

Title: The Christian Moral Life (1): The Ten Commandments
Date: 2 July 2017
Occasion: SSMC Sunday Worship
Text: Exodus 20: 1-17

1. **Introduction to “The Christian Moral Life”**

- Over the years, I have felt that the church has not given sufficient emphasis on teaching Christian morals and the holy life.
I can give many examples but these will emerge as we go through the series.
When I was growing up, one of the phrase that we often hear is the “fear of the Lord”.
Moreover the older generation of pastors and church leaders were much stricter about obedience to God’s word and His law.
But the present generation is often more keen on signs and wonders, and the prophetic gifts, etc.
We need to recover the emphasis the concern for holy living and the fear of the Lord!
- Four sermons:
 - The Ten Commandments
 - Mat 5: The Beatitudes—Defining Character
 - Mat 6: Our life hidden in Christ
 - Mat 7: The Narrow Gate—Radical Christianity

2. **The Ten Commandments—The Maker’s Instructions**

i. *The Maker’s Instructions*

- Buying a new car or a new gadget, the first thing you have to do is to obey the manufacturer’s instructions. Failure to do so leads to disaster!

E.g. Not changing engine oil in your car; or using a metal plate in a microwave oven!
- The most basic thing about the Ten Commandments is that they are our Maker’s instructions for life in the world.
But because we have not obeyed, individually and as a society we face disaster upon disaster!
- God gave the Ten Commandments, not to make life miserable by taking out all the fun. Rather He gave it in order that we can enjoy life at its best!

ii. *Two introductory comments*

- a. The Ten Commandments were laid down by God as Israel’s covenantal obligation: God bound Himself by a covenant (agreement or contract) to the people of Israel: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex 20:2).
To live by the commandments was Israel’s side of the bargain or covenant.

Christians are bound to God through the new covenant in Christ. We are obligated to obey and live by these commandments also!

- b. Jesus takes two verses in the OT and used them to sum up the Ten Commandments:
- Deut 6:5; “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”
 - Lev 19:18; “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”
 - Hence in Matt 22:37-39; “And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?’ And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.’”

iii. *How are the Ten Commandments structured?*

- First 4 focused on loving God.
- Commandments 5–10 concern loving our neighbour.
- Note 10th Commandment: It goes beyond the act to the inner motive or to the heart! It already anticipates Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in Mat 5:20, 22 & 28 where he goes beyond the letter of the Law to the heart.
 - v. 20: Our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees
 - v. 22: Not just murder but anger and hatred towards our neighbour.
 - v. 28: Not adultery but wrongful desire and lust.

3. **The Ten Commandments Explained**

i. *Have we taken God’s word for granted and assumed that everyone know what it means?*

Could it be that we have taken God’s word for granted?
Story of my sermon on the 6th Commandment in my first pastorate.

ii. *A brief run-through of the Commandments*

- C1: No other gods
 - Forbids all association with worship of other gods or spirits in any form. E.g. *bomohs*, astrological practices, etc.
 - Not just a problem for those who come from non-Christian background or the bumi Christians in Malaysia.
For many of us we are always tempted to worship other gods: degrees, positions and status, money, consumer society values, etc.
- C2: No visual images to which we bow down
 - Strict interpretation: Nothing at all

But that would exclude every form of artistic representation. Yet we have all been blessed through the work of great Christian artists whose works have inspired us!

- The emphasis appears to be on the 2nd part in v. 5: “You shall not bow down or serve them ...”
 - Remember that God is a “jealous God”—not jealousy in a competitive sense; but in the sense that He accepts no rival and will share His glory with no other! (Cf. Is 42:8; “My glory I give to no other!”)
(If time allows, tell the story of Smith Wigglesworth who died at 87: “Poor Wigglesworth. What a failure to think that people have their eyes on me. God will never give His glory to another; He will take me from the scene.”
We need to develop a similar sensitivity to God’s jealousy for His glory! Reason?)
- C.3: Not taking the Lord’s name in vain
 - Blasphemy and profanity forbidden
 - Presumptuous prophecy when God has not spoken.
 - Using it in any other way that is disrespectful; e.g. OMG
 - C.4: Observing Sabbath
 - OT Sabbath was Friday sundown to Saturday sundown
 - But did not Jesus reject Sabbath practice? No! Rather he rejected the Pharisaic legalism with its 1521 rules which had turned it into a bondage!
Jesus was not running down C.4 but he had no time for the Pharisees’ hair-splitting: “Sabbath made for men and not men for the Sabbath!”
 - The Sabbath principle is to be taken seriously
 - Rest mandated; goes back to the creation story
 - We need the recreation or the refreshment. E.g. If I failed to take a proper weekly rest, the whole of the following week I am weighed down by inner fatigue!
 - Also it is a test of whether we trust God: Cf. the collection of manna; the same principle applies in modern life; e.g. exam preparation; work; etc.
 - C.5: Honouring parents
 - This needs reemphasis again and again, especially in our modern world
 - This includes proper respect, providing for them, and also caring for them in their old age.
 - Time does not permit. But this is also a call to the proper ordering of our family lives.
 - C.6: Killing prohibited
 - Obviously it is not absolute prohibition as other parts of the OT allows for capital punishment, etc.
Murder is what is prohibited.
 - But what about abortion?
Modern men and women will certainly have to stand before God’s judgment throne one day and answer for the millions of murders they have committed through abortion.
Abortion as a means of birth-control for whatever reason cannot be justified. Yet sadly it is widespread in many countries like China, India and the west.
Christian ethicists have only allowed it for the purpose of saving lives.

(ASIDE: For that reason I am glad that Hilary Clinton was not elected!)

- C.7: Adultery prohibited
 - It is a call to sexual purity in all areas of life.
We live in a sex-obsessed world wherein sex has become an addiction to probably a majority of the world.
 - Note: Sexual immorality again and again is linked up with occultism and satanic worship. E.g. Alice Bailey at her death in 1949 (Cf. Charles Carrin, *The Edge of Glory*, pp. 147ff.)

- C.8: No stealing
 - All of us were taught that from Day 1!
 - Common sense! Yet, at certain levels, you forget that.
E.g. 1MDB and corruption
 - (Note: Principle applies at all levels. Without a respect for private property by government, a nation cannot grow economically strong! Acemoglu and Robinson in *Why Nations Fail?* argues that this is what happens when the national economy is built on “extractive institutions” which works to enrich a few at the expense of the majority.)

- C.9: No false witness
 - Again all of us were taught that from Day 1!
 - Frankly, none of us can claim to be telling the truth all the time.
Those of us in the world of working life know how difficult that is.
But some of us also have a tendency to tell “white lies” to avoid confrontation or problems, etc.
 - But we need to aim at truth-telling even when it is difficult and costly.
 - Both “speaking the truth to power” and “speaking the truth in love.”

- C.10: No Covetousness
 - More next sermon.

4. **Final point**

These are God’s commandments. We have no right to ignore them.
Yet obeying them is far more difficult than we dare to admit. Paul struggled with that—Roman 6!

How can then can we become blameless before God?

Answer: Rom 8:4! It is only through the inner working and empowering of the Holy Spirit that “the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us”!