

The Ten Commandments and the Law of Love

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Preacher: Canon Dr. J.I. Packer

- [0 : 0 0] I must say something personal to begin. I expect, most of you know, on the 27th of December last I discovered that wet macular degeneration had set in and I couldn't read either the figures or the letters in the prayer book.
- I'm under specialist treatment and today, Trinity Sunday, I was able to read the Athanasian Creed from the prayer book and so to join with a congregation in saying it and that is something about which I feel very thankful.
- However, I'm not yet 100% visually and so I have with me my magnifier and if you see me waving it around in a mysterious way, well, it'll be because I still from time to time need the magnifier, in this instance, to read my own notes.
- And that isn't a comment on my writing, only on the reality of the macular degeneration that isn't healed up as yet.
- But yes, I say I can begin to read again and this is the goodness of God and I am very cheerful about it and very thankful for it and I'd like to share that with you.
- [1 : 4 5] You might like to echo my feelings about it. Praise the Lord, take courage and remember he will be just as gracious to you as he is to me.
- Now, having said that, let us turn to our business. I am to speak to you on the Ten Commandments and the Law of Love.
- That's a title drafted as a kind of hook which might generate interest. what I'm actually going to do with you is begin to explore the reality of Christian behavior and Christian ethics, which is a field in which, if my observation is anything to go by, we evangelicals don't spend half as much time or give half as much interest as we do in matters of doctrine.
- Well, that imbalance is not very happy. So, I am going to speak on the neglected aspect of the situation and give you, as I said, an introduction to the study of Christian behavior, which, surely you will agree, is something that we all of us should come to sooner or later, and the sooner the better.
- Well, that's enough by way of preliminary. Let us pray that God will help us as we explore.
- [3 : 5 8] Gracious Father, all your truth is precious, and your truth about the living of the Christian life is supremely precious.
- And as we turn to aspects of that truth right now, we ask for the help of your Spirit, the Spirit who gave the Word, to come and interpret the Word, and orient us, and enlighten us, and so take us forward in understanding, so that we may move forward in obedience and service, and the furthering of your glory and praise through our lives.
- Grant it, we pray, Father, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Now, as I said, you'll see me waving this around.
- I shall need to do it from time to time, though there will be moments when I don't need to do it. See, I'm getting better. Well, praise God. All right.
- Now, our theme, then, is Christian behavior. And that theme requires us to focus on ethics, which is the study of Christian standards of conduct.

[5 : 36] and here I speak as an Anglican, because not all Christians use language in quite this way.

But Anglicans as a body, for hundreds of years, have bracketed with ethics, the study of standards, moral theology, which is the study of conscience, and of obedience.

And you can see, the two studies are complementary, and it's a goodly heritage to inherit, as we Anglicans do inherit, a good deal of wisdom in both.

you will have heard, I'm sure, of Lady Huntingdon, the peeress, who put lots and lots of money into the ministry of George Whitefield and John Wesley, and who financed the building of a number of chapels, which became, for a time, a denomination, Lady Huntingdon's connection.

Lady Huntingdon was a wholehearted evangelical, and one thing she used regularly to do was to organize parties, parties rather like this, actually, about this size, parties of her aristocratic friends, up to 50 at a time, and she would have Whitefield, or Wesley, or some other distinguished evangelical speaker, come and address them.

[7 : 36] And I suppose she herself reported this after one of these sessions, one of her guests said to her very indignantly, it is monstrous that clergymen should tell us that to be a Christian, you need to change your life.

But I think that all of us know better than to echo any sentiment like that. being a Christian is precisely a matter of changing your life, and it's to that end that you change your thinking by coming to believe the faith.

Yes, you would nod your head at that, you wouldn't need to think twice about it, you know it's true. But, it's a fact, and I think you will agree with me when I say this, we evangelicals aren't as sure-footed in talking about Christian obedience as we become in talking about Christian doctrine.

I suppose, as it is much because we talk so much about Christian doctrine and so much less about Christian obedience that we're not so sure-footed on the obedience front, but it certainly, I think, beyond any dispute, is a matter of fact.

