

The Ten Commandments Series

Rob Yule 1998

Introduction

Today we are witnessing a widespread deterioration of moral standards and cheapening of human life throughout the world. This message introduces the ancient Jewish moral code known as the Ten Commandments. In it, Rob Yule, argues that a revival of morality today requires a fresh vision of God's holiness, like that which originally produced the Ten Commandments.

1. Smoke on the Mountain

The Ten Commandments are the fountainhead of Western civilisation. Yet, in today's secularised, post-Christian society, the revolutionary significance of the Ten Commandments is seldom appreciated. This message shows the surprising importance of the first commandment for religion, science, human rights and personal fulfilment.

2. Making the World Safe for Revelation

Idolatry is a surprisingly pervasive phenomenon, appearing in modern materialistic guises as well as ancient polytheistic ones. In this message, minister Rob Yule explains what idolatry is and examines the far-reaching significance of the Bible's prohibition of making images.

3. Honouring God's Name

The third commandment, often assumed to refer to swearing and profanity by the irreligious, in fact emphasises the responsibility of believers to worthily represent the God whom they believe in.

4. Release from Slavery

The Sabbath commandment has often been misrepresented by a kill-joy attitude. In fact, its provision of a weekly respite from toil is a remarkable piece of humanitarian legislation, designed to enrich human life and liberate people from slavery to work.

5. Respect for Parents

The Bible's relevance to life is very apparent in the fifth commandment. Illustrating the importance of leading by example, it shows that the way we treat our parents is how our children learn to treat us.

6. Reverence for Life

With some thirty civil wars currently occurring, and a burgeoning of violent crime, there is an appalling cheapening of human life throughout the world today. In this address, Rob Yule shows the humanitarian importance of the sixth commandment. He makes a fascinating case for Christian pacifism, for the role of the military in civil defence and international peacekeeping, and for the legal protection of the unborn child.

7. Safeguarding Marriage

Promiscuity and adultery, widely practised in our sexually liberated age, actually have a number of sad and unintended consequences. Rob's message on the seventh commandment gives four compelling reasons - economic, moral, medical and theological - for choosing marital faithfulness.

8. Practical Honesty

Society comes down hard on petty theft, but respectable white-collar crime flourishes, comprising big business globally today. In this sometimes humorous address on the commandment against stealing, Rob Yule brings out the challenging and liberating nature of the Bible's teaching about wealth and money.

9. Nothing but the Truth

The purpose of the ninth commandment is not only to protect people from false accusation in a court of law, but to guard people's reputation and foster truth-telling in every area of life. Intellectuals, sadly, are no better in this respect than anyone else, as illustrated by examples of academic reputations damaged by false witness.

10. Restraining Greed

The tenth commandment differs from all the others by its focus on inner attitudes rather than on outward actions. In this final message in his series on the Ten Commandments, Rob Yule sees covetousness not only as a symptom of our consumer culture, but of our need for a new heart.

God Comes First

The Challenge of the First Commandment (Exodus 20:1-21)

The Ten Commandments are the fountainhead of Western civilisation. Yet, in today's secularised, post-Christian society, the revolutionary significance of the Ten Commandments is seldom appreciated. This message, given by Rob Yule shows the surprising importance of the first commandment for religion, science, human rights and personal fulfilment.

Joy Davidman, the high-spirited American Jewish woman who later married C. S. Lewis, called the first commandment 'the greatest discovery ever made.' (*Smoke on the Mountain: an Interpretation of the Ten Commandments* [London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1963], p. 23). Today we've become so blasé about the Ten Commandments that we miss the stupendous novelty of its opening salvo, 'You shall have no other gods before me.' This was a revolutionary innovation when it was first announced to the world. It was like the crashing opening of a Beethoven symphony, rudely interrupting the etiquette and decorum of the earlier chamber music tradition.

A Religious Revolution

It was, first and foremost, a religious revolution. A literal translation of the first commandment is, 'You shall have no other gods before my face.' This commandment doesn't deny the existence of other gods. It recognises that there are rival deities which could easily usurp first place in our lives. But it says, in clear and unequivocal terms, that God can't stand them, and God's people are to have nothing to do with them either.

The first commandment expresses what scholars call *ethical monotheism*. It commands us to give God his first and rightful place, as the only supreme being worthy of ultimate allegiance. There are plenty of god substitutes out there vying for first place in our affections. Whether they be ancient pagan gods and goddesses, or progressive modern god-substitutes, whether they be mischievous spirits or malignant spirits, whether they be horned protrusions from the pit or civilised projections of our passions, these rival entities always threaten to take the place that God rightly claims and rightly deserves in our lives. God won't have a bar of them.

Well, you say, what's revolutionary about that? We have grown so accustomed to a world made safe by monotheism, by belief in one supreme God, that we no longer realise what this belief saved us from. This is how Joy Davidman explains it:

. . . the belief in one God slew a host of horrors: malign storm demons, evil djinn of sickness, blighters of the harvest, unholy tyrants over life and death; belief in God destroyed the fetishes, the totems, the beast-headed bullies of old time. It laid the axe to sacred trees watered by the blood of virgins, it smashed the child-eating furnaces of Moloch, and toppled the gem-encrusted statues of the peevish divinities half-heartedly served by Greece and Rome.

The old gods fought among themselves, loved and hated without reason, demanded unspeakable bribes and meaningless flatteries. While they were worshipped, a moral law was impossible, for what pleased one deity would offend another. If your wife ran away from you, it was not because you beat her, but because you'd forgotten the monthly sacrifice to Ishtar; just offer a double sacrifice, and you'd get two new wives prettier than the old. (*Op. cit.*, p. 23).

We forget what the religions of the ancient pagan world were like, what the first commandment saved us from. Pagan religions were wild and disordered, arbitrary and unjust. They had neither rhyme nor reason. There was certainly nothing ennobling or humanising about them, for women or for men. They encouraged men to fight and lust, they made women slaves of religiously validated passions. These ancient religions were far from kind and far from benign. They were crude, and cruel.

Into this world, at Sinai, came the thunderous revelation of the one God. Invisible, apart from the sound and light show that accompanied his appearing, God, says Davidman, was 'An almost unimaginable person - a single being, the creator of heaven and earth, not to be bribed with golden images or children burned alive; loving only righteousness. A being who demanded your whole heart.' (*op. cit.*, p. 23).

A Scientific Revolution

The commandment to have no other gods led, secondly, to a scientific revolution. It made it possible for science to happen. Joy Davidman again (*op. cit.*, pp. 22-3):

Everyone [before the time of Moses] knew that the universe was a wild and chaotic thing, a jungle of warring powers: wind against water, sun against moon, male against female, life against death. There was a god of the spring planting and another god of the harvest, a spirit who put fish into fishermen's nets and a being who specialised in the care of women in childbirth; and at best there was an uneasy truce among all these, at worst a battle. Now along comes a fool, from an insignificant tribe of desert wanderers, and shouts that all these processes are one process from a single source, that the obvious many are the unthinkable One!

Whoever he was [Joy Davidman thinks it was Moses. In my previous message I gave reasons for believing it was a divine revelation, the thunderous voice of God himself], he shouted it so loud that it has echoed down all of time. . . The universe is one process, created by One Maker.

It was the greatest discovery ever made.

Monotheism made possible the rise of modern science. Science is the product of a world view which says the universe has a single origin. The first commandment expresses a profoundly simple, but enormously significant truth: the universe is one. It is a *universe*, not a *pluriverse* or a *multiverse*. It derives from one God, one source, one originator. This truth divested nature of spirits and demons. It gave the world a reality and integrity of its own. It led to the understanding that the world was rational, coherent, orderly. It meant the natural world, instead of being feared as the preserve of evil spirits, could be studied by human beings and put to practical uses.

It is therefore no accident that modern science arose not in any of the ancient civilisations like China, but in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Not until belief in one God displaced the ancient pagan conception of the world could scientific study of the natural world occur. The first commandment made the world safe for science, with all the blessing that has been to humanity.

A Moral Revolution

The first commandment, thirdly, brought about a moral revolution, a revolution of justice, by guaranteeing the unity of the human race. Monotheism, belief in one God, is the linchpin of human equality.

The unity and equality of the human race can only be established if humanity has a single origin. If human beings spontaneously arose from different origins - as the theory of evolution affirms - there would be no basis for defending the unity of the human family and the equality of all human beings against those who say some races are inferior.

God is one, therefore humanity is one, therefore all races are equal - none are inferior. Because God is one, racism is wrong. Because God is one, Nazism, the elevating of the Aryan race, is wrong. Because God is one, apartheid, the subordinating of black races, is a sin - as the World Alliance of Reformed Churches rightly called it in the early eighties. It is no accident that the movements for the abolition of slavery, the ending of *suttee* (widow burning), the opposition to apartheid, and the raising of the dignity and rights of women have all arisen in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, not within other religious traditions. Belief in one God has been a profoundly humanising influence throughout history.

A Personal Revolution

Finally, belief in one God can lead to a personal revolution. The first commandment can change your life. 'You shall have no other gods before me.' Who does not tremble when they hear that? This commandment affirms God's claim to our lives and our loyalty. God comes first. He brooks no rivals. He has made us for himself alone, and our lives are restless and unsatisfied if we fill the place that God should occupy with lesser loves and lesser loyalties.

'Your God is really that to which you are prepared to give all your time, all your strength, all your obedience,' says William Barclay, former Professor of New Testament at Glasgow University. 'Your God is that which is most

important in your life.' (*The Old Law and the New Law*, [Edinburgh, St Andrew Press, 1972], p.9). Barclay suggests that today money, pleasure, and self most commonly take the place of God. What holds first place in your affections?

We are to love God undividedly, with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength. Personal frustration is always the result of having other gods or consuming interests than God. A person trying to serve two masters has divided loyalties, is always half-hearted. The great nineteenth century Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard said, 'Purity of heart is to will one thing.' A consuming passion for the one God is the key to an integrated personality and a fulfilling life. Let go whatever has usurped God's place in your life, whether it be work, sport, money, comfort, worry about future security, a wrong relationship. Put God first.

Making the World Safe for Revelation

The Meaning of the Second Commandment (Exodus 20: 4-6)

Idolatry is a surprisingly pervasive phenomenon, appearing in modern materialistic guises as well as ancient polytheistic ones. In this message, minister Rob Yule explains what idolatry is and examines the far-reaching significance of the Bible's prohibition of making images.

The Seductiveness of Idolatry

Idolatry is almost universal in the world's religions. Pagan religions, in the ancient world and today, are characterised by idol worship. Secular anthropologists may defend idols in the name of primitive art and traditional culture. But the reality of life in animistic, idolatrous societies, is very different. Wherever idols are worshipped, there is fear, superstition, demonic oppression. As Roy Woods told us about the remote tribe in western Papua-New Guinea, people lived thirty metres up in tree houses purely because of fear - fear even of the other members of their own tribe.

Throughout its history the nation of Israel had to wage a constant battle against the Baals and Asherim, the lewd and sensual male and female deities of the Canaanite fertility religions. The history of Christianity too shows a constant temptation to reintroduce idols in worship or meditation, in the form of icons, statues, charms, fetishes, and religious objects. Idolatry is one of the most seductive temptations for spiritually sensitive people. Just last weekend I visited a modern Catholic church in a suburb of Wellington. Though it had been built as recently as 1975, already it was cluttered with second-rate statues, as if the liturgical and architectural reforms of the Second Vatican Council had never happened.

