

Exod 04-01-04a

Let's continue our worship this morning by taking a moment at the outset to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and seek the ministry of God's Holy Spirit so that the time that we spend in God's Word will be profitable to us and will put something in our souls that is usable as we face the challenges of the day and of the time ahead. Shall we pray? Father, thank you for this day. Thank you for a new year and a new set of opportunities that we remind ourselves our lives are defined by our relationship with you, by the faith that we acquire through studying your Word, the hope of the future that is taught to us by your Word, and the love that is shed abroad in our hearts by God the Holy Spirit.

We thank you for our fellowship and for the encouragement of fellow believers. We thank you for the spiritual gifts that you have distributed among us and through which each one of us is blessed. We thank you for the country in which we live, for our President and our national leaders who are seeking to honor you as they fulfill their responsibilities.

We thank you that our nation continues to prosper in many ways despite the inroads of degeneracy and of counterculture and of the things that are not a part of your will for us. We thank you that we have freedom to worship and we pray that you'll bless our worship this morning. Bless each one here.

Bless those who study with us by recording or from a distance. And we ask that each one of us will be strengthened and encouraged and built up so that we can bear much fruit, reflect your glory, and bring honor to the name of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray it in his name.

Amen. We continue this morning on this January the 4th of 2004, our study of Exodus chapter 20, where the Decalogue or the Ten Commandments are presented in the first portion of the chapter. The book of Exodus has built up to this mountain peak so that as you look at the content of the book, you find yourself sort of at a mountain and at a climactic point in the same way that Moses is literally up on the mountain and the children of Israel are camped around the base.

We have looked at the set of Ten Commandments and the possible ways in which they could be divided. Some people see five and five. Some see four and six.

The fifth commandment, honor your father and mother, is an interesting commandment in the sense that it seems to be a part of the first five that talk about God and relationship with God and honoring God. And yet it also deals with the horizontal plane, dealing with one's fellow man, in this case one's immediate ancestors. It is also the first commandment with promise.

When it says to have no other gods before Yahweh, when it says to not make a graven image, to not take his name in vain, to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, these are injunctions. Then when it says honor your father and your mother, there is a promise associated with that commandment, so that your days may be long upon the land which the

Lord your God is giving you. The idea here is there is a promise that you will live long in the land.

The condition of the promise is honoring father and mother. For an Israelite, this is the promise of longevity and prosperity in the promised land, in the land of Canaan, in the place that they are striving to go. For us, we are not on a pilgrimage.

I know some people who are over in the Holy Land area right now on a tour, but most of us are not harboring the ambition of getting over to Israel any time in the near future. We have a spiritual objective. We want to arrive in that place of service, in that place of maturity and of victory, and of not only reflecting the glory of God, but enjoying the blessings of God that is represented symbolically by Israel entering the land.

They had their time of deliverance out of Egypt. They had their time of testing and growth in the wilderness. Then they had their time of going in and laying hold of what God has promised them.

This is our goal as believers. We don't want to constantly be wandering in the wilderness or dropping and being buried out there in the dust. We want to be Caleb and Joshua.

We want to be the second generation out of Egypt that crosses the Jordan and goes into the land and drives out the enemies and avails ourselves of the milk and the honey. We want to go in and do that. So this is an interesting commandment in that light, because this one has attached to it the promise of longevity, which is in itself suggestive of prosperity.

There's not much point in living long if you're in solitary confinement, let's say, or if you're in egregiously bad circumstances. But to live long in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. The first commandment with promise.

Then on the second table of the law, you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor, you shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife. All of this has to do with being obsessed or interested in an unhealthy way in the property that someone else has. Looking at these commandments, you could categorize them and they have been classified in this way.

Commandment number one deals with religion or spirituality. Have no other gods before me. Number two deals with worship.

Number three with reverence. Number four with time. Remember when we talked about the Sabbath day, it is an injunction to rest on the Sabbath, but also an injunction to work on the other six days.