And so, I'm going to begin with one or two questions and answers to make quite sure that we are together in approaching our topic.

[9 : 30] The questions and answers are covering familiar ground, but nonetheless, here are things that we need to have in mind if we are to become sure-footed in studying.

our subject. Question one. Whence comes understanding of Christian doctrine, yes, and Christian obedience?

Answer. It comes from the Bible. And we must never allow ourselves to lose sight of that fact. It doesn't come from the culture.

And it doesn't come from Christian history. Certainly, the culture may challenge us to think about aspects of it that we've never thought about before.

And certainly, Christian history may give us a head start in understanding certain aspects of what it means to live a godly and obedient life.

[10 : 43] But basically, our understanding must come from Scripture just as our understanding of doctrine must come from Scripture. And that, I believe, is something so fundamental and so likely, actually, in this room, this company, to be accepted the moment I say it.

But I'm not going to elaborate that. I simply lay it down as the starting point for the line of thought on which I hope to take you.

Second question, then. What is there in the Bible to guide us in this matter of Christian ethics and Christian morals?

Christian obedience, that is. Answer. There is a good deal in Scripture that is relevant, but you have to put it together just as you do when you're seeking true doctrine.

What you have in the Bible is, first and foremost, and fundamentally, a record of a historical relationship between God and people, a record that goes right back to the beginning of things, creation, Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve in fellowship with God, and the story then becomes a story of failure spiritually, of a breakdown of relations between God and humans, and then of remedial action by the Lord God himself, beginning and carrying through step by step slowly over a very long period of time, a program for restoring the relationship, restoring the state, the original state of affairs in which

[13 : 10] God has his human creatures as his people, people, or at least has a great body of them as his people, and right at the center of that story is the Lord Jesus Christ, God incarnate, God living a human life here on earth, God incarnate dying in our place for our sins, God incarnate rising from the dead, ascending back to heaven whence he came, and being established by the Father, yes, we're confronted with the plurality of persons in the Godhead the moment we try to tell this story, the Father establishes the Son as, to use

Peter's phrase, as the sermon recorded in Acts chapter 10, he is Lord of all, he is, and the world is his kingdom, he is its proper overlord, because of his redeeming action, and his present heavenly reign, as the Father's agent in all providence, and all the unfolding of world history, yes, that's an easy phrase to utter, but it's a tremendous thought to think, and that is the biblical thought, that we must learn to think, yet he, Christ, is on the throne, and the kingdom is a reality, and all

God's servants are called to become servants of the kingdom, and that means a global commitment, and the promise is that one day Christ will return, and the whole exercise will be drawn to a conclusion, and a whole new order of things will begin, which is unimaginable, really, to us at the moment.

What you've got in scripture here is fantastic pictures of a wonderful quality of life that transcends anything that we have known thus far, or shall know, before the saviour's return.

Okay, that's the material in scripture, within which fits all that scripture teaches us about Christian obedience.

[16 : 20] experience. So, we ask a third question. How do you and I get in on this project which God is carrying through?

God the triune, God the father, who has sent the son, and now established the son on the throne, and God the Holy Spirit, sent by the father and the son, to apply the word, that is, the news of what God is doing, the gospel.

Yes, the Holy Spirit comes to apply the gospel, and bring people thereby into a share in all of this, a partnership, if you like, within this frame of divine activity.

That's a rather bold way of saying it, but radical involvement is the idea. And, well, here we are in this classroom at this moment on Trinity Sunday, celebrating, amongst other things, the fact that we are in, not out, which means that we are spiritually alive in Christ, not spiritually dead as we would be otherwise, and we are worshipping God, Lord's day by Lord's day, we come together for that purpose, and we come together also to learn more of God's project and of our own place in it.

Yes, that's where we are right at this moment, and so what we have before us in the Bible, which establishes the links between us and, well, the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit.