The prohibition against making idols distinguishes the Jewish faith from paganism. The Old Testament prophets waged war against idolatry. Their favourite weapon was ridicule. Isaiah makes fun of a craftsman who cuts down a tree, burns part of it to keep himself warm and cook a meal, while he uses another part of it to make a god to worship (Isaiah 44:9-20). Isaiah pours scorn on so-called 'gods' which are powerless to help anyone, which cannot even move but have to be carried by their worshippers (Isaiah 46:5-7). Jeremiah ridicules idols that are knocked together and fastened in place by hammer and nails, 'scarecrows in a cucumber field,' he calls them, idols which are powerless to do anything to help anyone (Jeremiah 10:3-5). Throughout the Bible there is nothing but scorn for gods made by human hands, which have mouths but cannot speak, eyes but cannot see, ears but cannot hear, which are lifeless and worthless (Deuteronomy 4:28, Psalm 135:15-18).

What is idolatry?

1. Idolatry is confusing the means with the end.

Idols originate as an aid to worship, a visible object to remind us of the invisible God. A parallel would be a photograph of a friend or family member, to help you remember that person. At first that was what an idol was meant to do. The trouble is that people begin to worship the idol instead of God, to worship the symbol instead of the reality it was supposed to represent. Idolatry is confusing the means with the end.

An intriguing example of this can be seen in the Bible itself. On one occasion during their wilderness wanderings, Israel was attacked by venomous snakes. Moses was commanded by God to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole for the people to look at and be healed of the snake bites (Numbers 21:6-9). The bronze snake was a replica of the plague, a kind of foreshadowing of the cross when Jesus was lifted up for all to see, and was the means God used to save the Israelites. Yet, centuries later, we see the bronze snake being worshipped by the Israelites as an idol; and, because of this it was destroyed by king Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4). The people confused the means with the end; they had come to worship the bronze snake, rather than the Lord it pointed to and who saved them.

This story could be repeated many times throughout history. This is precisely how Christians, who have been clearly commanded not to make images of God, have come to venerate icons, statues, crucifixes, charms, more than God himself, making idols of them.

2. Idolatry is worshipping the creature rather than the creator.

This is the biblical definition of idolatry: 'they worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever' (Romans 1:25). Idolatry is giving created things the place that rightly and properly belongs to God himself. This not only dishonours God. It also leads to the overvaluing of the creature, giving to created things a place and a significance they do not have and cannot bear. The result is disillusionment and destructiveness. Idolatry leads to dehumanisation.

The great illustration of this is modern atheism. In the nineteenth century atheists like Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche turned against God in order to liberate humanity. To liberate people from ecclesiastical and economic oppression they consciously elevated human beings to the place of God. This, in the Bible's view, is the supreme act of idolatry, putting the creature in place of the Creator. But, instead of liberating humanity it had precisely the opposite effect: it led directly to the great dehumanising ideologies of our time. The denial of God in the nineteenth century led to the dehumanising of humanity in the twentieth, as the great totalitarian ideologies to which atheism gave birth turned against humanity, devouring millions of people in the death camps of Nazism and the slave camps of Communism (see Henri De Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* [London, Sheed & Ward, 1949]).

3. Idolatry is worshipping things instead of God.

That leads to a third aspect of idolatry: idolatry is putting things in place of God. Idolatry is a misplaced value system. It accords a higher value to lesser things. It gives primary place to what is only secondary.

We can see this very clearly in our modern world, whose main idolatry is materialism. Today our idols and status symbols are materialistic in nature. We rate success in terms of a flash car, a stylish townhouse, designer clothes, a seductive image, an overseas holiday. William Barclay illustrates our materialism by a crossword puzzle he saw. The clue: 'What makes a home?' The answer: 'furniture!' (*The Old Law and the New Law* [Edinburgh, St. Andrew Press, 1972], p. 13). That is modern idolatry in a nutshell. You might indeed have a stylish and expensively furnished house, but it might be a very poor home, filled with tension, lacking love and companionship.

Today in our modern monetarist economy we seem to know the price of everything and the value of nothing. People count for less than things. Balancing the books is more important than jobs. That is idolatry, a value system gone awry. Idolatry devours its worshippers. The flash house gives the housekeeper neuroses, the demanding office rewards the executive with stress-related illnesses, video games rob us of the ability to entertain ourselves.

This leads me to the positive implications of the second commandment.

1. The second commandment affirms human dignity and equality.

By prohibiting us from making an image and bowing down to it, this command tells us not to demean ourselves by putting ourselves in subjection to anything or anyone less than God himself. This is a very radical commandment. It is the heart and soul of an egalitarian society. We are not to worship and bow down to anyone or anything less than God himself. We are not beholden to them, we should not kowtow to them, not even to another human being. We can give them respect, but we should not reverence them.

In *The Gulag Archipelago* Alexander Solzhenitsyn tells the story of an elderly Christian woman arrested in the twenties by the NKVD, as the Soviet secret police was then known, for helping the Metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox Church escape to the west. They shook their fist at her and bullied her, but they couldn't break her. 'You can't kill me,' she said, 'You'd lose contact with the underground railroad!' She was indomitable. Fearing God, she feared no man.

2. The second commandment affirms the invisibility of God.

We are forbidden to make graven images, because God cannot be represented in any way. God is greater than we can even think or imagine. We can make no adequate representation of him. When the Roman armies under Titus broke the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70 and entered the temple sanctuary, they were shocked and surprised

to find it empty, devoid of any religious objects. 'God is Spirit,' Jesus tells us, 'and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth' (John 4:24).

3. The second commandment affirms God's right to make himself known as he truly is.

We all know what it's like to have our motives or opinions misrepresented by someone. We want to be able to have our opinions and convictions truthfully represented. Who better to represent them than ourselves? It's the same with God. When God denies us the right to make representations of himself, it is so that he can reveal himself to us as he really is. The ban on idolatry is to make the world safe for revelation! Revelation is when God gets tired of being misrepresented by others and shows up in person to put matters right! That's why in the New Testament the term 'image of God' is only applied to Jesus Christ - not to anyone else, but only to him who is the express 'image of the invisible God' (Colossians 1:15) and the 'exact representation of God's very being' (Hebrews 1:3). So in the second commandment prohibiting idolatry God is eliminating human religion in order to make the way clear for divine revelation.

On my 1982 trip to Israel I met and talked with an Israeli soldier on a trip into southern Lebanon. He had come from South Africa twenty one years before. He was a deeply spiritual person. A devout Orthodox Jew, he talked to me about the importance of keeping the 613 commandments of the Bible. He told me what matters in life is deeper than logic, deeper than understanding. To explain his view of God's greatness and mystery he told me about Maimonides, the famous medieval Jewish philosopher, who said that we cannot say who God is, we can only say what God is not.

I acknowledged to him that this was thoroughly in keeping with the second commandment, banning idols, because nothing we can devise is adequate to represent God. But I shared with him that it is only half the truth. The other half is that God has made himself known to us, as a Father to a child, through Jesus, Israel's Messiah, God's firstborn Son. By prohibiting idolatry God opens the way to reveal himself to us as he really is.

Honouring God's Name

The Meaning of the Third Commandment (Ezekiel 36:22-32)

The third commandment, often assumed to refer to swearing and profanity by the irreligious, in fact emphasises the responsibility of believers to worthily represent the God whom they believe in. This address, preached by Rob Yule, underlines the ever-present dangers of religious hypocrisy and the importance of God's people living what they profess.

'Danger - 130,000 Volts!' Signs like this warn us of the danger of behaving carelessly at an electricity generating station or substation. Sometimes a young person responding to a dare or a drunk mindless of the dangers gets fried after disregarding such signs and climbing the protective fences. The dangers are far more serious than we often realise. Electricity employees are warned to take short steps and not raise their hands, lest they get zapped by a bolt of high tension electricity.

'The third commandment is not just a nice-Nellyish warning against profanity,' says Joy Davidman in her book on the Ten Commandments. 'It is much more like the sort of warning you see around power plants: "Danger - High Voltage!"' (*Smoke on the Mountain* [London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1963], p. 42). We have already seen how the appearance of God on Mount Sinai was an awesome demonstration of the majesty and holiness of God. The third commandment further underlines the immense seriousness of our dealings with God. Our God is an awesome God. He is creator of the universe. He is God Almighty, not God Almatey. It is a serious matter to invoke his name.

Misusing God's Name

'You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain', says the third commandment (Exodus 20:7). This is often thought to be a reference to swearing and profanity, misusing God's name by turning it into an expletive. But the root meaning of the verb *shawe*, 'to take in vain', is 'empty' or 'groundless' - something that is objectively without reality or substance, something worthless, without a basis in reality (Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus* [London, SCM Press, 1974], pp. 410-11).

Thus this commandment, while including swearing, profanity, lying, perjury and false witness, goes far beyond speech to imply a whole attitude toward God: an attitude of indifference, of irreverence, casualness or flippancy in using God's name. A better translation might be: 'You shall not use the name of God to no effect', or 'You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.' Its meaning is: 'Your behaviour should be consistent with your belief,' 'Your life should not contradict your profession,' 'You should walk the talk'. This commandment includes everything from profanity to hypocrisy, from blasphemous speech to conduct that dishonours God. It especially condemns religious hypocrisy.

Profanity

Profanity is a form of taking God's name in vain, but in a different way than we commonly realize. Profanity is the blasphemous and constantly repeated use of God's name by those who don't acknowledge him.

In one sense profanity is not entirely in vain - it is a back-handed tribute, by unbelievers, to God's existence and universal significance. After all, what workman says, 'O Buddha!' when he hits his thumb with a hammer? What woman cries 'Mohammed!' when she has forgotten to save her document on the word processor?

But profanity is calling on God in vain when it doesn't lead to godly behaviour. At the judgment, I suspect the blasphemer will be judged, not for naming God's name, but for taking it in vain; for doing nothing at all to honour God and live for him.

Incidentally, how should you behave when someone around you is always swearing? Try this: 'Sam, I didn't realise you were so interested in Christ! Where did you learn about him?' 'Linda, you talk a lot about God. I didn't know you were such a religious person! Would you like to come with me to church this Sunday? You can learn more about this God you talk about!'

Perjury

Profanity is the specialty of unbelievers. But both unbelievers and believers can be guilty of perjury: breaking an oath of truthfulness, wilfully lying when on oath. If we swear an oath in court in God's name that we will tell 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth', and then lie, conceal, or distort the truth, we are taking God's name in vain.

More generally, when we give our word that we will do something, and then fail to do it, we are dishonouring God's name. God is true, he is faithful to what he undertakes, so failure to keep our word is a denial of God's faithfulness. Promise-keeping honours God's name. Not keeping our promise is taking God's name in vain. How many problems we create for ourselves if we tell lies, if we shift our opinions to suit the occasion. It is much easier simply to tell the truth. What good advice Jesus gave us when he said, 'Let your word be "Yes, Yes" or "No, No"; anything more comes from the evil one.' (Matthew 5:37).

Hypocrisy

The thrust of the third commandment, however, is not towards unbelievers, but believers; not them, but us. An ever-present danger for Christians is to become formal, mechanical, or hypocritical in our faith. How easy it is to grow cool in our devotion, to become glib and presumptuous in our attitude toward God, to take God's name in vain. Think how easy it is to be over-familiar with God, to make glib promises to follow him, to pray thoughtless prayers, to sing songs and hymns without attention, to live lives that contradict our profession.