So time management. And then number five, authority. We've studied this in some detail.

Honoring father and mother is the beginning of understanding and application in the area of

respect for authority and functioning within an authority structure. What a lot of people don't remember is that learning to operate under authority is the key to being able to exercise authority. The son in the household now is going to be the father in some future household.

And to honor father and mother now, you hope that when you become the father and mother you receive the honor that you are learning to give in earlier days. So it is a cyclical type of thing. This is why midshipmen are taken out to the fleet and they stand enlisted watches and they do enlisted duties before they are commissioned as officers in the Navy so that they will be better officers because they know what it is like to function under authority before they go out and exercise it.

So this fifth commandment is pivotal and is unique in this regard. So number one, religion. Number two, worship.

Number three, reverence. Number four, time. Number five, authority.

Number six is respect for life. You shall not murder. This is respect for human life.

Number seven, purity. Adultery here represents and stands in for all of the immorality sins, all of the ones that render us impure. Number eight, respect for property.

Do not take what does not belong to you. Number nine, the tongue. James says the man who can bridle his tongue has brought his whole body into subjection.

And number ten, contentment. Be content with such things as ye have. So this is a wonderful summation of the major areas of operation and the major areas of challenge in our lives.

When you think about the scripture, 2 Timothy 3, 16 and 17, it talks about the word of God. And it says all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness so that the man of God may be complete, may be mature, thoroughly equipped for every good work. All scripture is given by inspiration of God.

These commandments are delivered directly from God to Moses and through him to the nation of Israel and is profitable. We've heard this verse many times. Some of us have heard it hundreds of times.

Profitable. But think about these categories. The word of God, the word that we're studying right now, what's it good for? Why do we bother? What's it supposed to do? Well, Paul tells Timothy this inspired scripture is profitable.

It renders a benefit in these areas. Doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness. Doctrine, this is what we should think.

Reproof, this is correcting us from what we should not think. Correction, stop us from what we should not do. Instruction in righteousness, telling us what we should do.

So, how should we think? What should be going on in our minds? That's doctrine. What should we stop thinking and get out of our minds? That's reproof. What should we stop doing? That's correction.

What should we start doing? That's instruction in righteousness. Well, that pretty well covers the basis, doesn't it? That pretty well covers the same areas in a more concise way that we find here in the Ten Commandments. Whether it is spiritual life and worship and reverence, the use of our time, authority, the respect for other people's lives, their privacy, their property, and our own values and priorities and goals.

All of these are conditioned and are rehabilitated what we should and should not think and what we should and should not do by the Word of God. So, when we think about, here comes Bible class or here's some time, should I meditate on what I have learned? Should I review my notes? I have a few minutes here while I'm driving or while I'm sitting in a waiting room or while I'm waiting for the dryer to click off so I can fold the clothes or whatever it might be. We have time available to meditate and to think about our standing before God.

This is a helpful thing to remember because our lives boil down to what we think and what we do. And in those areas, we're either doing what we're supposed to or we're not. The Bible gives us information on what we should be doing and what we should not, what we should be thinking and what we should not.

And the measure of any Bible class, the measure of any sermon or of any meditation that we do in God's Word is we ask ourselves the question, so what? Is it worth my time to pursue this Christianity, to pursue an understanding of God's Word? This is a way to look at it. Well, how am I doing in the area of my activities and my actions? Am I doing the right things and stopping doing the wrong things? Am I thinking properly? Is my mental life before God squared away? What should I be thinking and what should I stop thinking? And it's a real simple test. Teaching of the Word of God that we hear, whether it's on the radio or in church or from a book or in conversation with other people, believers oftentimes come up to us, especially during the holidays, and they have a point of view and they say, oh, here's what we're doing in our church.

Here's what our emphasis is. Here's how our worship goes. We can measure it in this way.

