

Covenant with God – The Last Five Words (i.e. Commandments)
Deuteronomy 5:16-22

Turn to Deuteronomy 4, please. We're going to go over the last five of the Ten Commandments today. Remember that Israel first heard these spoken by directly by God, God's own voice talking to the whole nation of Israel, out loud. They heard from God as you're hearing me now.

Remember also that although these are commands, the Bible never calls them the Ten Commandments. They are always the Ten Words.

And remember the first thing they heard from God: *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.* (Deut 5:6) After this God says, *You shall have no other gods besides me*, and so on.

The Ten Words don't go to everybody, though they are a good idea for everybody. The Ten Words go to particular people, those the LORD had already rescued.

The Ten Words are in Deuteronomy 5, and we'll get there in a minute, but first two verses from Deuteronomy 4. Deut 4:12-13 - *Then the LORD spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice.* ¹³ *He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Words, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets.*

Then the LORD spoke to you out of the fire. This is 40 years later, most of the people listening to this sermon from Moses had not even been born when God spoke the Ten Words! Moses still says that the Lord "spoke to YOU."

God wants to make this new again for every generation. He is only going to do that once, but he wants the next generation to assume they also have heard this directly from Him. *The LORD spoke to YOU.*

If Moses could say to those people, who had not been born when God spoke from the fire, *the LORD spoke to you*, then I cannot see why He does not think He's speaking in the same way to us here today.

You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. ¹³ *He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Words.* Get that? *He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Words.*

A covenant is a solemn agreement about between two about how they will treat each other. It is like a vow or a promise that two make with each other. What all covenants have in common is some kind of ongoing loyalty to each other. They promise to help each other, not attack each other.

The clearest example in our society is marriage, when a man and woman make vows or promises to each other at their wedding. They are covenanting with each other.

God spoke his covenant, the Ten Words. What God promises is to take care of his people. We are his people. He took Israel out of Egypt, and into the promised land. He rescued us from sin and fear of death by sending his Son Jesus. That's the new covenant.

God's part of this covenant is to rescue us and take care of us. Our part is the Ten Words. The Ten Words are not all God has to say to us about how we live, but the Ten Words are the basics.

The Ten Words are the core of our duty to God. This is how we serve God, fear God, obey God, love God, with all our hearts and all our souls and all our might. He loves and rescues, we love and obey his Ten Words. Got it? That's how the covenant relationship works.

In the Bible, the core of how we love God and serve God is NOT some extra thing we call "ministry" – no, the core of how we love God and serve God is how we treat him and people in daily life.

The Sixth Word - "You shall not murder." (Deut 5:17)

God respects human life, so we respect human life. God puts great value on human life, so we his people also put great value on human life.

God made each of us and gives us life and breath. God has the right to end a human's life. No human has the right to end another human's life. God created us, we are his creations, we do not have the right to end a fellow-creature's life.

In the wider context of Deuteronomy and the Old Testament, it is clear that *you shall not murder* is not about capital punishment, and not about war. Capital punishment in the OT is God's decision, and he has that right. And I will not get into war here, we'll do that on Deuteronomy 7.

The Ten Words follow the basic pattern of the two great commands that Jesus gave. Jesus said there were two great commands. First, love the LORD our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. And Second, love our neighbour as ourselves.

The Ten Words speak first about how we act toward God, and then they speak about how we act toward each other. So the Sixth Word teaches us basic respect for each other's lives. You respect my life, and I respect yours.

This is how you and I fear God, and serve him, and love and obey him, and live out our covenant with him.

The Seventh Word – "You shall not commit adultery." (Deut 5:18)

Adultery is when a married person breaks their vows of faithfulness to their spouse and has an affair with someone else. It was too common in ancient Israel, and is too common now.

It is more serious than any other kind of sexual immorality that you can imagine, BECAUSE it breaks a covenant with another person.

The Seventh Word imitates God, just as all the others. God is completely faithful to his people, so husbands and wives that follow God are completely faithful to each other.

Jesus is completely faithful to his people, his bride, the church, so wives and husbands that follow him are completely faithful to each other. When Jesus taught about marriage in the NT, if anything he was stricter about marriage faithfulness than the OT was.

The OT prophets often compared God's covenant relationship with Israel to marriage. God was the husband, and Israel was an adulterous wife because Israel worshipped idols.

As NT believers, we are the bride of Christ. The great banquet after the Lord returns to the earth is a wedding banquet, we the followers of the Lord are the bride, and he is the groom. We're all going to get married to Jesus the Lord!