[18 : 51] What we have in the Bible, it's a narrative, but in the narrative there's embedded, well, if you want a single word for it, it's truth, and it's truth under at least three headings, truth of fact, Bible tells us what has been happening in God's world ever since God made it, viewed at least from the standpoint of God's plan and purpose and redemptive action in it, and its truth of wisdom, there's a great deal in the Bible, in the form, sometimes proverbs and maxims, and sometimes stories, good and bad examples, this is teaching about obedience or disobedience, teaching about how to live, in other words, how to live responsively and gratefully, and pleasingly, to the

God who has taken the initiative to save us. Truth of fact, then, and on that basis, truth of wisdom, which is where we shall be digging for the rest of this talk, and then there is, thirdly, the truth of promise, promise.

The Bible contains promises of the future, promises of what will happen when Christ comes again and there's a new world.

As I said earlier, these are not teachings that we can easily understand, or fully understand, we can't imagine what it will be like, but we can be sure of the trustworthiness of God's promises, and so we can say, as they used to say in the 17th and 18th centuries, we have a solid hope.

That isn't the kind of language, well, it isn't the use of the adjective solid that we make today, but it's historic evangelical Protestant lingo, and it's a great thing to be able to celebrate the certainty that God gives us a solid hope.

[21 : 40] The world doesn't. There is no solid hope available except the solid hope of the promise of God, that the promise of God is solid, and we can be quite sure that God will keep it, and that within the frame of his overall strategy to keep all his promises to all his world, he will keep the promises to individuals who are his, promises which fit in just as individuals fit in, in the large strategic operation that he's carrying through in his world church.

So, this is the truth that we have in the Bible, and this threefold truth is precious, and I hope that none of us undervalue it, you hardly can undervalue, or rather say it another way, you hardly can say anything about this revelation from Scripture, except that it's almost too wonderful to envisage, and not quite.

we can begin to get the feeling for it, we can begin to get the sense of its glory, we can begin to feel something of the sense of triumph that comes when one's involved in it, and our experience is a little bit like my experience has been with macular degeneration.

You can't see very well yet, but you can see something, and you can see enough to know that, well, again, let me be autobiographical, you're getting clearer in your vision, you're seeing better than you did before, and the sense of the glory of what you can see gives you something very thrilling to live with every day of your life.

You are on the way, and I am on the way, by God's grace, no personal dessert here, it's all grace, first to last, but by grace we are on the way to glory.

[24 : 24] Whatever glory is, we are on the way to all of it, and we shall miss any of it. yes, pause to let that form of words sink in, I find it a powerful form of words myself, I hope you do too.

Okay, so that's where we are, moving along, and as we move along, so, we are obeying, and by obeying, we are growing, and by growing, we are advancing both in understanding and in conformity, and we keep, I mean, conformity to what God has in his plan, and as we go on in life, so, as we move up and down in the text of scripture, and the fellowship of the church, we come to appreciate more and more of what the glory is going to involve, and as we do so, we, hopefully, hopefully, anyway, move further and further forward along the path of obedience.

So, we grow by going, and we go forward by growing, and it's as folk moving forward in the Christian life along the path to glory, that we do all our Bible study and reflection and discussion and theological work, preaching, teaching, and practical obeying, each of us in the course of our own lives, and the thinking that we do to try and get all this in perspective is to be done within that constant movement forward.

forward. It's thinking for travelers, thinking for people on the way, the way, on the way to the hope of glory, that we do our theology, and, well, if you, like me, are called to teach theology, that's something that you have to say over and over again, lest anybody lose sight of it.

And I hope that it's something that isn't news to any of us. Okay, then, this is how we get in, if I may put it this way, get in on God's act, and this is what's happening to us, as we seek to understand better, and get things into more precise focus, and appreciate more the greatness of God's grace, and indeed the glory of it.

[27 : 54] Glory is a Bible word, which is, I said a moment, a moment ago, carries more meaning than any of us can ever pick up.

But, certainly, right from the start, the element of glory, which we can appreciate from the word go, is the praiseworthiness of God, and I have come to think that that word, praiseworthiness, is as helpful as any word to focus for us what it is that we're concerned with when we talk of the glory of God, and we envisage the practice of glorifying God.

we discern his praiseworthiness, and as we discern it, so we praise it.

And so, those who obey, those who please God, those who are moving forward along the path of Christian obedience, they are constantly changing, at least ideally so, and changing for the better.