'Not everyone who says to me "Lord, Lord", will enter the Kingdom of heaven,' said Jesus, 'but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven' (Matthew 7:21). How often do we call him Lord, but treat him like a servant. Prayers telling God what to do, instead of humbly and patiently waiting for him to guide us, and tell us what to do. The third commandment points to the seriousness of our dealings with God, our obligation to worthily represent him.

Hypocritical Religion

Hypocritical religion is one of the chief ways that we believers dishonour God's name. Boring services, formal ceremonies, going through the motions, is taking God's name in vain. How many people have rejected God because of their experience of church; its legalism, uncaringness, hypocrisy. Boring, conventional Christianity has been one of the biggest turnoffs to people's belief in God. For better or worse, we are God's advertisement. 'You will have to look more redeemed if I am to believe in your Redeemer,' said the nineteenth century German atheist Friedrich Nietzsche. In fact, reacting against conventional, domesticated, bourgeois Christianity was the main reason why many leading nineteenth century thinkers, like Karl Marx, became atheists.

We are to live a life worthy of our calling (Ephesians 4:1). Failure to do so dishonours God, brings God's reputation into disrepute. When we fail to live lives that are consistent with our profession we are giving God a bad press, a bad image. We are not representing him well, as he deserves. This is the kind of lifeless, killjoy Christianity that Bob Dylan scathingly satirised in his song 'Desolation Row' (on the 1965 album, *Highway 61 Revisited*):

The Good Samaritan, he's dressing
He's getting ready for the show
He's going to the carnival tonight
On Desolation Row.

The Church on Desolation Row - joyless, lifeless, formal Christianity - is a wicked misrepresentation of who God is, a travesty of real Christian community. It is taking God's name in vain - a form of religion without the substance (2 Timothy 3:5).

God's Reputation

This theme was a concern of the biblical prophets. They were zealous to protect God's reputation and honour. I'll give you two examples.

1. *Ezekiel's prophecy of Israel's regathering to their land* (Ezekiel 36:22-32), emphasises over and over again that God will do this not because of what Israel has done, but 'for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations' (22). Israel's entitlement to the land of Canaan was conditional on their obedience to God's will and their faithfulness in walking in his ways. Because of their unfaithfulness, taking God's name in vain by turning to idolatry, they forfeited their entitlement to their land and were scattered among the nations. But God makes this amazing promise to regather them from the countries of their dispersion and bring them back to 'the land that I gave to your ancestors' - a prophecy that is being fulfilled two and a half millenia later, with the return of Jews to the land of Israel in our own day. 'It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act', says the Lord, 'but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations.' (22)

2. *Joel's call for a national prayer assembly* (Joel 2:15-17), in response to a devastating famine and economic collapse of the nation caused by a locust plague which he saw as God's judgment on the nation for their evil ways. Joel summoned the people to call on God to intervene, turn around their desolate state, and restore them for the sake of his name:

Blow the trumpet in Zion;
sanctify a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
gather the people.
Sanctify the congregation;
assemble the aged;
gather the children,
even infants at the breast.
Let the bridegroom leave his room,
and the bride her canopy.
Between the vestibule and the altar
let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep.
Let them say, 'Spare your people, O Lord,
and do not make your heritage a mockery,
a byword among the nations.

Why should it be said among the peoples,
'Where is their God?'

The heart of this prayer is the humble acknowledgement that God's people are the reason why God's name is dishonoured. Our condition, our conduct, reflects on God's honour. We must take steps not to take the Lord's name in vain. We must start taking God seriously. As Joy Davidman says, the positive meaning of this commandment is: 'You shall take the name of the Lord your God in earnest!' (Davidman, *op. cit.*, p. 47).

Release from Slavery

The Blessing of the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:1-2, 8-11)

The Sabbath commandment has often been misrepresented by a kill-joy attitude. In fact, its provision of a weekly respite from toil is a remarkable piece of humanitarian legislation, designed to enrich human life and liberate people from slavery to work. This address, fifth in a series on the Ten Commandments, was given by Rob Yule.

Distortions of the Sabbath

'Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy' (Exodus 20:8). The Hebrew noun *shabbat* comes from a verb meaning 'to rest' or 'cease from work'. What harm the kill-joy mentality has done to this commandment, which is actually one of the most liberating prescriptions in the Bible. Among Jews after the return from exile, the prohibition from work was interpreted with an awful literalness: you were not allowed to light a fire, move a lamp, cook a dinner, tie a knot, or use your false teeth. In Jesus' day, there were 1,521 things which you couldn't do on the Sabbath - so many things, in fact, that I'm surprised that the effort of remembering them all didn't qualify as forbidden work! If you accidentally scuffed your foot in the dust, that was a kind of ploughing, and ploughing of course was prohibited work. Until the resolute Maccabees taught them better, Jewish armies would let themselves be slaughtered on the Sabbath rather than do the 'work' of self defence.

Closer to home, there has been a legalistic sabbath keeping in the Church, especially in our Scottish tradition, whose attitudes have been just as contrary to the spirit of this commandment. A generation ago New Zealand poet James K. Baxter remarked on people leaving church on Sunday morning with their 'long Jehovah faces.' In seventeenth century Scotland an unfortunate fellow was actually hauled into court for smiling on the Sabbath! Considering the state of Scotland at the time, he deserved to be congratulated for managing to raise a smile at all!

To Enrich Life

How tragic, and how utterly contrary to what this commandment enjoins. It was as if it said: 'You shall not enjoy life on the sabbath.' I think it was the Russian novelist Boris Pasternak who once pointed out that the real intention of the sabbath commandment is to enrich life. It is certainly not meant to make life burdensome. It points to the importance of being free from drudgery and immersion in the workaday world. It is an invitation to share in the delights of creation, and to anticipate God's eternal rest and joy. The early Christians enjoyed their Sundays so much that the ancient Romans, whose religion had long declined into a listless and sceptical routine, suspected them of holding obscene orgies in their love feasts.

What then does the fourth commandment actually require of us?

Honest Work

First of all, the fourth commandment requires us to do six days of honest work. 'Six days you shall labour and do all your work' (Exodus 20:9). 'Sleeping is no mean art,' said the German philosopher Nietzsche, 'you have to stay awake all day to do it.' By analogy the fourth commandment could be paraphrased: 'Resting on Sunday is no mean art; you have to work all week to do it!' There's nothing here to encourage personal laziness or bludging, and certainly no mention of a 35 hour week! The Bible encourages a robust, diligent, responsible attitude to work. You can't enjoy rest if you don't apply yourself to work.

A Special Day

Secondly, the commandment requires that we cease from all avoidable work and make the sabbath a special day. The rest day is to be hallowed or kept holy. 'Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy' (Exodus 20:8). The basic meaning of the word 'holy' in Hebrew is 'distinctive' or 'different'. The temple is holy because it is different from other buildings. The Bible is holy because it is different from other books. God is holy because he is different from all other beings. Similarly, the sabbath is to be holy because it is one day in the week which is

different from all the other days. The sabbath is to be a special day. On it as far as possible we should seek to avoid the routines and work that characterise our daily life throughout the week.

My mum used to make our rest day special for us when we were little kids by putting a lolly by our pillow for us to discover when we woke up on Sunday mornings. Consequently I grew up seeking to make Sunday a different day from others, by not training on Sunday when I was an athlete, and by not studying on Sunday when I was a student. My brother and I used to reckon that we did as well if not better than many runners of our ability; we certainly weren't worse off, and I think we were actually fresher for not training one day a week. I also used to notice as a student that many students who did work on Sundays did so spasmodically, not actually accomplishing very much, but losing the benefit of a complete day off. If some activity is your regular work or routine during the week, avoid doing it on your rest day, and you'll be better off for it.

Abstaining from work is not just a luxury for the well-off who can afford it, who expect others or pay others to do their work for them. There's a strong element of justice in the fourth commandment that requires us to arrange our lives in such a way that our family and dependents, our workers and staff, are to be released from avoidable work too (Exodus 20:10). The commandment even includes agricultural animals, which, in the days before machinery, were beasts of burden to cultivate the land, and significantly, the resident alien, or as we would call them today, migrant workers, who tend to end up doing the menial jobs to make life more leisured for others. The fourth commandment doesn't allow us to make rest and leisure the preserve of the rich at the expense of the poor.

Life is More than Toil

Thirdly, the sabbath commandment means that God intends there to be more to life than work and toil. 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery' (Exodus 20:2). God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The sabbath commandment is a boundary fence to stop Israel going back to slavery. William Barclay describes it as 'a great piece of social and humanitarian legislation', 'one of the great merciful laws of the Old Testament.' (*The Plain Man's Guide to Ethics* [London & Glasgow, Collins Fontana, 1973], p. 27).

The sabbath commandment is social legislation based on religious belief, which we ignore to our peril. The French Revolution rejected God and tried to do away with a seven day week and a weekly day of rest, but they found they were destroying people's health and wellbeing, and had to bring it back. Our New Zealand way of life has known the immeasurable benefits of a weekly day of rest. But we don't learn from history, and seem condemned to repeat it. Today our society too is rejecting God, and suffering the consequences. In the last ten years we have eroded a rest day in New Zealand, and are getting increasingly caught up in work and commerce. People who were typically doing 40-45 hours of work a week ten years ago in New Zealand are doing 60 hours or more a week today. Are we, or the economy, any better off for it? In the last few months we've started to hear reports in the news media of the problems of high stress levels this is creating.

A day of rest is a social and industrial necessity. Without it health and work inevitably suffer. By ignoring God's provision of a rest day, we are returning to a self-imposed slavery to drudgery and toil - the very thing God delivered Israel from.

Enjoying God's Creation

Fourthly, we should enjoy a rest from our labours as God did to enjoy the fruit of his labours. 'For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it' (Exodus 20:11). The fourth commandment relates the human institution of a weekly day of rest to God's resting after he had completed his work of creation, to enjoy what he had made. This suggests that the pattern of work and rest is built into the very structure of the universe. The theologian Karl Barth has pointed out that the seventh day of the Genesis account of creation (Genesis 2:1-3) is not an empty day, a day without content. It is a day full of content - filled with God and the entire content of the preceding six days - namely, God and all of his creation (*Church Dogmatics*, III, 1, pp. 213-19). The sabbath rest is not meant to be a boring day, a day without anything to do, but rather a day when we desist from the demands and restrictions imposed by our regular work, so that we may enjoy God and his works!

Time for Eternity

Fifthly, the sabbath commandment enjoins us to sanctify time, to set aside time specifically for God. 'The seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work' (Exodus 20:10). Hallowing the sabbath goes beyond making one day a week a special day. Holiness is the unique possession of God - it is God's character and integrity. To keep the Sabbath holy is to set aside one day a week for God - to enter into God's realm, to worship, to commune with God himself. It is time on a weekly basis to enter eternity. The sabbath rest is intended to be a weekly taste of eternity, a release from the captivity of *chronos*, clock time, to enjoy the blessings of *kairos*, high time, God's time. How right the early Christians were to move it from the seventh day of the week, the last day of creation, to the first day of the week, the day of resurrection, the eighth day, the beginning of a new octave, the first day of the age to come.

Respect for Parents

The Relevance of the Fifth Commandment (Exodus 12:12)

The Bible's relevance to life is very apparent in the fifth commandment. Illustrating the importance of leading by example, it shows that the way we treat our parents is how our children learn to treat us. In this message, Rob Yule deals with the foundational social relationship of parents and children.

