

Breaking God's Law

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BREAKING ONE

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:19.

The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20:1-17

In the neighborhood where I once lived, there was an infidel whose chief delight was to invite ministers to his home and then confuse them with his infidel arguments. He boasted that he always silenced them and sent them away worsted. He had tainted nearly all the young men of the community with his infidelity, and was generally dreaded by the church people.

In due time, his invitation came to me to take dinner with him on a certain day. After prayerful consideration, I accepted it. During the meal we chatted upon the usual topics of conversations such as the weather, crop prospects, matters of social interest, and one or two political questions. Religious themes were studiously avoided, until the atmosphere became as tense as the calm before a storm. As we arose from the table and took the easy-chairs in the sitting room, the storm suddenly broke.

THE LAW DECLARED A SCHOOLBOY'S COMPOSITION

"I want to ask you a question," came from the infidel, whom we shall call Mr. Jones. "Where did Moses get that law, the Ten Commandments? I would be ashamed to write such a law. If I had a schoolboy coming to me who could not write a better law, I would send him home."

I was somewhat startled by his direct and unusual attack, but replied: "Is that so? Did you ever study that law very carefully?"

"I should say I have, until I am convinced that it is nothing but a childish effort to intimidate an ignorant people and dupe them into submission to a selfish, tyrannical, ambitious leader. I think it beneath the dignity of the one you call God to give such stuff to mankind, and to pretend to come down and write with his finger on stone."

"Yes? Would you mind studying it with me for a little while today?"

"Well, I can, to please you; but it will not do any good. What can you get out of a document so primitive and brief and simple and childish as that?"

"To begin with," I replied, "inspiration says that this law is spiritual, so spiritual that it discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart; and so comprehensive, yet so closely related, is each commandment to every other one, so interlocked is each one with every other: one, that if we offend in one point, we are guilty of all. I read: 'The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.' 'The law is spiritual.' Romans 7:12, 14. 'The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.' Hebrews 4:12. 'Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.' James 2:10. If I understand it aright, no human mind conceive of such a code, or write one that would so thoroughly reach, every part of it, into the very citadel of human thought as well as action.

"Let us, for example, start with the fourth commandment, and see with what infinite accuracy and wisdom this law is constructed.

“The fourth commandment reads: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shall not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.” Exodus 20:8-11.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT BROKEN

“If a person works on the seventh day of the week, he has broken the fourth commandment outright, has he not?”

“I suppose he has, if you believe the Bible,” Jones replied.

“But the commandment says, “The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God.” It is His; it is not ours, or any man’s. Now, when a person takes for himself what belongs to another, what is he doing?”

With some show of surprise, he said, “We call that stealing.”

“Yes, sir. Then has he not, in breaking the fourth, broken the eighth also?” “I guess that is the one you mean,” he answered.

“But,” I continued, “before he steals, he always has an intense and illegitimate desire for the thing he steals, and in such desire, what commandment has he broken?”

“It may be that you would call, it coveting.”

“Yes. Then he has broken the tenth commandment also; three of them broken in transgressing just one.”

His eyes opened wider as he moved uneasily in his chair.

“When a man puts himself so entirely first, so fully before God, as to covet what is His and to steal from Him, what other commandment does he break?”

“Do you mean the first one?”

“Yes, ‘Thou shall have no other gods before Me.’ “

“But man is not a god; why do you suggest so absurd a thing?” Jones retorted.

“Well, he has put himself first; he has considered his own interests more to him than his relations to his Maker. Not only can a man become a god to himself, but I read of some who think so much of their appetites that it is said of them, ‘Whose god is their belly’ (Philippians 3:19); just as we say of others, Their god is the dollar.

MAKING AN IDOL OF HIMSELF

“There is another commandment so closely related to this, that I must ask right here, If a man thinks so much of himself and his own desires as thus to place himself before God, does he not make an idol of himself? And in that case, what other commandment does he break? What commandment forbids idolatry?”

“I don’t know, unless you mean the second, the one on making images. But I do not see how he has broken that one; he has not made a graven image of anything.”

"It, is true that he has not made a literal, tangible image; but all image worship is nothing more or less than a certain conception of the worshipper's own mind and heart embodied in a visible image and worshipped--really worshipping himself, or making a god or an idol of himself. What difference does it make whether one worships one's self in a stone image or in one's own person? It is idolatry just the same.