Oh, I know it's possible to go off the track, and as it were, spiritually fall in the ditch, and change for the worse.

[29 : 39] Some people sometimes do, it's tragic when that happens, and reclaiming those who have fallen is a difficult job.

But, I'm talking to you folks, simply as fellow travelers with me, and what I'm trying to do is to fill in the landscape of Christian obedience, so that we know where we are, and we've got all the angles and aspects clear in our minds.

Then, life will become more of what we've had already. God will give, and give, and give, and we shall respond with thankfulness, gratitude, adoration, and praise.

A process which will continue and expand and deepen until we are in glory, enjoying the fullness of what, at the moment, is largely beyond our understanding.

Okay, well, I've labored that a bit, because there is a danger these days, you know, in the Western world, just because so much academic theology is being done in so many places, and for so many, in so many good ways, the danger is that our attitude as students of these things becomes an academic attitude.

[31 : 37] we, so to speak, sit on the touch lines, admiring the play of others, but we're not in the game ourselves.

And folk with an interest in theology, like me, have to face the fact that it's very easy for them, very easy for anybody, to move from the field of play to the touch lines, and not actually be actively in the game anymore, at least until somebody puts a bomb under your seat and says, chum, you are slipping, or you have slipped, spiritually, I have to tell you, you've slipped, and you need to come back in repentance and get down to the business of obeying again.

well, all of that is background and framework material, and it's within that framework that the more detailed material that I'm going to deploy for you now, as best I can, is to be focused and, so far as possible, understood, which is the purpose of this talk, this talk, this very day.

so, what we have to do, having got the framework and the landscape clear in our minds, is to appreciate what's involved in the business of obeying.

And I am going to tell you straight away, three things are involved in the business. We have to study standards, standards to which we should live, and that's ethics.

[33 : 51] We have to study obedience as an activity, that is to say, the living of our life, our lives in such a way that day by day, morning till night, we are on track and what we are doing is some element of the life that we know God wants us to live, and the behavior that he wants us to show.

And the third thing that we have to study is conscience. Conscience that unique, what shall I call it, experience, though experience isn't a very good word for it, the unique awareness, shall I say, of who we are and what standards we are living by, and the unique awareness of what we should have been doing and haven't been doing, and occasionally the awareness of having done something right.

Because we're not always in the wrong. Those who seek to obey God will find themselves living a life in which, every now and then, you get it wrong, for sure, but every now and then, you get it right.

We are going forward with him. And so, the sense of triumph, which runs all the way through the New Testament letters, becomes a reality, intermittently perhaps, but some of the time anyway, for us.

And we are able, thankfully, to recognize that we are going forward with God. And thus, we are being formed, formed in the image of Christ, and thus, we are being transformed in relation to what we were by nature.

[36 : 06] And when we teach, preach, witness to, celebrate, share Christianity, well, we shall give proper emphasis to the fact that when you are a Christian, the transformation process goes on, and you become increasingly different, in positive ways, from what you were before you became a believer, if you can remember that far back.

If you were converted in the cradle, somehow, you don't have as vivid a memory at that point, as if you were converted at age, like, for instance, I was converted at age 18, and so I could remember quite a lot in the way of contrasts.

all right, well, once again, I'm depicting the Christian life from a particular point of view, and I'm doing it in order to say something hope helpful about the standards to which our God calls us to live, the standards which the Bible sets, the standards which the Lord Jesus and the apostles taught, and that is the next section.

What you've had so far is a sort of preliminary framework section for the thinking that I hope this talk is going to engender, and now within that frame, we set, what we set, we set a study of the standards, which means that now we are coming close and seriously close to the theme of holiness, the life lived to God, as we say.

The words are simple, deceptively simple, the reality is enormously demanding, and continues so, I think, and I have a certain amount of experience to confirm this to me, it's a process that goes on, has to go on, to the end of life.

[38 : 53] John Wesley was quite simply wrong in thinking, that he did think and did teach to his Methodist societies that after you're converted and become alive to God, if you seek, you may be blessed to find an inward event in your consciousness whereby sin, as a dynamic, a force, is rooted out of your nature altogether and your heart is as perfect as it will be in heaven.