A Grim Tale

Once upon a time there was a little old man. His eyes blinked and his hands trembled. When he ate he clattered the cutlery, his spoon missed his mouth, and he dribbled food on the tablecloth. Lacking anywhere else to live, he lived with his married son, but his son's wife was a modern young woman who knew that in-laws oughtn't be tolerated in a woman's house. 'I can't have this,' she said to her husband. 'It interferes with my right to my personal happiness.'

So she and her husband took the little old man by the arm and led him to a corner of the kitchen. There they put him on a stool and gave him his food in a crockery bowl. From then on he always ate in a corner of the kitchen, blinking at the bench with sad eyes.

One day his hands trembled more than usual, and the crockery bowl fell to the kitchen floor and broke. 'If you want to be a pig,' said the daughter-in-law, 'you can eat out of a trough.' So they made him a wooden trough, and from then on his meals were served in that.

This couple were fond of their four-year old son. One meal time the young man noticed that his little boy was playing with some bits of wood. 'What are you doing, son?' he asked the child. 'I'm making a trough,' he said, looking up for approval, 'to feed you and mummy out of when I get big.'

The man and his wife looked startled, but didn't say anything. Then they began to cry. They went to the corner of the kitchen, took the little old man by the arm and brought him back to the dining table. They sat him in a comfortable chair and gave him his food on a plate. From then on nobody scolded him when he clattered his cutlery, spilled his food, or broke the crockery.

One of Grimm's fairy tales, this story has the crudity and simplicity of old times. The modern method would be to pack Grandpa off to a geriatric hospital, where his senile dementia wouldn't disturb the tidy house and busy lives of his family.

Lead by Example

'Honour your father and your mother' (Exodus 12:12). Here is the commandment parents want me to expound to their kids. But it's really a commandment for parents. It calls us to lead by example. How we treat our parents is how our kids will treat us. If we want to be honoured by our children, we must set them an example by honouring our parents. Our parents may be deceased, but we can still honour their memory. Some of us may never have known a father - like my wife, whose father walked out before she was born - but he too, vagabond that he was, can be spoken of with respect. Experience is the best teacher. Children learn by modelling how to treat us. Your child's experience of how you treat your aging parents is their best lesson in how to treat you, when the process of growing old catches up with you.

'Honour your father and mother, *so that your days may be long in the land.*' To care for elderly parents is to invest in your own future security. The fifth commandment is surprisingly relevant to the current debate about superannuation and retirement provision. It predates the welfare state by millennia, before there was a welfare net of any kind. The Grey Power movement hadn't been thought of, and the grey were often regarded as an economic liability. This commandment ensured that the elderly would be cared for, throughout the generations, in ancient times and today.

The importance of this commandment, however, extends beyond social welfare to the very welfare of society itself, because the family is the basic unit of society. Just as a body's health is dependent on the health of its cells, so the vigour of a nation, the body politic, is directly related to the health of the families that make it up. The parent-child relationship that this commandment speaks of is the foundational relationship of society.

A noticeable feature of the fifth commandment is its reciprocal form. It encourages us to do something, so that something might be done to us. It is a specific example of Jesus' Golden Rule, 'Do to others, as you would have them do to you' (Matthew 7:12). The basic principle here is that if we want our children to honour us, we must set the example and honour our own parents. It points to the importance of modelling in the learning of moral behaviour. For better or worse, we learn by what we see and experience. How we were parented is how we in turn will parent our children.

Considerable attention has been given recently in our own society to the observation that dysfunctional families produce dysfunctional children, and that, unless broken, this cycle becomes an ongoing one through the generations. A recent Family Life Conference Christene and I attended mentioned an American study of the family of a particularly notorious nineteenth century criminal, and noted how many criminals, murderers, rapists, prostitutes and drunkards there were through the succeeding generations of his family. By contrast, the large family of Jonathan Edwards, the famous minister and theologian of the New England Revival in the eighteenth century, and his remarkable wife Sarah, produced many United States senators, college presidents, ministers, doctors, lawyers, missionaries, and spouses of such leaders. For good or ill, our model of parent-child relationships is passed on through the generations. To secure our family heritage we must honour our parents. When we dishonour and neglect them we squander our heritage.

I am the oldest child of a family of eight. I left home when my youngest brother was only two. Despite so little shared time at home, what has held our extended family together over the years has been the 'tribal holidays' that my parents would organise in the summertime, often hiring an old campsite to make it possible for so many of us to assemble in one place. Right up until my parents fiftieth wedding anniversary our scattered extended family has gathered from all over the country to share these gatherings, the cement which binds our family together. We are glad to make the effort to travel the length of the country for such reunions, because we all know, instinctively, how much Dad and Mum have sacrificed themselves for us.

Family Breakdown

The breakdown of family ties which is such a marked feature of the modern world is very largely the result of industrialisation. In pre-industrial society the family was necessary for economic survival. The family was an economic unit, and every member, even the children, contributed their labour to the economic viability of the home. There used to be dozens of activities that bound parents and children together: rearing sheep, spinning wool, weaving cloth, making clothes; growing trees, cutting timber, gathering firewood, making furniture; planting crops, harvesting produce, bottling fruit, brewing cider; learning trades, reading books, making music, having family devotions. The old taught the young and were respected by them. The young honoured the old for their knowledge, yet were also valued as being useful members of the household in their own right.

Now most of this creative work has been taken away from the family and placed in factories. Even on farms children are now no longer really valued as workers contributing to the family income. There are few bonds linking children to their parents. The speed of change is mind-bogglingly fast. In agricultural times, what a man knew was of use to his son. Now, in the age of information technology, the son probably knows more than his dad by the time he turns twenty one. So family bonds are under acute stress. Children are viewed by parents as an economic liability. Parents are viewed by children as dinosaurs from a bygone age. If ever there was a time when we needed to honour our father and mother it is today. The fifth commandment is a social necessity if our culture is not to implode in a meltdown of dysfunctional families. Those who've known little love when they were small are unlikely to show much love when they grow big.

At the heart of the fifth commandment is the need to care for parents in old age, to protect them when they can no longer provide for themselves and become an economic liability. This is just as relevant today as it was when God thundered it to the Israelite tribes at Sinai. In our selfish, hedonistic, pleasure-seeking society people who are economic dependents - whether they be children, the elderly or the socially disadvantaged - are increasingly seen as an impediment to our economic freedom and personal happiness. I predict, as the debate hots up over whether we can afford national superannuation, as the ratio of retired people to working people increases into the

next century, that there will be increasing pressure in our society to view the elderly as an economic liability. This commandment enshrines our foundational duty to protect them, to honour our father and mother, and to care for them on into old age.

Fatherhood and Motherhood

This commandment can also be applied more generally, for it reminds us that nothing can replace the love and guidance of a father and mother. Schools, churches, community organisations, youth groups, sports clubs, childcare facilities, government welfare programmes - none of these can ever take over the crucial role that parental love plays in developing personality, nurturing character, and forming people of emotional stability. The joys of home and family life are irreplaceable. This commandment therefore means that we must not only honour particular fathers and mothers; we should also honour fatherhood and motherhood.

Many New Zealand fathers struggle with the responsibilities of fatherhood, they avoid the role of nurture and example, they leave family life and the upbringing of their children to their wives, while they are busy working at the office or socialising with their friends. Is it any wonder that so many women have adopted a radical feminist denial of motherhood, when they have been left to carry the burden of parenting alone. Who can blame women who, when left by selfish men to an enforced solo parenthood, have rejected motherhood, and with it something essential to their own femininity and to their heritage of family life. Fathers, your children are immensely more valuable to you than making money or a name for yourself. Mothers, your caresses are as important as your careers. Your boss might thank you in the weekly staff meeting; but your children will sing your praises for generations!

The term 'honour' used in the fifth commandment is a noble and exalted term. To honour is to 'prize highly' (Proverbs 4:8), to 'show respect', 'glorify' or 'exalt'. It is a much broader term than 'obey'. It is a word used frequently in the Bible to describe how we are to show respect to God, and is akin to worship, yet here it is applied to parents.

This points to the mystery and privilege of parenthood. The Bible recognises that the quality of parenthood we experience while growing up is crucial for forming an adequate understanding of who God is. Parents are visible representatives of God, 'from whom' (as Paul says in Ephesians 3:15) 'every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.' Similarly, the promise attached to this commandment speaks of an extended life in the land given to us by God. The phrase 'so that your days may be long in the land', found chiefly in the book of Deuteronomy (6:2-3, 11:9, 25:15), not only refers to chronological extension of time, but indicates the rich blessing which comes to a society that keeps God's ways.

In some deep and mysterious way the family is bound up with faith in God: the two are interdependent. The Marxists knew it, and tried to undermine the family. The devil knows it, and would try to destroy the family. Would that we too knew the importance of family life, and would invest more time and effort to enhance it.

Reverence for Life

The Requirement of the Sixth Commandment (Exodus 20:13)

With some thirty civil wars currently occurring, and a burgeoning of violent crime, there is an appalling cheapening of human life throughout the world today. Rob Yule shows the humanitarian importance of the sixth commandment. He makes a fascinating case for Christian pacifism, for the role of the military in civil defence and international peacekeeping, and for the legal protection of the unborn child.

The Scope of the Commandment

The sixth commandment, 'You shall not kill' (Exodus 20:3, Deuteronomy 5:17) isn't as straightforward to translate into English as it may first seem. Some scholars claim that the Hebrew verb *rasah* has a more restrictive meaning than the English verb 'to kill'; that it refers only to the deliberate or intentional taking of human life. Those who take this view, like the translators of the New Revised Standard Version, render the commandment, 'You shall not murder.' Likewise the author of the article on the Ten Commandments in a recent multivolume Bible dictionary says, 'The commandment forbids the illegal and wilful killing of the innocent, but does not ban capital punishment nor forbid the killing of Israel's enemies during war.' (Raymond F. Collins, 'Ten Commandments', in David N. Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary* [New York & London, Doubleday, 1992], Vol VI, p. 386).

The appeal of this translation is that it allows for capital punishment and the taking of life in self-defence, as when a country is attacked in war. But there is a basic difficulty with it. The verb also occurs in the Old Testament in contexts where unintentional killing is clearly being referred to (Deuteronomy 4:41-42, Joshua 20:3). Both Moses and Joshua provided for the establishment of cities of refuge, where a person who had killed someone by accident could flee for protection from reprisal until a proper court case could be held to settle the issue fairly. In the light of these passages a leading Old Testament scholar, Brevard Childs, observes that 'the basic distinction between murder and killing, namely the factor of intentionality, cannot be sustained for the verb *rasah*.' (*Exodus* [London, SCM Press, 1974], p. 420). The sixth commandment refers to all forms of killing, and means, quite simply, 'You shall not kill'. It challenges us to preserve the basic sanctity of human life.

The Morality of Killing

Life was cheap in ancient societies. For many primitive tribes killing was wrong only if it was within your own clan and against your own flesh and blood. Beyond your own clan slaughter and genocide was viewed as permissible, and blood feuds were common, as they still are in the smouldering conflicts of the Balkans. We see echoes of this in the book of Genesis. Cain's wickedness was not just in killing, but in killing his own brother (Genesis 4:8-16). Lamech boasted of revenge, far beyond what was required by simple retribution (Genesis 4:23-24):

'You wives of Lamech, listen to what I say:
I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for striking me.
If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.'