Two more commandments broken in breaking the Sabbath commandment, so already!

The man moved about with ill concealed agitation; his eyes opened wider; He scratched his head.

"But this is not all. God's name is in the fourth commandment. It tells us that He is Maker of heaven and earth, the great Creator. That distinguishes Him from all other gods. It is the only place in the Decalogue where He has affixed His name to the wonderful document--just at the close of the first table of the law, those commandments which tell of our relations and obligations to Him. Now, when we treat His precepts in such a reckless, vain way, are we not using His name in vain?

"And what does the third commandment say?"

"Oh, well, that commandment pretends, or tries, to prohibit swearing; but what you say is not swearing, or profanity--if there is such a thing."

"But this commandment forbids more than out spoken oaths. Any-vain use of God's name whatever would tend to break down our own or another's sense of reverence for God and cause us to forget Him and His word is also forbidden.

"And that is not all. Many persons say, 'it makes no difference which day you keep, just so you keep it holy.' But God says, in the commandment where His name is signed, that the seventh day is His Sabbath; in it we are not to do any work. Then, is it true that it makes no difference which day you keep? Is it not a vain use of that commandment, and of God's name in it, to take such a position--really a violation of the third commandment?"

He looked rather chagrined, and made an effort to speak, but failed. "Again, if the individual has not told the truth about it, what other commandment has he transgressed outright?"

IF WE SIN AGAINST MAN, WE SIN AGAINST GOD

"I see what you mean, but that commandment says, 'Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor.' What has that to do with the being you call God?"

It is true that that is the letter of the law; but you must remember that we read that God's law is spiritual. To lie is to lie, whether to one or to another; and it is far worse to lie to God than to man.

"Now, in regard to this saying that it makes no difference which day one keeps, I want to suggest one or two more thoughts on that point: If we want to keep God's rest day, we must rest on the same day He did; and He rested on the seventh day of the week only. His resting and blessing made that day the Sabbath; for 'Sabbath,' you know, means rest. Man's rest counts for nothing in making the day holy. If all the people on earth should rest on another day, that would not make that other day

God's rest day. Man's rest day could never be God's rest day, unless he should rest on the same day that God rested on at Creation.

"In Genesis 2:3, I read, 'God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made.' He put His presence into that day in a separate sense from that in which it is in other days, just as that sacred presence is in some individuals and not in others, His presence in the burning bush made the ground about it holy, as it did also the place where the Captain Of the Lord's host met with Joshua. Exodus 37: 5; Joshua 5:13-15.

Although we may not outwardly discern any difference between the seventh and the first day of the week, the fact that God's presence is in the seventh day makes all the difference in the world. His presence may and should be with us and in us every day of the week; but quite aside and separate from this is it in His holy day. And when that sacred presence in the day and in the individual meets, there is in that heart a sense of holiness and sacredness that is felt and known joy those who know this truth and have this experience.

"I wish that all might see that there was but one day that God blessed and sanctified, on which He rested, and into which He put His presence and that therefore it does make a difference which day we keep, and that it is not the truth to say that it makes no difference which day we observe."

WE DISHONOUR GOD BY BREAKING HIS LAW

Seeing some signs of excitement on his face, I said quickly: "Let us go another step. God claims, by virtue of Creation and redemption, that he is our Father. In thus openly dishonoring, Him, what other commandment has been broken?"

"You certainly are not so simple as to mean that he has violated the fifth commandment. That is only for children--for them to honor and obey their parents. It is a command, by the way, that is entirely superficial and useless; for what parent does not know enough to make the children mind?"

"Not so fast. God calls us His children; for, as I said, He made-us. Especially does He promise those who will separate from sin and turn to Him for forgiver-less and salvation, 'I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters.' 2 Corinthians 6:17, 18. And will He allow us to show Him less respect and honor than we show our earthly parents? If the letter of the law is broken by a child's disobedience to its earthly parent, is not the spirit of it broken by our disobedience to our heavenly Parent? This makes eight commandments broken in transgressing 'only one.'

With an astonishment he could not conceal, Jones said, "I confess I never heard or saw such things before."

COMMITTING SUICIDE

"We have not finished; there are two other commandments. But I wish first to refer to three or four other texts. 'The wages of sin is death.' Romans 6:23. 'The soul that sins, it shall die.' Ezekiel 18:4. 'Sin is the transgression of the law.' 1 John 3:4. This law of Ten Commandments is the law that points out sin, and without which we could not tell what sin is. Romans 7:7. In this wholesale transgression of God's law, what is the sinner bringing upon himself? What is he doing to himself? "Do you mean that he is taking his own life?"