Is this giving me what I need to improve my thinking and improve my doing and to enable me to stop thinking what I shouldn't think and stop doing what I shouldn't do? Am I availing myself of it in that way? That's what these commandments do in a nutshell. Your average Israelite tramping around in the wilderness, trying to keep his flocks together, trying to keep his family fed, trying to not get tangled up with his neighbors as they're marching in column, trying to not get killed in battle and all the other challenges that they had in the wilderness, it really boils down to, am I thinking the right thing and am I doing the right thing? And if not, what do I need to cut out? Well, these Ten Commandments are memorable. They're easy to remember.

He didn't have a scroll. He couldn't run over to Moses every 15 minutes and say, now Moses,

what was that you said? I know you're going to write it down and it's going to be Exodus 27.5, but just give me the drift. And these Ten Commandments for us are useful as well.

We think, well, that's the law. We are not under law. We're under grace.

But you think about the categories that they represent. You think about our spiritual life, our worship and reverence, the way we spend our time. Do we respect authority? It's an odd thing that Honor Your Father and Mother can tell us what to do when it's time to pay our taxes, when it's time to observe the speed limit, when it's time to manage our property and observe the laws of our community on what we do with our fence or what we do with the drainage of our pool or whatever it might be.

And as we go through life, Honor Your Father and Mother extends to national authority and to state authority and to local authority. And to violate that authority, in principle, violates that commandment. So we are reminded in these areas.

If we come up on a challenge, we say, boy, this is kind of fuzzy and murky. I'm not sure what to do. Run through those categories that these Ten Commandments represent.

Well, that is our general view of these two tables. We want to look specifically at the second half now, beginning in verse 13 of Exodus 20. You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

The Bible is replete. People like to say, well, I should be a pacifist and not kill anyone in battle. We should not have capital punishment and so on.

These people are exceedingly inconsistent in citing the law that says thou shalt not kill and then not reading all the other parts of the law that say when someone commits this act, you will stone him to death with stones. They will be burned with fire and so on. But, of course, you go back to Genesis chapter 4 to find the original murder and the punishment therefore.

We talked in our study of Genesis how interesting it is that although in the law of Moses murder is a capital offense punishable by death, Cain murdered his brother Abel and was not put to death. God did not go to Adam and Eve and say, pick up rocks and stone Cain to death. Which I think is a mercy for parents to begin with.

But secondly, God had a different agenda and a different set of priorities before the flood than he does after. Before the flood, God executed all punishments on sinners. He is the one who decided who would live and who would die and what their punishment would be.

So, when Cain in Genesis 4, 8 rose up against his brother and killed him, the Lord confronts Cain and says, where is Abel your brother? He says, I don't know. I'm on my brother's keeper. God says, what have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the

ground.

Now, God says, this is the evidence of your guilt. Your brother's blood testifies against you in my court. I find you guilty of having slain your brother.

Here is the sentence, verse 11. Now you are cursed from the ground which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you.

You will be a fugitive and a vagabond, a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth. Cain says to the Lord, my punishment is too great to bear. He appeals, he doesn't appeal the verdict, but he appeals the sentence.

Notice he doesn't say, I didn't kill my brother. He just says, that's too severe a punishment. He says, behold, you have driven me this day from the face of the ground, which of course was his best love.

He was a gardener and a farmer. And he says, I will never again be able to enjoy that which I enjoy most. And from your face I will be hidden and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth and whoever finds me will kill me.

So the Lord said to him, whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold. And God then of course put the mark on him to protect him. The Lord appointed a sign for Cain so that no one finding him would slay him.

We don't know what that was. But then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. And you've had a theme in literature ever since then, east of Eden, representing the place of cursing, the place of separation from blessing.

Well, God later, Genesis 9 and Genesis 10, after the flood, changes the justice system and says from now on, this is Genesis 9, 5, surely I will require your life blood from every beast I will require it and from every man. From every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed.