In societies where unrestrained violence was common, the famous *lex talionis* introduced a sense of fairness by limiting revenge to what was proportionate to the offence: 'You shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe' (Exodus 21:24-25). Instead of wholesale slaughter, out of all proportion to the crime, retribution was to be limited to punishing the assailant in the same way the assailant had dealt to the victim. This was justice, not revenge, and it came from the same moral law that God gave to Moses at Mt Sinai. It was divine revelation that brought home to the world for the first time that killing was morally wrong. 'You shall not kill.'

Building on this, other passages in the Old Testament, even while they sometimes describe horrible episodes of violence and killing, speak with abhorrence about the deliberate taking of the life of another human being, especially the life of the weak and defenceless. An example is Psalm 94, which calls on God to bring to justice

those who 'kill the widow and the stranger' and 'murder the orphan', who behave in arrogant disregard of God's law and claim that 'the Lord does not see' their evil deeds.

The Old Testament goes so far as to protect people from accidental or unintentional killing. The owner of an ox is responsible if he hasn't warned people of the danger and it then gores someone to death (Exodus 21:29-32). If someone strikes a person, and that person later dies from the injury, the killer could flee to a place of refuge until the issue was properly judged. But if it was shown that the injury was deliberate and premeditated, then the killer was to be taken from the place of refuge and executed (Exodus 21:12-14). Modern application of this principle would involve us taking responsibility to care for the safety of our workers, to make construction sites safe, to drive carefully, and to child proof our homes. These are things for which we must take due care and for which we are responsible.

The Dilemma of War

There is one widespread form of killing which could involve us all, and that is war. Each one of us has to settle this issue personally for ourselves: can a Christian be involved in war?

On the one hand it is argued that the most precious things in life, and life itself, have to be defended. It is argued that a person cannot stand idly by and see evil rampant and unchecked. At the time of the Second World War, faced with the expansionist designs of Nazi Germany, this was a very powerful argument. Few people would say that a war of aggression is ever justified, but there are many who have argued that there are occasions when a war of defence is justified - a so-called 'just war' - and that it is our duty to defend our fellow-countrymen when unjustly attacked. On the other hand there are those today who would say that with modern weapons, especially nuclear weapons, there can be no such thing as a just war anymore, because not only combatants but innocent civilians as well are bound to be caught up in the destruction.

This is something which each of you has to decide for yourself. But it is my conviction that a Christian cannot take life, and therefore should be a pacifist in time of war. I first developed this view back in 1970 while I was studying in Edinburgh, and I had the privilege of sharing it and defending before the senior boys at Fettes College, one of Scotland's most prestigious schools. Here are my reasons for this view:

1. The sixth commandment, part of the moral law divinely revealed by God himself on Sinai, forbids the taking of life.
2. Jesus taught us to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us, so that we may be children of our Father in heaven, who makes his sun rise indiscriminately on the evil and the good, and sends his rain on the righteous and unrighteous alike (Matthew 5:43-48).
3. The apostle Paul taught us not to repay evil for evil, but, so far as possible, live at peace with all people. We are not to avenge ourselves, for vengeance is God's prerogative. If our enemies are hungry we are to feed them, and so heap burning coals of shame upon their heads (Romans 12:14:21).
4. The apostle Peter urged us to count it all joy when we suffer various trials (1 Peter 1:6-9), and taught us that it was praiseworthy to suffer for doing right, following the very example of Jesus himself (1 Peter 2:19-24).
5. For three centuries the early Christians were pacifists - through the persecutions, right up till the fourth century, when Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire, and became compromised by its alliance with political power. The church historian Roland Bainton, in his great book *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1961, p. 66), says, 'The age of persecution down to the time of Constantine was the age of pacifism to the degree that during this period no Christian author to our knowledge approved of Christian participation in battle.' The early Christians would rather be killed than to kill. Some were prepared to serve in the Roman armies in a policing or peace-keeping role, but not in active warfare.
6. I have never supported the abolition of compulsory military training in New Zealand. My reason is that I believe our military should pursue even more vigorously than it has in recent years an international peace-keeping role. The military could be much more to the forefront in civil defence in New Zealand, and in delivering emergency relief aid around the world. There would be many benefits from such a policy. Training for these roles would benefit all New Zealanders. If the New Zealand military pursued such roles our nation would gain tremendous international prestige, which would in turn benefit our trade, tourism, and ability to attract students from other nations to our educational facilities.

The Protection of the Defenceless

Finally, there's one other matter I must comment on regarding to our obligation to preserve life rather than destroy it. This is the matter of abortion. It is a tragic and appalling fact that statistically the most dangerous place for a New Zealander to be is in their mother's womb. In 1997, 15,208 abortions were reported in New Zealand, representing one in every five known pregnancies. 30% of these were to women who had had abortions before.

Jenny Street, national president of the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child, says that this is

Tragedy for the innocent lives that have been aborted, tragedy for the devastating effect abortion will have on their mothers, and tragedy for the harmful flow-on effect to our country in many ways.

Far more New Zealanders have died through abortion than on the nation's roads, or in all the wars in which New Zealanders have fought overseas. Since the passing of the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion Act in 1977 there have been more than 187,000 notified abortions in this country. That distorts our nation's demographic profile, is a huge chunk out of our national economy, and is the single most important factor affecting the present unsustainability of retirement incomes in this country.

Historically, the law has functioned to protect the weak and defenceless against the powerful and unscrupulous. Today in New Zealand, it is the unborn child, the weakest and most defenceless form of human life, who needs recognition and protection in law. Professor Scott Davidson, Associate Professor of Law at the University of Canterbury, says,

The legal recognition of the unborn child as a human being is a necessary and vital step towards securing the rights of these children in New Zealand. Without such legal recognition and the protection of the law which ensues the silent holocaust in this country will continue unabated.

The sixth commandment forbids us to take life, and by implication lays on us the obligation to protect it - especially the life of the innocent and vulnerable. For this reason I want to call on you today to support the current petition organised by Christians for Life, requesting Parliament 'to give statutory recognition to the unborn child as a human being endowed with an inalienable right to life.' As Thomas Jefferson, architect of the American Declaration of Independence and third President of the United States once said,

The care of human life and happiness and not their destruction, is the first and only legitimate object of good government.

Safeguarding Marriage

The Importance of the Seventh Commandment (Exodus 20:14)

Promiscuity and adultery, widely practised in our sexually liberated age, actually have a number of sad and unintended consequences. Rob Yule's message on the seventh commandment, gives four compelling reasons - economic, moral, medical and theological - for choosing marital faithfulness.

If the commandment to honour parents puts a fence around the family, the commandment prohibiting adultery puts a hedge around marriage. These two commandments are the buttress of social relationships. Neglect of them today is having disastrous consequences for our nation and our way of life.

Adultery is voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and another person - whether married or not - other than their spouse. It is easy to understand what adultery is. It is much harder for a sex-obsessed culture like our own to accept what the prohibition of adultery involves - being sexually faithful to your wife or husband. I want to give four reasons why we ought to heed this often sneered-at commandment.

1. Economic

In its original setting the seventh commandment had an economic aspect to it. The tenth commandment concerning coveting includes the requirement, 'You shall not covet your neighbour's wife' (Exodus 20:17). Much more was involved in this than just the view, now unfashionable, that the wife was the property of her husband. The ancient world knew what we are today in danger of forgetting, that the family was the basic unit of economic life. Family continuity was essential to economic survival.

In ancient communally-based societies there was no social welfare outside clan or family. Adultery threatened the ability of the family to provide for its legitimate members. If an act of adultery produced a child, it threatened family continuity by introducing an unauthorised dependent on the family's income and a rival heir to the family's property. The ancient Jewish philosopher Philo, a contemporary of Jesus, remarks how a deceived husband would therefore be forced to care for the children of a treacherous rival as if they were his own flesh and blood (Elaine Adler Goodfriend, 'Adultery', *Anchor Bible Dictionary* [New York & London, Doubleday, 1992], Vol. I, p. 82). Adultery is the behaviour of a cuckoo, which lays its egg in another bird's nest for it to care for.

We today, of course, think that contraception has eliminated this inconvenience. But it hasn't altered one bit the disastrous economic consequences of adultery and other forms of sexual infidelity. In his *Focus on the Family* film series James Dobson warns would-be philanderers, 'The grass might look greener on the other side of the fence. But just remember, you'll have to mow it! And you'll not only have to mow it - but go on mowing your present lawn as well! The economic cost of supporting two groups of dependents - quite apart from the emotional toll of a broken marriage and a fractured household - is so little considered today by a society which continually sells us the lie that sexual promiscuity is a way to happiness and fulfilment. It's not. It's a way to pain and poverty.

William Galston, a former domestic policy adviser to President Clinton and now a professor at the University of Maryland, has pointed out that you only need to do three things to avoid poverty in the United States. They are: finish high school, marry before having a child, and have that first child after the age of twenty. In America only 8% of children from families who do this are poor ; but 80% of children from families who fail to do this are poor (Bruce Logan, 'Family Matters,' *Cutting Edge*, July-August 1998, p. 1). We enlightened people, supposedly so worldly-wise about sex and economics, forget what earlier generations knew so well - that the family is the basic economic unit of society, and that faithful marriages are the key to personal as well as national prosperity.

2. Moral

The moral dimension of adultery was even more prominent than the economic in the ancient world. Adultery was viewed as the height of betrayal or treachery. It was an assault on the sanctity of marriage and the family. The Old Testament calls adultery an 'abomination' (Ezekiel 22:11), and says that both parties to an illicit union are 'defiled' by what they have done (Leviticus 18:20, Numbers 5:13, Ezekiel 33:26). Adultery is even listed in the offences which defile the land of Israel, disqualifying the Israelites from living there, causing the land to 'vomit out

its inhabitants' (Leviticus 18:20, 24-25). The book of Genesis calls adultery 'a great sin' (Genesis 20:9), a 'sin against God' (Genesis 20:6, 39:9), and this revulsion is echoed in ancient Near Eastern texts from Ugarit and Egypt that call adultery a 'great crime' (Goodfriend, *art. cit.*, p. 82).

The book of Proverbs, chapters 5-7, contain vivid warnings against consorting with an adulteress. She is described as a 'foreign' or 'strange' woman - suggesting that she places herself outside accepted norms of conduct and community relationships. She lures foolish men to their downfall with seductive words. Associating with her leads to 'death' (7:21-23):

With seductive speech she persuades him;
with her smooth talk she compels him.
Right away he follows her,
and goes like an ox to the slaughter,
or bounds like a stag towards the trap
until an arrow pierces his entrails.
He is like a bird rushing into a snare,
not knowing that it will cost him his life.

Her indifference to moral standards, and to the men and families she is bringing to ruin, is vividly expressed: 'she eats, and wipes her mouth, and says, "I have done no wrong."' (Proverbs 30:20).

The book of Proverbs brings out the folly of adultery and the wisdom of avoiding the seductions of the adulteress (6:23-32):

Do not desire her beauty in your heart,
and do not let her capture you with her
eyelashes
Can fire be carried in the bosom
without burning one's clothes?
Or can one walk on hot coals
without scorching the feet?
So is he who sleeps with his neighbour's wife;
no one who touches her will go unpunished...

He who commits adultery has no sense;
he who does it destroys himself.