Paul tells husbands and wives that their mission is to treat each other as Christ and the Church treat each other. Among God's people, marriage faithfulness is a big deal. So, no adultery.

Eighth Word - "You shall not steal." (Deut 5:19)

God respects personal property, so we respect personal property. God asks us to give a part of what we have to him, as an act of worship and thanks and trust, but normally when he specifies how much, it is only a tenth. The rest is ours to use. God respects personal property.

So we respect personal property. I own things, and you own things. God says that you shall leave mine alone, and I shall leave yours alone. We do this BECAUSE we are in a covenant relationship with God. This is how we love and serve God – we do not take what's not ours.

People sometimes get the idea that individuals owning things is itself a problem to God, and that what he really wants is no one would own anything, rather everyone would make use of whatever they needed. Not so.

This basic covenant with God assumes that people will own things. Relationship with God means that we leave alone what we don't own. Big things, little things: leave them for their owners.

Ninth Word - "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." (Deut 5:20)

In a general way, this speaks against all lying. Do not lie. That's how we serve and obey God: no lying. God tells the truth, never lies, so we tell the truth, never lie. These are all built on his own character, I hope you're getting that by now.

But this ninth word has something more specific in mind than just lying: *false testimony against your neighbour*. It concerns how we speak about other people, our neighbour.

Do not say someone did something wrong if they are innocent, and do not say someone is innocent if they did something wrong. God likes justice, and he wants life to be fair.

God knows who's done something wrong and who has not. When you and I talk about another person, let's not lie, let's not give false witness. This is how we honour and serve the God that rescued us.

Tenth Word - "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (Deut 5:21)

You shall not covet, you shall not set your desire on – now God speaks to us about our attitude, our heart, our inner person. I have heard it said that the OT speaks about actions and behaviour, the outer person, and in the NT we are taught about our heart and our attitude.

There is much in the OT about our heart and attitude. Don't make God's real concern the inner person, and don't make God's real concern our actions and behaviour. It is both. All of Scripture assumes that our outward actions and our inner attitude are doing the same thing.

Our **words** might lie about our heart and mind, but our **actions** always come from **our heart and mind**. So the Ten Word speaks about our inner person, our heart and mind.

And it turns out that coveting can cause these other sins. Do not covet your neighbour's wife. This is where adultery comes from. We think Jesus was the first one to say that desiring another woman was an adulterous desire.

The language here is a little different, but the basic idea is just the same. Seventh Word: Adultery is wrong; Tenth Word: Coveting your neighbour's wife or husband is wrong. Both commands are in the Ten Words. The action is wrong, and the attitude and heart desire is already wrong. Doesn't sound much different than what Jesus said.

Don't set your desire on your neighbour's house or land or anything at all that belongs to your neighbour. The Eighth Word: *You shall not steal*. Is longing for what your neighbour owns not often where stealing often begins? Sure it is.

Stealing is wrong, and the attitude of longing for what's not mine is already wrong. Guard your hearts, people. Think about what you long for.

And twice the NT says that greed is idolatry. (Ephesians 5:5 and Colossians 3:5) Greed is always wanting more, coveting is wanting what someone else has – they are not very far apart. All of a sudden we are pretty close to the First Word: *you shall have no other gods besides me*.

Jesus said, *You cannot serve God and money*. Apparently serving money is a common idolatry, an alternative God.

Serving money, greed, coveting – these are all pretty close to each other, and they take us back the first few Words: no other gods, don't make any images with your hands, don't bow down to them or worship them.

Do not covet comes last on this list, and maybe that is not an accident. Coveting is the only command that is ONLY about the inner person, about our heart, our mind, our soul. But it tends to make us look again at the previous nine, and reinterpret them all.

In any case, people, the only Word of the Ten that speaks directly to the heart and soul is a command not to covet, not to long for what is not yours, not to set your heart on what is not yours. I don't like that, but that's the way it is. So be careful about your longings.

It is God's part of the covenant to take care of us. We need to work, work hard, work diligently to feed and clothe ourselves, make no mistake about that. But he provides. Coveting denies the covenant, denies that we have a God who provides.

*God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. That's **God's part** of our covenant with him. If we have food and shelter, with this we will be content. That's **our part** of the covenant relationship. (Both of these texts are in 1 Timothy 6.)*

Summary: Hear the covenant Words of God, spoken directly to us, with his own mouth, by the God who rescued us:

"You shall not murder.

"You shall not commit adultery.

"You shall not steal.

"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Amen.