And John Wesley thought it happens, here, and John Wesley, I'm telling you, was wrong, as perhaps you discerned before I passed the judgment.

But of course he thought he was right, and it's a constant weakness actually, in the way in which John Wesley taught Christianity.

He did a wonderful job just about everywhere else that teaching has to be given, but at this point he got it wrong, and his teaching became, I think it's certain, a stumbling block to a lot of people, rather than being at this point an encouragement and a step forward into greater reality and greater faithfulness.

I make that point simply because in positive terms I want to talk to you about where we really are. In seeking to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord, to use a phrase that Paul uses, we are up against the fact that we have sinful hearts, and it isn't until we are beyond this body and in the glory that we shall be free of the self-centred twist that comes into just about everything that we plan to do, and messes it up to a degree because the twist gives the action an element of self-centredness which ought not to be there.

[41 : 53] We can agree at once, of course, it ought not to be there, but we can't stop it being there simply by affirming that it ought not to be there.

And so watching one's heart as the Puritans used to express it, letting one's conscience review what one has desired and done, and the desires coming out of the heart, may I say, are just as important as the doings.

Well, that inevitably necessarily has to be a part of the life of obedience. In the life of obedience, we're always negating something in ourselves.

There are times when we're hardly conscious of that, but there are times when we're very conscious of that. It varies. And the certainty is that our hearts are not purged in the way that Wesley dreamed, but we shall have to carry on with this particular conflict as long as life lasts.

So it's within this frame, this frame of progressive but incomplete sanctification, as we may call it, that our obedience has to be pursued and practiced, just done.

[43 : 35] Okay, so here we are at the beginning of a new day. What are the steps that wisdom prompts us to take in order to continue along the path of labouring to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord?

There isn't any question as to the Lord's desire that we should. What do you think repentance is all about? Repentance is turning at volitional, purposing, purposive level, turning back to God from a life of letting your self-centred sinfulness call the shots and direct your doings.

you do turn back to God, you set yourself against sin in your system. That doesn't mean, however, that you can simply walk away from it.

It clings to you. And we're all in the same boat here. And our consciences, I spoke of our consciences a minute or two ago, our consciences which help us to discern how God's standards apply to our lives so that we see what we should be doing and our consciences which focus the specifics of obedience so that without, we hope anyway, that we shan't be found leaving anything out because what would I call it, a half and half obedience isn't what God is after.

God wants the obedience of our heart at every point in our lives. Conscience will alert us to areas of our life in which we're not doing what the wise Christian will do and seeking God's standards and laboring to live up to them as best we can in the Lord's strength with help but we never get all the way.

[46 : 19] That's the point. Conscience alerts us to areas of our lives in which we haven't made the grade, not yet, just as conscience focuses for us areas of our lives in which we can say from our hearts, thank you Lord, you've changed me here, I'm out of the grip of whatever it was, I'm following after you, following after Christ, seeking to be conformed to him in spirit and attitude and response to people and their needs, and I don't want ever to be different.

yes, all of us should be living with that as an element in our self-assessment, our self-awareness, our self-knowledge, and one of the things that I'm a bit anxious about these days is that that is rarely, it seems to be said, or at least it isn't said in the circles of evangelical life where I move around.

It's almost said but not quite. Well, be that as it may, it's certainly something which our conscience has given us in order that we may have said to us, and I can put it that way, because that's how conscience works.

It behaves like another person telling us, telling us what's right, telling us what's wrong, and that is one dimension of the moral life as God made it.

Adam had a conscience and when God tackled him, he admitted that, yes, the reason why he hid from God in the garden after the original sin had taken place was that he was afraid and ashamed.

[48 : 42] That's how conscience works. so this is the agenda, the style, these are the ingredients in our moral life, which is the life of observing the standards taught by biblical ethics.

okay? And this brings us to the realities proclaimed in our title, you may think, it's just it's about time we got to them, the Ten Commandments and the Law of Love.

The point I want to make to you about both these codes, moral codes, that's what I call them, is that the very way in which we embrace them, as Anglicans living by the prayer book, creates a possibility of self-deception with regard to them.