Proverbs not only warns against adultery; it extols the value of marital love and tells how to fireproof your marriage (5:15-20):

Drink water from your own cistern,
flowing water from your own well.
Should your springs be scattered abroad,
streams of water in the streets?
Let them be for yourself alone,
and not for sharing with strangers.
Let your fountain be blessed,
and rejoice in the wife of your youth,
a lovely deer, a graceful doe.
May her breasts satisfy you at all times;
may you be intoxicated always by her love.
Why should you be intoxicated, my son, by another woman
and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?

3. Medical

A third reason why adultery and sexual promiscuity should be avoided is for the sake of health. The liberal mentality that encourages people to be sexually permissive is guilty of a huge con. There is only one safe way to avoid sexually transmitted diseases, and it's not condoms. The HIV or AIDS virus is small enough to pass through the micropores in the latex of a condom. Anyone who thinks that's protected sex should try Russian roulette with seven cartridges in the revolver. The only sure way to avoid sexually transmitted diseases is by abstinence or fidelity - by having no sex, or by limiting it to a single lifelong heterosexual partner whom you can trust never to have sexual relations with anyone else than you, and you equally keeping yourself exclusively for that person. This has even been acknowledged by the World Health Organisation, which for World AIDS Day in 1991 put out this statement: 'The most effective way to prevent sexual transmission of HIV is to abstain or for two people who are not infected to be faithful to one another.'

Let me clarify this statement. I said 'a single, lifelong, heterosexual partner whom you can trust.' Can you trust someone who wants to have sex with you, without a long period of courtship to get to know them? Can you trust someone who wants to live with you, but is not prepared to make a lifelong commitment to be faithful to you in marriage? Many people think they can trust a person to be faithful, because they only have one partner at a time. But over a period of time people who are not committed to monogamous marriage can have many partners, and the incubation period of some sexually transmitted diseases can be longer than the duration of these relationships. Dr. Patrick Dixon, in his book *The Rising Price of Love: The True Cost of Sexual Freedom* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), which draws on his extensive work in AIDS care in London, says this (pp. 79-80):

You might think that the best way to avoid sexual diseases is to reduce the number of partners. However, life is not that simple. . . . The commonest sexual pattern is serial monogamy, or faithfulness to one person at a time, but unfortunately this can be an ideal way to spread sex diseases. One partner infects another; and after a year, perhaps both have new partners, and infect one other person each. After another year or two, each of the four infects another. Eight becomes sixteen and so on. Therefore it is hardly surprising that even in the absence of . . . 'promiscuous behaviour' . . . sexual diseases still spread.

Patrick Dixon says that if he had to choose between death by cancer and death by AIDS he would choose cancer. People are shocked when he says this. However, the hospice movement and the development of modern cancer treatments means that much of the pain of cancer can be alleviated. It is very different with AIDS, and some other incurable sexually transmitted diseases. One in four AIDS patients loses their vision, sometimes becoming completely blind. Many have memory loss, almost all experience crushing tiredness and weakness, many have severe diarrhoea from gut infections, or pain from shingles, genital herpes, or other immune problems. The combination of AIDS and genital herpes can cause the entire skin to break down, with ulcers so severe they can expose the bone. Losing control of the bowels, passing water involuntarily, unable to walk without falling, unable to remember who came to see you five minutes ago, nausea, vomiting, headaches, fevers, drenching sweats (Dixon, *op. cit.*, pp 93-94). AIDS is not a pleasant illness.

Some say you should hide this from people. But it's the sad reality of today's sexual revolution, and its proponents have got a lot to answer for. God's commandments are given for our good, and would protect us from such tragic consequences. The Bible tells us that if we lived according to them God would protect us from 'all the dread diseases' which are epidemic in the society around us (Deuteronomy 7:15). If we lived by the Maker's Manual we wouldn't mess up our lives like this.

4. Theological

Let me conclude with the heart of the matter. Adultery is wrong, because it denies the depth of the sexual union, the most intimate union of two people, a man and a woman, which the Bible describes in incarnational terms as becoming 'one flesh'. 'For this reason a man will leave his mother and father, and be united with his wife, and they will become one flesh' (Genesis 2:24). This verse follows the first love poem in history, where Adam greets Eve in the language of sexual ecstasy (2:23):

'This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called "woman",
for she was taken out of man.'

What is striking about this passage are the repeated references to 'flesh': 'this is flesh of my flesh', 'they will become one flesh'. John Stott remarks that 'heterosexual intercourse is more than a union; it is a kind of reunion. It is not a union of alien persons who do not belong to one another and cannot appropriately become one flesh. On the contrary, it is the union of two persons who originally were one, were then separated from each other, and now in the sexual encounter of marriage come together again.'

Stott continues: 'It is surely this which explains the profound mystery of heterosexual intimacy, which poets and philosophers have celebrated in every culture. Heterosexual intercourse is much more than a union of bodies; it is a blending of complementary personalities through which, in the midst of prevailing alienation, the rich created oneness of human being is experienced again. And the complementarity of male and female sexual organs is only a symbol at the physical level of a much deeper spiritual complementarity.' (*Issues Facing Christians Today* [London, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1984], pp. 310-11).

This is ultimately why adultery is wrong. Adultery trivialises the sexual relationship. It misses its point, skims its surface. It treats as skin-deep what is really soul-deep, as public what is actually private, as transferable what is essentially personal. The sex act is more than a handshake, more than the bumping of bodies in a bed. It is the indescribable comfort offered by two persons who are committed to each other and belong to each other, transcending their individuality in an act of intimacy that while being a universal experience is uniquely personal to themselves.

The commandment prohibiting adultery safeguards this exclusive relationship. It puts a fence around it, with a notice that says, 'Private Property. Keep Out.'

Practical Honesty

Living Out the Eighth Commandment (Exodus 22:1-7, 25-29)

Society comes down hard on petty theft, but respectable white-collar crime flourishes, comprising big business globally today. In this sometimes humorous address on the commandment against stealing, Rob Yule, minister of St. Alban's Presbyterian Church, Palmerston North, New Zealand, brings out the challenging and liberating nature of the Bible's teaching about wealth and money.

My wife Christene and I will never forget the day our son Andy, aged about ten, came home shaking with excitement to tell us what had happened to him after school. It was the time when 'Easy Rider' handle-bar 'chopper' bicycles were in vogue. He'd loaned his to a friend, who was cycling over the mounds of earth that had just been placed by a landscaping firm around the new Hornby Public Library in Christchurch. From behind the Library the friend let out a cry. Andy rushed round to find him holding a large bundle of \$20 notes. What should they do? After talking together Andy suggested they'd better take it into the Library.

The Library staff told us later what happened. Two little boys came in shaking with excitement, and placed a huge stash of money on the counter. All the staff gathered round to see it. In due course enquiries revealed that the woman teller at the local TAB betting agency, anxious to put any would-be robber off her trail, had taken a circular detour to the bank, and dropped the takings - \$1,000 worth of \$20 notes - on the way! She was in big trouble - till the boys showed up with their haul! The TAB subsequently rewarded Andy's friend to the tune of \$100. We hoped that he might share his reward with Andy, but that never happened. So, since it was our son's honesty that led the friend to take it to the Library, we gave Andy a special reward of our own. We bought him a chain guard that still adorns his beloved chopper, to teach him that honesty pays!

More Ways than Killing a Cat

Human beings are very ingenious. There are more ways of breaking the eighth commandment than there are of killing a cat. Obvious ways - like breaking into a house, cracking a safe, converting a car (odd phrase that), or driving a truck through the front window of a bank and making off with the cash vending machine.

But what about not paying accounts on time, not registering your software, not paying your workers a fair wage, not giving your employer an honest day's work, tampering with weights and measures, rigging contracts, bribing officials, finding loopholes in the tax laws, speculating with international exchange rates, designing and manufacturing items for deliberate obsolescence, monitoring electronic communications to break into someone else's bank account, or using the phone redial function to access your parent's telebanking facility? Who said human beings aren't creative or hardworking? The dullest school dropout can show surprising intellectual ingenuity when it comes to breaking the eighth commandment!

One of the more enterprising ways of breaking the eighth commandment I've heard of was at the time of the transition to decimal currency in the United Kingdom. Because half pennies ceased to be legal tender, and were being removed from bank accounts, an enterprising bank clerk decided to collect all the redundant half pennies that came his way and put them into his own bank account. It was tedious work, a real labour of love; but over a period of time it grew into a quite sizeable stash of money. The court, however, took a dim view of it, because they viewed the offending half pennies as no longer legal currency. It seemed odd to me that you could be legally charged for what was no longer legal tender, and I wondered if the enterprising clerk perhaps deserved his hard-earned pay.

Incidentally, what did happen *officially* to all those spare half pennies? Did the state pocket them, on a far greater scale than the enterprising bank clerk? Isn't that state theft - just like when it prints too much paper money, which fuels inflation and erodes our savings? 'The state gave, and the state has taken away. Blessed be the name of the state.'

Respectable Crime Worldwide

Our society comes down hard on common forms of stealing, like breaking and entering, shoplifting, and our bank clerk's helping himself on the side, but tends to treat more leniently respectable white collar crime, large-scale fraudulent business deals or skilfully devised economic transactions like the Winebox affair (though maybe we haven't heard the last of it yet).

The Bible actually condemns stealing by the dishonest rich in far stronger terms than stealing by the desperate poor. One of the most disapproved of crimes in the Bible is the political skulduggery by which Queen Jezebel got Naboth murdered so that she could confiscate his vineyard. The same Jesus who welcomed the repentant thief into paradise, a few days earlier overturned the tables of the money changers in the temple and labelled those respectable ecclesiastical financiers a 'den of thieves'. The medieval Christian writer Dante placed respectable fraudsters deeper in hell than petty burglars. In this spirit I must say I was disappointed that Crossroads Bible Chapel in Palmerston North didn't retain the graffiti on the brick wall when they took over Central Power's workshop as their new worship facility. 'Come back Robin Hood' would have made a nice foil for the gospel. How about: 'I believe in the resurrection of the dead. Come back Robin Hood!'

Breaking the eighth commandment is big business globally. In *Our Globe and How to Reach It* (Birmingham, Alabama, New Hope, 1990), pp. 19, 54-69, noted statistician David Barrett gives the following statistics (cost per annum):

- Absenteeism at work \$6 billion
- Computer crime \$44 billion
- Credit Card fraud \$500 million
- Ecclesiastical crime \$1.1 billion
- Financial fraud \$800 billion
- International organised crime \$700 billion
- Money-laundering through banks \$1.3 trillion
- Shoplifting \$90 billion
- Tax cheating \$180 billion

Compare this with the estimated money needed annually to provide those in poverty with adequate food, water, education and health: \$500 billion.

Usury, Destroyer of Nations

There's a specific issue I'd like to comment on: is charging interest on loans a breach of the eighth commandment? It comes as a shock to Christians today to learn that Christianity consistently opposed the charging of interest on loans right up until the beginnings of modern capitalism. Richard Baxter was a moderate evangelical leader in seventeenth century England. He lived at time when levying of interest was first beginning to be countenanced by Christians. Popular contemporary editions of his autobiography leave out his struggles of conscience with usury, thinking such subject matter not sufficiently spiritual or edifying for modern devotional taste. It's a sad commentary on our blindness to economic and social ethics.

Today we live in a world where a few (the Sultan of Brunei, or Bill Gates) have billions, and billions (the absolutely poor) have nothing. Usury, the charging of interest, is the single most important factor in this situation. It enforces the gulf between money-lenders and debtors, and so creates ostentatious wealth on the one hand and desperate poverty on the other. Usury causes the economic ruin of individuals and of nations. It is a sin before God.