This is a change. God ran the justice system before the flood, but he says now it's in your hands. You have to evaluate.

You have to listen to witnesses. You have to come to a verdict and you have to inflict the punishment. Here are the standards.

Here are the instructions. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed. For in the image of God he made man.

As for you, be fruitful and multiply. Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it. So from the days of Noah forward, it is man's responsibility to determine innocence or guilt and to inflict punishment, specifically for the sin of murder.

In Genesis 27, 41, you have Esau being mad at his brother for taking his birthright and saying to himself, the days of mourning for my father are near. In other words, once Isaac dies, then I will kill my brother Jacob. And he doesn't seem to be deterred by the example, which he well knows, of Cain.

And so the advice to Jacob is, get out of town. In verse 45, until your brother's anger against you subsides and he forgets what you did to him, then I will send and get you from there. Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day? This is Rebekah telling Jacob to hightail it out of there.

But this is a case where a brother is ready to kill another brother. And rather than let him do so and then kill him and lose both of them, Rebekah says, we will separate you. And there is a principle there because Jesus says, if you hate your brother in your heart, it is all the same as murder.

And there is a case where you have to separate from those who hate you to prevent that crime and to put a lid on that kind of evil. And there are people who say, blood is thicker than water, no matter what. But there is a time to separate.

There is a time to put a stop to an incessant evil. And it's pictured in this flight of Jacob where he goes and God is able to bless him. And by the time he returns, he is actually able to reconcile with his brother.

But sometimes people need a time of separation. They need a cooling off period where they can be restored to objectivity and not have a constant presence and a constant friction egging on and making worse an evil attitude. This same Jacob in chapter 49 of Genesis in verse 6 accuses his own sons of murder.

Simeon and Levi, when they go and murder the men who they feel are responsible for defiling their sister Dinah, Jacob says of Simeon and Levi, let my soul not enter into their council. Let not my glory be united with their assembly, because in their anger they slew men, and in their self-will they hamstrung oxen. We studied that in detail.

But Jacob himself separates from the fellowship of Simeon and Levi, but he does not kill them. And you ask yourself, were they worthy of death for that? In Leviticus chapter 24 verse 17, if any man takes the life of any human being, he shall surely be put to death. So if some pacifist, peacenik, non-capital punishment person ever comes up and says, thou shalt not kill, you say, have you ever read Leviticus 24 verse 17? If a man takes the life of any human being, he shall surely be put to death.

Verse 21, thus the one who kills an animal shall make it good, but the one who kills a man shall be put to death. If you're doing target practice and you shoot high and kill a man's cow, deer hunters do this quite often. They're traipsing through the woods and they see something moving that's brown, they shoot it and it turns out to be cattle.

You have to make it good, restitution. You pay the man for his loss. But the one who kills a man shall be put to death.

And this is the idea of murder. This is explained in more detail in Numbers chapter 35 verse 16 through 21. He is a murderer.

The murderer shall surely be put to death. You know what this is talking about here? The iron and the stone and the wood. Intermediate means, oh, I didn't kill him.

My rifle killed him. I didn't kill him. My baseball bat killed him.

I didn't kill him. My car killed him. I didn't kill him.

The defective gas stove I sold him killed him. Intermediate means the blood avenger himself shall put the murderer to death. He shall put him to death where he meets him, when he meets him.

This is the senior member of the family, the designated member of the family of the victim. And if we were going to follow this principle in American justice, when someone is found guilty of murder and he's strapped into the electric chair or strapped onto his little death by injection table or whatever, a family member ought to get to go up there and throw the switch or push the plunger on the drugs or whatever. That's the law of God.

You get the satisfaction of sending that individual to their eternal destination. The blood avenger himself shall put the murderer to death. He shall put him to death when he meets him.

If he pushed him out of hatred or threw something at him lying in wait and as a result he died, or if he struck him down with his hand in enmity and as a result he died, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death. He is a murderer. The blood avenger shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.