Because the prayer book, for its own specific purposes, which within their limits are absolutely right, separates the Ten Commandments from their Old Testament context, and doesn't make the point that Jesus makes when he talks about the two great commandments, answers a question about them, and sets, by the very shape of his answer, sets the two great commandments, so to speak, at the top of the ethical tree.

This is what virtuous, godly living is all about. So, let me put both these moral codes, that's the appropriate word for them, put them into their context, so that we won't make this mistake ourselves.

[51 : 10] The prayer book can't do everything, and this is biblical exposition, which it's beyond the scope of the prayer book to do. So, Ten Commandments, what does the prayer book use them for?

It uses them to prepare young folk for confirmation, and then, in the communion service, it uses them more or less frequently, and there is a good deal, I think, to be said, for using them more frequently than, in fact, we do, but anyway, they'll not be used all the time in the communion service, just sometimes, and they are used in the communion service, when they are used there, to remind us, alert us, and, if you will pardon the phrase, rub our noses in the fact that we, all of us, fall short of the glory of God, we, all of us, fall short of perfect righteousness, we come to the Lord's table as forgiven sinners, sinners, but if we don't come as sinners, well, then we shall come as forgiven sinners, rejoicing in their forgiveness, and then our attendance at the table will be formalism without substance, we'll just be going through the motions, what the

Lord's Supper is all about, is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, through his cross and then his resurrection, actually brings the saving grace of God to sinners into our lives, and thereby helps us forward on the path away from sin into holiness.

and if you don't say all of that, you haven't focused the Lord's Supper properly. The prayer book service, Cranmer's masterpiece, does focus the Lord's Supper just like that, and it's a wonderfully rich liturgy to live with, as surely we all of us know.

Okay, this, then, is wonderful, but it doesn't tell you everything that we need to remember about the Ten Commandments.

[54 : 05] What else should we remember? Well, we should remember that the Ten Commandments are the heart of a covenant bond, covenant relationship between God and the seed of Israel, the Jewish people, with whom God is entering into covenant, and to whom he is giving a sizable agricultural area, an area in which you really can't do much except grow things and tend cattle, but it's an area in which those things are going to happen in a very rich way.

It's a land flowing with milk and honey. It's a land in which, if things go well, the Lord's people will always be reminded of the Lord's generosity, prosperity, because life in the promised land will be so good.

It didn't work out quite like that because the Lord's people weren't faithful in the way that they should have been. It's idle to ask what would have happened if they had been faithful.

The fact is that they weren't faithful, and so life in the land got disrupted and impoverished. I'm not going to go into all of that.

I mean, it runs through Old Testament narrative history. But now, the Ten Commandments were intended to operate as guidelines for the Israelites in living to the glory of God, in the country of God.

[56 : 07] And if you think through them, you realize, well, yes, of course, if there is to be a peaceful, fruitful, agricultural culture wrought out in this country, or for that matter, any country, then all these directions and restrictions for the shared life of God and his people, and the life of God's people before the face of God, all of these need to be observed.

Total loyalty to God, no other gods but me. Learning my nature from my revelation as distinct from idolatrous fancy.

That's commandment number two. Reverence for God in every way. That's commandment number three. Keeping the rhythm of weekly worship.

And to that end, having a day of rest in every seven in which you don't work and are therefore not able to say, sorry, I haven't got time for God or for worship or for anything religious today, I've got too much to do.

Families must be strong and stable, so honor your father and your mother. Show respect with affection, or show affection with respect.

[57 : 57] Affection and respect both combine to make up honor to parents. And then, in relation to each other, all through the community, no violence, no murder, no immorality of a sexual sort, disrupting families.

Families are to be stable, that God wants that. Family life, then, is to be stable. Property is sacrosanct in ancient Israel, as it is, of course, in latter-day cultures like ours.

So, you don't steal. And community is meant to be based on trust and goodwill, people. So, no false witness against your neighbor, no slandering of each other, no exploiting of other people by lying about them, nothing of that sort must be, must have a place in Israel's life.

You shall not bear false witness. and contentment under God in trusting his providence and the goodness that it expresses.