If this statement seems harsh, could it be because we have departed a long way from the Biblical and early Christian view of the matter?

If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them. If you take your neighbour's cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down; for it may be your neighbour's only clothing to use as cover; in what else shall that person sleep? And if your neighbour cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate. (Exodus 22:25-27)

Deuteronomy 23:19-20 softens this, making a distinction between lending without interest to a fellow-Israelite, and lending to a foreigner, where interest was permissible. But it's interesting that the stronger view prevailed into the early church. The early Christians found it abhorrent to make money from the exchange of money, without any commodity or added value changing hands. The Latin American church historian, Justo Gonzalez, concludes his fine book *Faith and Wealth: a History of Early Christian Ideas on the Origin, Significance, and Use of Money* (San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1990): 'Usury, by which is usually meant any loan on interest, is universally condemned in the early church. . . . Christian writers throughout the first four centuries are practically unanimous in their rejection of usury as well as of any loan on interest . . . even though a moderate rate of interest was legal according to civil law.' (pp. 225-26).

Basil the Great was a fourth century Christian leader in Cappadocia, modern Turkey. One of his sermons that has come down to us was on the subject of usury (Gonzalez, *op. cit.*, pp 175-76). He spoke as a pastor to the poor in his congregation, to persuade them that borrowing money and taking loans would not solve their economic problems - it only mortgages up their future and makes their difficulties worse. However, in the course of his message Basil makes a number of scathing remarks about rich people who lend money at interest. It is most inhuman, he says, that when a person is in need someone else takes advantage of their predicament to make money, 'increasing his opulence at the price of the sufferings of the poor.' Basil says to the lender, 'Do you not know that you are increasing your sins more than you can increase your money through usury?' And he says to the borrower, 'If you have the money to pay, why not solve your present problem using that? And if you do not have it, you are simply heaping evil upon evil. . . . Now you are poor, but free. If you borrow, you will not become rich, and you will lose your freedom.'

Basil expounds a view that was common in the early Christian centuries but has disappeared today: to give to the poor, whether as an interest-free loan or as an outright gift, is to lend to God. They saw God as the guarantor of money given to the poor, so that the person who gives to the poor lends to God. 'Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full' (Proverbs 19:17). It is the height of unbelief, says Basil, to put your trust in a rich person to guarantee a loan instead of trusting God by giving generously to the poor.

Maintaining Financial Freedom

Scrupulous honesty is the best way to maintain financial freedom and a clear conscience. Step off the path of this commandment and you will quickly end up in a financial and moral quagmire. The following true story happened about fifteen years ago. I won't give any identifying details, but I can tell you it, because the woman concerned has died. There was a family I used to visit in my previous church, who were always extremely gloomy. It was an effort to go there. Things weren't helped when the woman contracted cancer.

In the midst of my visits, she opened up and confided something that was burdening her. She was a keen reader and book lover. She was a member of a well-known postal book discount club. Her passion for books had gotten the better of her, and she'd started taking out further memberships under various false names, to get the benefit of the choice of free books that went with each new membership. But she hadn't reckoned on losing her financial freedom and a clear conscience. The membership dues were mounting, the bills were flowing in at an alarming rate, and she had a haunting fear of being found out.

She confessed to me, and to God, what she had done. I talked to her about the importance of restitution if her confession was to be full and restorative. I encouraged her to put things right with the book company, return all the books that weren't rightfully hers, and pay all the arrears she'd incurred; and I offered, if she was willing to do her part, to write a covering letter to the firm, acknowledging their right to instigate criminal proceedings, but asking for clemency for her on account of her new found faith and her medical condition. She was ready to face prosecution, and that acceptance of responsibility alone saw an enormous increase in her self-esteem. For the first time the joy of salvation started to enter that house. Her confession was like opening the venetian blinds, and the light started to stream in.

To my and her amazement, the firm pardoned her and said they wouldn't make charges. Her faith grew in leaps and bounds. The impact of her change of life, even as she was growing weaker with cancer, was amazing. Like Samson, she slew more in her last act than in the whole of her previous life put together. The husband, who'd been praying for her for years, was overjoyed at the answer to his prayers. It coincided with his last months before retirement as a film projectionist, and he had the satisfaction of the record-breaking screening of *Chariots of Fire* as his last movie - a grace gift to him after years of screening X-rated garbage that he didn't like. We have

cause to remember this wonderful story, because we were given the woman's old Raleigh bicycle, and Christene, to the embarrassment of our children, still rides it to Palmerston North Girls High School each day.

I admit that being honest is not without its complications. I will never forget the time I discovered that my garage had undercharged me \$1 for fuel; they forgot to include the squirt of Valve Master petrol additive - 'because they don't make cars like they used to.' When I took my dollar to them next time they were not only flabbergasted at my honesty; they didn't know what to do with it. There was no category under which they could record it. 'Shell Ferguson Street: Charitable Donation.' Maybe I simply provided an additional temptation for the poor harassed attendant, and he had a Mars Bar after my back was turned! But I went away with the incalculable benefit of a clear conscience, and that's my wish for you all!

Nothing but the Truth

The Value of the Ninth Commandment (Deuteronomy 19:15-21)

The purpose of the ninth commandment is not only to protect people from false accusation in a court of law, but to guard people's reputation and foster truth-telling in every area of life. Intellectuals, sadly, are no better in this respect than anyone else, as illustrated by examples of academic reputations damaged by false witness.

False Witness in the Bible

The original setting of the ninth commandment was a legal one, but it came to apply to truth-telling in all areas of life. In ancient Israel an accused person would be brought before a court of elders, and people would testify against them. The commandment required that witnesses tell the truth, so people were protected from being falsely accused. In the book of Proverbs, among seven things the Lord hates is 'a lying witness who testifies falsely' (6:17). 'A truthful witness saves lives, but one who utters lies is a betrayer' (Proverbs 14:25).

Because of the possibility of false testimony, the Old Testament contained regulations about the conduct of trials. 'No one shall be put to death on the testimony of a single witness' (Numbers 35:30). 'Only on the evidence of two or three witness shall a charge be sustained' (Deuteronomy 19:15). If there was suspicion that witnesses were not telling the truth, they were to be examined. If it was found that 'a witness was a false witness, having testified falsely against another, then you shall do to the false witness just as the false witness had meant to do to the other', in this way creating a fear in society ensuring that such an offence would not be committed again (Deuteronomy 19: 18-19). An example of exactly this punishment is in the book of Esther, where the treacherous Haman, who had plotted the murder of Mordechai and the genocide of the Jews, is hanged on the very gallows that he had planned for Mordechai (Esther 7:9-10), with the result that a tremendous 'fear of the Jews' fell upon the population of the vast Medo-Persian Empire (Esther 8:17).

There are numerous accounts in the Bible of the destructive effects of false witness. A frequent cry of the psalmist is that 'false witnesses have risen against me' (Psalm 27:12). The shocking crime of Queen Jezebel when she misappropriated Naboth's vineyard for her husband King Ahab, was carried out by means of two scoundrels, recruited to give false witness against him (1 Kings 21:8-14). False witnesses were involved in the trial of Jesus, which was a travesty of proper judicial process, though they could not agree together what testimony to give (Mark 14:56-59). False witnesses also testified against Stephen, the first Christian martyr, when he was stoned to death (Acts 6:13).

False Witness in the Law Court

False witness is very harmful when it occurs in a court of law. We tend not only to interpret things from our point of view, but to twist things to put ourselves in a more favourable light. Two drivers involved in a car accident might each tell the story of what happened in a way which puts the blame on another. William Barclay recounts how one judge, after hearing the evidence in a case like that, said that if you were to believe the evidence of both sides, there was a head-on collision between two cars, each of which was stationary on its own side of the road! (*The Old Law and the New Law* [Edinburgh, St Andrew Press, 1972], p. 42).

In our New Zealand courts, perhaps the most famous case of false witness was after the 1979 DC10 crash on Mount Erebus in the Antarctic. Air New Zealand's defence, which attempted to put the blame on pilot error, was dismissed by Judge Peter Mahon in his Royal Commission of Enquiry Report as 'a pre-determined plan of deception' and 'an orchestrated litany of lies.' His report found that 'the single dominant and effective cause of the disaster was the mistake made by those airline officials who programmed the aircraft to fly directly at Mount Erebus and omitted to tell the air crew.' So the pilots believed they were flying on a navigation track safely down McMurdo Sound, west of Mount Erebus, when in fact they were headed directly towards it, in whiteout conditions that made it invisible.

False Witness in Scholarship

False witness is also a pernicious influence in scholarship. It is disappointing to discover that intellectuals are no more honest, and are sometimes a lot less honest, than the rest of us, often breaching the ninth commandment. In his account of Soviet prison camps the Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn tells a number of stories about stolen academic reputations. He mentions a leading plant breeder, V. S. Markin, whose variety of wheat that he had developed, 'Taiga 49', was stolen by another agronomist, A. A. Solvyev, after Markin was arrested by the Communists. It was twenty years before Markin was rehabilitated, in 1963, but he received only a fraction of the payment due to him for his wheat variety (*The Gulag Archipelago*, Vol. 2 [Glasgow, Collins/Harvill, 1975], p. 625).

Solzhenitsyn also tells how at the height of their anti-religious policy, the Communist authorities destroyed the Institute of Buddhist Culture in the Soviet Union (*Ibid.*, pp.625-6). All its leaders were arrested, and the head of the institute, Academician Shcherbatsky, died. A self-serving student, Kalyanov, went to Shcherbatsky's wife, and threatened her with serious repercussions from the authorities if she didn't hand over to him her husband's books and papers. He then proceeded to publish some of them over his own name, so gaining a wrongful academic reputation at the dead scholar's expense.

The most shocking story of this kind that I know was discovered by Dr John Hitchen, former principal of the Bible College of New Zealand, during his doctoral research on Christian missions in the South Pacific. A leading nineteenth century anthropologist made it his business to criticise the activity of early missionaries as culturally insensitive. In fact, these particular missionaries not only displayed great sensitivity towards the cultures of the peoples they worked with, but by their careful and objective scholarship became authorities on these cultures. The anthropologist, dishonestly, not only misrepresented the missionaries and criticised them in his publications; but after their deaths took their researches and published them over his own name, thus gaining a stolen academic reputation at the expense of the missionaries he thus doubly maligned.

False Witness about C. S. Lewis

On 29 November 1998 we celebrated the 100th anniversary of C. S. Lewis's birth, and my wife Christene spoke to us about Lewis as a man, as a writer, and as a Christian. You probably know that late in life Lewis married Joy Davidman, a feisty American Jewess, divorced wife of an alcoholic, Bill Gresham. In his biography of Lewis, the writer A. N. Wilson implies that Lewis's relationship with Joy was consummated before his Christian marriage ceremony to her in the Churchill Hospital in Oxford, where Joy was dying of cancer:

According to an oral memory of Joy's son Douglas, transcribed in the Marion E. Wade collection at Wheaton College, Illinois, the two of them were already lovers in 1955. Douglas on one occasion came into his mother's bedroom at 10 Old High Street and found it occupied by Jack and Joy in a compromising position. This memory, which transpired during a conversation between Douglas Gresham and Lyle W. Dorsett, is not repeated in either of the books which the two men have written about the Lewis marriage, and it is not clear whether the omission is because Gresham distrusts the memory (he was eight years old at the time) or because it was considered indelicate to imply that the union between Lewis and his future wife was consummated, as would appear to have been the case, before they were married. (*C. S. Lewis: A Biography* [London, Collins, 1990], pp. 256-7).