Temporary insanity, I just went nuts. Anger got the better of me and I didn't know what I was doing. God says, there's no excuse.

If you got angry, if your hatred overcame you, you're a murderer. That's Numbers 35, 16-21. You go down to verse 31 of that same chapter.

This picture that God creates of murder is, if a man murders a second man, the blood of that murdered man pollutes the ground. And the only way to cleanse the ground is to shed the blood of the murderer. And that expiates or atones for the blood that has polluted the land.

If this does not take place, if justice is not fulfilled, what happens? The land is defiled and it is not purified. What does that mean? God does not bless the defiled land. And this is a principle that comes down through history at the point that justice is no longer executed, that murderers are let off free or are simply imprisoned instead of executed.

The blessing of God begins to be removed from that land. That's what has happened to our nation. You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell, for I the Lord am dwelling in the midst of the sons of Israel.

Well, we know that national Israel is a picture, a metaphor for our individual life. So, what does this mean in our own life? When we have hatreds, when we have grudges, when we have axes that we do not bury, the Lord Jesus compared hatred and grudge-bearing to murder. He says, if you hate your brother in your heart, it's all the same as if you've murdered him.

And he talks about being brought before the council just for saying, you fool, and to be thrown into hell fire. What's he talking about? Losing salvation? No. It is loss of eternal reward, loss of blessing, loss of whatever we might have gained and might have enjoyed in this life and in the next is forfeit if we hate our brother in our heart.

And this goes obviously beyond blood relatives. So, what's the point? That idea of thinking what we should think and being corrected away from thinking what we should not think, that purification of our heart, this is the place where God should dwell. And defiling our hearts with hatreds, with grudges, with sinful attitudes toward others that are of a nature to be compared to murder, our land is polluted.

Our land is defiled. What blood is it that cleanses that defilement? We can't shed our own blood, but who died in our place? It's the Lord Jesus. What does 1 John 1.9 say? If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

How does that happen? 1 John 1.7, if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship each with the other and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us. The expiatory blood is the blood of the cross and the murders that we commit in our hearts are atoned for by the application of the blood of the Lord Jesus. In Leviticus 25.6 it talks about the cities of refuge and when we get to the, I'm sorry that's numbers 35.6, 11 and 12 and 15 through 31, the six cities of refuge that were established in the land were a way to avoid the death penalty for someone who was blood guilty.

We will cover those in more detail at a later time because our focus here is on the Ten Commandments. You have the cities of refuge again in Deuteronomy 4.42, but we get the idea here. Killing in battle, David sings in the Psalms, blessed is the Lord who teaches my hands to war and my fingers to fight and God commands the destruction of enemies.

So once again we see the principle that where one thing is taught in the word of God, we have to take the full witness of scripture to find the balancing, limiting and conditioning passages. So here you and I are going into a new year, 2004. We may or may not make our New Year's resolutions, but as we evaluate ourselves and see where we stand, we look at the two major areas, our thought life and our activity life.

We know that it is the word of God that is profitable for instruction, for reproof, for doctrine, for

correction. We have those areas of thinking and we have the areas of acting. Just as in the Old Testament days God gave the Ten Commandments to Israel, we have the witness of scripture to look into our own hearts and see do we need the application of God's sacrifice in Christ to the land of our souls? Do we need to avail ourselves of the correction, the rebuke, the instruction in righteousness so that we can be blessed? Everyone wants to be happy, everyone wants to prosper, everyone wants to be blessed and hopefully we have enough love for God that we want to be pleasing in His sight.

Well there is a way to do that and it is the application of the word of God to our souls. We do have to evaluate, we do have to think, we make choices, we set priorities, we set goals, we have values that we establish in our hearts and that drives what we think and what we do. And those need to be held up to the light of the word of God.

Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery is the seventh commandment. Well this is a large subject to which we will return after we pause and take our break.