"I do. Is not his course leading him to certain death-unless he repents and turns to God and secures the forgiveness of his sins? Of what commandment is killing, even if it be self-destruction, a violation?"

"I suppose it must be the sixth, as you Christians call it: 'Thou shall not kill.' But you can't get in the seventh commandment on this argument. There is no possible way in which one can break the commandment forbidding adultery, in breaking the fourth."

"We shall see," I replied with confidence. "There are many figures used in the Bible by which God illustrates to us the relations existing between Him and us. I read in Isaiah 54:5: 'Thy Maker is your Husband; the Lord of hosts is His name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall He be called.' He is the husband of all whom He has made. Israel backslid from God, uniting with the nations around her. Of her, God said, 'Surely as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel, said the Lord;' also that she had 'played the harlot,' 'and committed adultery.' Jeremiah 3:8, 9, 20. And in James 4:4 I read, 'You adulterers and adulteresses, know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?' This spiritual adultery is forbidden by the seventh commandment just as truly as is the carnal. As a spiritual law, it detects the sin in the thoughts and in the heart. Matthew 5:27, 28. Therefore, in transgression of the fourth commandment, the seventh is broken as well as are the other nine."

I pitied the poor man, for he looked ashamed and confused; but I felt that it was really, necessary to carry my reasoning to its conclusion.

THE ARGUMENT IN A NUTSHELL

“I wish to ask you a few questions now. First, to sun: up all in a nutshell, I want to ask a question on each of the commandments; then on the law as a whole.

“How can a man take God’s Sabbath (fourth commandment) for his own selfish use, ruthlessly breaking it, without stealing also (eighth commandment)? How can he steal a thing without first coveting it (tenth commandment)? How can he thus put himself first, without even before God, without having another god before the Lord (first commandment)? And how can he make such an idol of himself without breaking the second commandment? How can he so heedlessly and vainly use the commandment in which God has placed His name, without taking that name in vain (third commandment)? How can he show such disrespect to his heavenly Father without breaking the fifth commandment? Or how can he commit such sins, when God has said that the sure result of sin is death, without being guilty of knowingly and deliberately taking his own life (sixth commandment)? How can a person do all this, and by his actions and his words of Self-justification, say that his course is all right, and be telling the truth (ninth commandment)? And last, How can he go so completely away from his spiritual spouse as to join the sinful world, living with the world as with a beloved, congenial companion, without being guilty of adultery (seventh commandment), as God said ancient Israel was in doing the same thing?

“Can you now think that the fourth commandment is of no consequence, and that it makes no difference which day we keep? Really, is it not the very heart of the law of God, the greatest of all the commandments-if it is possible that one can be greater than another? Does it not matter if we do keep another day, concerning the observance of which God has said nothing in His Word, when the discarding and disregarding of His day involves the violation of every commandment in the Decalogue? And does not the substitution of another day in its place, without His direction so to do, add greatly to the guilt of the transgressor? How would you like it if someone should steal your fine horse boldly before your very eyes, and give you instead an old broken-down steed and say it was just as good?”

THE INFIDEL CONVICTED

Without realizing what he had done, the infidel had stood, moved his chair nervously, and had seated himself again where the better light from the window, falling upon his face, revealed a great surprise, and evidence of a deep conviction.

“Now for some questions on the law as a whole: In all candor, Sir,” I asked, “did you ever see any other law so brief, yet so comprehensive. While each section, or commandment, is so distinct and complete the whole is so entirely one, each so related to every other, that it is impossible to transgress one without transgressing every other one in the same act. I would like to ask you, Where did Moses get that law? Can you tell? Do you think any human mind devised it? Can you write as good a law?”

Then followed a few moments of uncomfortable silence, then, he said: “I must admit, sir, that this is the first time I have ever been beaten by a minister. I have no more to say now; I must take time to think of this more seriously. I admit that your reasoning is logical; and if the Bible is true at all, I am wrong.”

“This is not my wisdom; I do not gloat over ‘beating’ you,” I quickly assured him; “it is only the little knowledge I have of God’s Word and His law, aided by His Holy Spirit, that enables me so to reason. ‘The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.’ Psalm 19:7, 8.