Another biographer, George Sayer, who was, unlike Wilson, a close personal friend of Jack (as Lewis was known to his friends) over many years, and a practising Christian, discusses this issue carefully. According to him Douglas Gresham 'has stated in writing that he never made this statement', and both Gresham and Lyle Dorsett, the former curator of the Wade Centre at Wheaton College, have told him 'that the statement is not on the tape or in the typescript that was made from it.' Sayer writes:

This is a most serious charge. If it is true, it destroys Jack's credibility as an honest man and a Christian moralist. For Lewis not only taught and believed that sexual intercourse outside marriage was utterly wrong for the Christian, he told his brother and a few of his closest friends (I had the honour to be among them) that the registry office marriage was a formality to enable Joy to stay permanently in England and that any living together as man and wife was out of the question. All of us who knew him had no doubt that he was an honest man who practiced what he preached. (*Jack: A Life of C. S. Lewis*, 2nd. ed. [Wheaton, Illinois, Crossway Books, 1994], p. 414).

Wilson is a widely respected biographer. Yet he makes this damaging insinuation without any evidence or documentation, and in so doing casts an unjustifiable shadow over Lewis's moral integrity and authority. The implication is that Lewis didn't live out what he wrote about Christian sexual morality in *Mere Christianity*: 'There is no getting away from it: the Christian rule is "Either marriage, with complete faithfulness to your partner, or else total abstinence".' ([London, Collins, 1952], p. 86). As far as I can judge from the lack of evidence, Wilson's assertion is simply a refined but scurrilous form of false witness.

That same Joy Davidman whom C. S. Lewis married, remarks in her book on the Ten Commandments that 'You can usually tell when a hypocrite has been sinning; he denounces that sin in public - and in somebody else.' (*Smoke on the Mountain* [London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1963], p. 100). It is inappropriate for me, especially in a message on false witness, to raise the issue of Wilson's own sexual propriety, because I have no idea what sort of man he is; but it does make you wonder what ulterior motive or conduct underlies such an insinuation about Lewis.

False Witness in the Church

False witness, often in the guise of gossip, can be a destructive thing in the Christian community, quickly sowing mistrust and broken relationships in a local church. About three months ago I heard the astonishing rumour going around that St Albans was experiencing division because of the lack of resolution to the debate about homosexuality and leadership in the wider Presbyterian Church to which we belong. Nothing could be further from the truth. Despite this difficult external environment, St Albans has been surprisingly buoyant and united. We adhere strongly to, and the Presbyterian Church has never rescinded, the statement of the 1991 General Assembly affirming the inadmissibility of sexual relations outside of marriage.

The letter of James in the New Testament addresses this problem of gossip, comparing the tongue to a fire which can set ablaze and destroy a whole forest (James 3:5-8). Older New Zealanders will remember the former New Zealand Forest Service warning: 'One tree can make a million matches, one match can destroy a million trees.' Careless and inflammatory speech can be equally destructive. 'If any think they are religious,' says James, 'and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless.' (James 1:26). Criticism, slander, gossip, can cause great harm to people's reputation in the church. We are to avoid it, along with all forms of false witness. Instead, we should speak well of one another, building one another up and protecting one another's reputations.

Restraining Greed

The Focus of the Tenth Commandment (Exodus 20:17)

The tenth commandment differs from all the others by its focus on inner attitudes rather than on outward actions. In this final message in his series on the Ten Commandments, Rob Yule sees covetousness not only as a symptom of our consumer culture, but of our need for a new heart.

The commandment about covetousness is subtly different from all the rest. It refers not just to wrong actions, but to wrong attitudes. All the other commandments deal with particular actions. We are to worship only the one true God, never make or worship idols, or dishonour God's name. We are to keep the Sabbath, and honour our parents. We are not to kill, steal, commit adultery, or bear false witness. All these are specific actions. But the tenth commandment deals not with actions, but with our innermost thoughts and desires. 'You shall not covet' (Exodus 20:17).

Because it is concerned with attitudes, not just actions, the tenth commandment is the most challenging and far-reaching of the commandments. We can control our actions, but it is difficult to control our thoughts and desires. We can stop stealing, but it's much harder to stop *wanting* to steal. It's easy not to hit a person; it's much harder not to hate them. We can avoid committing adultery; it's much harder not to have lustful thoughts or covetousness desires. Outward actions can be controlled; but inward thoughts and desires are difficult to control.

The tenth commandment, by its inwardness, exposes the sinfulness of our hearts. It reminds us how inwardly corrupt we are. 'The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse - who can understand it?' (Jeremiah 17:9).

By its concentration on attitudes the tenth commandment also shows that the other commandments have an inward aspect. We cannot congratulate ourselves on a merely external observance of the commandments, like the man in Albert Camus' novel *The Fall*, who prided himself on his high moral principles. He would never dream of sleeping with the wife of a friend. Only, a few days beforehand, he would 'simply cease to feel any friendship for the husband.' (Penguin ed., London, 1957, p. 44). The tenth commandment, with its emphasis on integrity of heart, shows that we cannot indulge in that kind of sophistry and self-deception when it comes to keeping God's laws. We must do God's will with inner integrity, as well as with outward activity. We cannot pass ourselves off as paragons of virtue or model citizens, if our heart attitudes are corrupt and depraved. The tenth commandment indicates our need of a heart transplant, a new heart and a new spirit. 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.' (Psalm 51:10).

The prohibition of covetousness unmasks three forms of wrong desire that we are all familiar with.

1. Covetousness is desire for what is forbidden.

It's strange, but once something is forbidden, it becomes attractive. Almost instinctively we want what we cannot have. St. Augustine tells how, when he was a boy, he and his friends made a raid on a garden and stole some pears. He tells us that he had far better pears in his own garden. The pears he and his friends stole were so hard and sour they couldn't eat them. The sole pleasure they got was the excitement of the raid, the pleasure of taking what was forbidden.

Ever since Eve and Adam took the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, to want what is forbidden has become a characteristic of our sinful desires. That's how Paul sees it in his discussion of covetousness. 'I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet".' (Romans 7:7). As every primary school teacher knows, if you draw a line on the playground and tell the class to stay behind it, immediately there will be toes edging across that line. The commandment against coveting exposes our sinful attraction to what is forbidden.

2. Covetousness is desire for what others have.

The commandment against coveting highlights, secondly, our wrong attraction to what others have. We are terribly dominated by this elemental passion. A home without a television set would be bliss, were it not for the chorus of complaints from the children who want one in order to be like the family down the road! The odd thing is those parents down the road might in fact envy our more placid family lifestyle, free from the acquisitive pressure generated by television images and advertisements!

This is the strange thing about covetousness: we covet the kind of life someone else lives, not realising that the other person may all the while covet ours. A poor person envies a rich person for his money, but a rich person might envy the same poor person his simple lifestyle or robust health. A tradesman might envy a doctor or a university lecturer their salary, while they might envy him because he can stop work at 5.30 pm, and enjoy an evening free from anxiety.

It always seems that the other person is better off than we are, so we envy their position in life. William Barclay illustrates this with a delightful story about a golden house (*The Old Law and the New Law* [Edinburgh, St Andrew Press, 1972], p. 47). There was a boy who lived in a house on one side of a valley. On the other side of the valley was a house, which he saw every day. It seemed the most wonderful house in the world. He called it 'the house with the golden windows', because every morning when he got up he would look at it, and it seemed to have windows of gold.

One day he decided to visit it. He took his lunch and set out walking across the valley. When he reached the house a boy about his own age came to the door. 'Where do you come from?' he asked. The first boy replied, 'I come from that house you can see across the valley. The other boy said, 'You mean you're the boy who lives in the house with the golden windows? Every evening I see the windows of your house pure gold.' 'Not so,' said the first boy, 'you are the one who lives in the house with the golden windows.' 'I'm not,' said the second boy, 'it's you who lives there.' 'Look,' said the second boy, 'you can see for yourself.' It was now late afternoon as he pointed across the valley, 'There's your house, and the windows are gold!'

We covet, because we mistakenly think that the other person's life is better than our own. They live in a golden house, and we live in a plain one. In the morning the sun shone on the house on the one side of the valley, so that it looked as if it had golden windows. In the evening the sun shone on the house on the other side of the valley, so that now it seemed to have the golden windows. Each boy thought that the other boy's house had golden windows. But in reality both boys lived in a golden house. Contentment is accepting our place in life as best. Contentment is saying, with the psalmist, 'the boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage.' (Psalm 16:5). Contentment is saying, with the hymn writer,

Hast thou not seen
How thy heart's wishes have been
Granted in what he ordaineth?

Such contentment is the true antidote to covetousness.

3. Covetousness is desire without bounds or restraint.

The third commandment highlights the way our entire modern consumer culture is built upon covetousness. In Sarajevo, they need to heed the commandment not to kill. In New Zealand, we need to heed the commandment not to covet. We exalt the free market, unrestrained competition, commerce built upon satisfying wants, and advertising dedicated to increasing and maximising those wants.

As the postwar boom began forty five years ago the English theologian D. R. Davies wrote a provocative book called *The Sin of Our Age*. In it he said of our materialistic culture that 'the good life has become inseparable from the maximum possible consumption of things. The dogma of the new religion is the dogma of increasing wants.' What would Davies say of our consumer society today? In the nineties our entire society is based on the violation of the tenth commandment.

Think of the symbols of affluence in our culture. Expensive off-road vehicles, many of which will never go off-road unless they leave it in a vehicle accident. Extravagant houses with four car garages and more rooms than will

never be needed to house today's diminishing-sized family. Fashion clothing whose labels cost more than the fabric, and simply cover our pride and vanity. It all illustrates something ancient and primitive: 'covetousness, which is idolatry', as Paul summed it up (Colossians 3:5).

Joy Davidman, in her book on the Ten Commandments, puts it insightfully. The coveter, she says,

. . . learns to value what he gets chiefly because his fellows can't have it; to desire his neighbour's wife, not because she is beautiful, but because she is another's. . . . Before long the gold and elephants, the convertibles and chinchillas, are no use at all to the coveter in themselves; he will drop them the instant they go out of fashion, he even resents them a little as responsibilities; but he must have them to convince himself that he is all-powerful, all-successful, all-important. (*Smoke on the Mountain* [London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1963], p. 113).

We need to beware of the sin of covetousness. It is a snare to us all. It is boundless in its appetite. It isolates us from others, it puffs up our pride and inflates our self-importance, it leads us to pursue foolish fripperies and miss the point of life. Jesus warned 'Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed [or covetousness], for a one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.' (Luke 12:15).

Ultimately, the real solution to covetousness is contentment. Paul, that gifted but self-sacrificing pioneer of Gentile missions, said of himself, 'I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.' (Philippians 4:11-12).

Woody Guthrie was the folk balladeer of the Great Depression in America. In his autobiography, *Bound for Glory*, he brilliantly recreates what it was like growing up in poverty in Oklahoma. He and his friends used to play with stick horses. They reared them, broke them in, learned their individual characteristics, rode them, traded them. A whole vivid world of imagination was available to those poor kids, lacking any of the sophisticated playstations and plastic constructions sets available to kids today. After I read that chapter to my children they themselves had hours and hours of happy play with stick horses of their own, each with their own unique temperament, their own way of handling or of bucking.

Learn to live simply. Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. We need to control our appetites, reign in our covetousness, and be content with what we have.