Sure, there’s Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. And he extends adultery to include lust, and murder to include angry contempt.

But aren’t the Ten Commandments simple, clear laws? Aren’t we adding to what God is saying if we add all these theories about how the sin is really in the hidden depths of the human heart? Aren’t we over-spiritualizing this stuff? Aren’t we being too introspective, too intense, with the Ten Commandments?

Well, by the time we get to The Father’s Tenth Good Word, these questions are explicitly answered. Are we being too spiritual? Too introspective? Well, the final thing the Father wants to tell his young son, Israel, as they begin to make their way in the world after being born anew out of slavery in Egypt, is this:

“You shall not covet.” The First Good Word and the Tenth Good Word are the frame for the other eight. And the first and last words show us that all of the Ten Good Words are deeply spiritual, even if the things they forbid and the duties they call for are things that we do out in public. First Word: “Serve no gods in my presence. Make your heart, and therefore your life, exclusively devoted to me—your Creator and Redeemer.” Tenth Word: “Don’t set your heart on anything but me, and definitely don’t set your heart on people and things that I haven’t given you.”

The Father’s Ten Good Words are *good* precisely because they’re more than “commandments.” They are heart-calibrators. They are soul-diagnostics. They are mind-converters. They words meant to speak into the deepest depths of who we are, and when their sound lands on the dark and chaotic depths of our hearts, they’re powerful enough to create new worlds in there. The Father’s Ten Good Words are to our hearts, and to our life together as God’s people, what the Father’s 6 creative words were to the soupy, formless chaos of the universe before creation. The Father is doing nothing less than birthing a new humanity among his people, starting with the

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depths of our hearts, and then, yes!, working new creation out into our public and social lives together. The goal of Israel's redemption is not simply to "be saved from Egypt." The goal of Israel's redemption is for the nations to be able to say "wow! There really is a God in Israel. And who is like Yahweh their God?" And the goal of our redemption in Christ is not simply for us to be able to say, "yep, I'm saved; are you?" The goal of our redemption in Christ is for us to be able to say "Come and see what the Lord has done. He's loved us when we weren't lovely. And he's loving us into loveliness—each of us, and all of us together."

And ultimately the Father's Tenth Good Word is an invitation. The Father says, to us who are prodigal sons: "treasure my house."

My *house*? Yes. Verse 17: "You shall not covet"—you shall not be envious of and try to get—"your neighbor's house." And then it goes on and on. What's *in* your neighbor's house that you might also be tempted to covet? His wife. His servants—male and female. His agricultural work-animals.

Now, this is not simply a way of saying: "Hey, remember when I said not to *steal*? Well, I also don't want you obsessively and maliciously *desire* things that you aren't going to steal." It's that. But it's deeper.

A "house" in the ancient world is not "real estate," or brick and wood. A "house" is a whole *world* in which a person finds their significance. A "house" is a name that is known and respected in other houses. A "house" is an identity. And if you're part of Israel, you treasure the fact that you belong to a specific "house": the house of Zebulun, or the house of Manassah, or the house of David.

When an ancient person was tempted to "make a name for himself," he didn't try to get 10,000 Twitter followers or a million YouTube subs. He didn't try to become an all-star athlete or to win a nomination for elected office. To "make a name for yourself" in the ancient world was not a popularity contest. It was *way* deeper than that. It was the quest to build a house. To have a generations-long identity. To be respected and revered. To bring lots of families under your family's name and fortune. To literally make your family into a *city* with its own economy, its own army, and its own walls of safety. The Tower of Babel was a quest for a family to make a name for itself.

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So when the Good Father wants to make a new humanity out of his new son Israel, he wants to do it differently. There will be no “making a name for yourself” through envy, through raids and warfare, through exploitation. There will instead be a family of families. All of them will be the house of Abraham, inheritors of the promises to Abraham by faith. And each of these families will be given a house: not to compete with brothers and sisters from neighboring houses, but to be built up by the Lord alongside and in collaboration with the others. There's going to be houses, and they'll grow, and they'll have names, and they'll be known. But not through “making a name for yourself.” That's what the wicked nations and cities around them were up to. But here in Israel, it's going to be a whole new world. A New Creation.

You and I long for a house. A home. An identity. A place where we belong. Significance. Recognition. Respect. Prosperity. And you and I, like ancient people, face two temptations. We can get quite tempted to focus on “making a name for ourselves” —no matter the cost to our relationship to God, to one another, and to our neighbor near and far. Or we can be tempted to abandon the quest for significance, recognition, security, and identity. “I can't make a name for myself, so I'll just stay here by myself.”

Whether we strive for “a house,” or whether we give up that striving and settle into isolation, or, frankly, whether we just moderate our expectations and decide that we'll just aim for “middle class” ... the reality is that the desire for significance never disappears. The longing for home doesn't go away. Not when you're secure. Not when you're famous. Not when you've decided to simply love yourself and take care of yourself.

Because we *want* house and home; because we were *made* for house and home, we will continually look at other people, and envy them. We'll look at famous people, wealthy people, successful people, people with well-behaved kids and supportive parents, and we'll covet what they have. But because we want security and we'll also look at individualistic people who seem to be completely self-sufficient, who seem not to care what anyone thinks of them, and who seem to have made it all on their own, and we'll covet the freedom and independence and pride they seem to have.

Hundreds of years after the Father gave Israel his Ten Good Words, King David had got himself a nice house. A grand palace. He had an army. And security from his enemies. A family. A

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house, and a *house*. And then one day it occurred to him. “Oops. I’ve built quite a nice house for myself. But I haven’t built a house for my God. He’s still living in a tent that my people made for him when we were wandering in the desert, homeless, hundreds of years ago. I really should put some of my time and money and energy and creativity into building a house for my God.”

So David tells the prophet Nathan about this plan— to build God a house. Nathan says “sounds great.” Then Nathan hears a Good Word from David’s Good Father. “Go tell David that I don’t need him to build a house for me. Tell David, ‘Hey, you think you have a house now because you’ve got an army and a throne and a palace and a family? You think you’re going to build *me* a house, out of *your* resources? From *your* generous heart? You’re going to share some of *your* significance, security, permanence, and honor *with ME*? Son, you’ve got the backward. I don’t need you to build me a house. You need *me* to build *you* a house. And that’s exactly what I’m going to do. It’s not that I don’t like buildings and prefer tents. The issue is this: until you realize that the only place in the universe where you are secure, where you have significance, where you have the opportunity to flourish, where you have a legacy, where you have permanence, is in *my house*, called by *my name*— *a name which I have made for MYSELF* among the nations— then you are going to be forever insecure. But the moment that it really sinks into your heart that you get the chance to treasure my house, and your place within it, is the moment when you’re free from the awful cycle of striving for everything that you can never get enough of.”

Dear IPC, you and I— we all, together— need to hear and heed the Father’s Tenth Good Word. “Treasure my house.” In Jesus Christ, Great David’s Greater Son, all of Israel’s hopes for significance, all of David’s longing for permanence and glory, all your the church’s desire for a thriving future and an identity, finds its “yes and Amen.”

Don’t make a name for yourself. Don’t build a house for your name. Don’t covet your neighbor’s house and all the things that come with it. Come into the house of the Lord, and rest. And then join the Good Father in the family business—doing the only work that guarantees a forever house, and a forever name.

Amen.