You're not to covet what others have got. Your sinful hearts will prompt you to do that. You must resist the urge to covet.

[59 : 42] and you mustn't cultivate the discontent that comes from coveting. Well, that's, as you don't need me to tell you, a very positive direction and what a good place the world would be if people practiced contentment.

Contentment. I mean with what they've got. All right, well, that's all that I need to say, I think, about how the Ten Commandments were meant to provide, shall I say, cement for the fitting together of the people of Israel, like so many building blocks, bricks, in a building, so that there'd be a unified structure at the end of the day.

It didn't happen, you know very well, it didn't happen, and the Old Testament tells the sorry story of what did happen instead, but these are standards being focused, stated, with special application to entry into the promised land.

now it's possible to take the principle that is being applied in each of those directives, and reapply it to any form of community life at any time in world history.

So, it's not wrong to say the Ten Commandments apply today, but they apply in that way. You have to work a bit in making or remaking the application.

[61 : 41] And then, what about the two great commandments? Well, remember the context in which Jesus gave that teaching. in the communion service, for liturgical purposes, the two great commandments are presented in terms of what our Lord Jesus Christ said, and most certainly that is true.

But, the episode, you may remember, in which we find our Lord saying it, is an episode in which one of the Jewish theologians asked him, which is the great commandment of the law.

And, he's answering that question when he gives the first great commandment and adds to it something which he wasn't asked to do, but which he does because he wants to teach with fullness.

Two great commandments which are top of the list of any commandments that we, his people, seek to live by.

Love the Lord your God with everything that you've got and love your neighbor as yourself. If you're honest, you know that that means that you will exert yourself for the benefit of your neighbor.

[63 : 14] and who is your neighbor, why, anyone with whom you rub shoulders, anyone with whom you're linked, connected, there are no limits.

What would you, how would you say it? Juxtaposition, I mean, being next to a person in some meaning of the word next, constitutes that person as your neighbor.

neighbor. Love your neighbor then as yourself. Seek, in other words, to do what love always seeks to do.

The best definition of love that I know is that love is the purpose of making folk great. Labor to make your neighbor great in whatever way is appropriate to the situation in which you're dealing with him or her or whatever.

And these are the supreme standards for Christians, top of the ethical tree as we might say. Yes, our Lord does want us to apply these two great commandments every day of our lives and to apply them across the board as far as our neighbor is concerned.

[64 : 47] So, that's the standard, the ethical standard, to which conscience is going to hold us.

and in so far as conscience does, conscience will be the voice of God to us, applying his standards for the guidance of our lives.

What is it then that God wants of us, converted Christians who are on the life track, previously they're on the death track, but they're on the life track now, well, he wants of us action with an attitude, appropriate service, expressing the motive of appropriate love, goodwill, and desire to make the folk at the receiving end of your gesture whatever the gesture is, make that person great.

So, this is the frame into which the two ten commandments and the two great commandments should be fitted now, and every Christian's conscience, yours and mine, should be attuned to these standards, and we should never allow ourselves, indeed, if our consciences are awake, our consciences won't allow us to settle for anything less.

without going into the pathology of how it is that Christians nonetheless manage, again and again, to settle for something less because of what sin is doing in their system, including what sin is doing in trying to muffle the voice of conscience, and that is something that sin regularly does, without going further into that, we now see, in simple basic terms, the conditions of the moral life that we are called to live, observing God's ethical standards without compromise, and that I'm putting to you as the biblical foundation for holiness, righteousness, whatever.

[67 : 43] There is in the church a heritage of thought about Christian virtues, that is, habits, and regular patterns of action which arise, which become realities, when we are laboring to obey the commandments and to fulfill the two great commands.

But I can't begin to go into any of that now. I've already gone five minutes over time, as so often. sorry about that.

But be of good courage, I'm just about to stop. What I wanted to do, you see, was to set before you the framework within which we know how to be realistic and responsible in coping with the moral obligations and the ethical requirements that do actually press on us as Christians, as children of God, as forgiven sinners restored to the path of life, indwelt God's word, but by the Holy Spirit and encouraged by God's word to keep on until we get to glory.

And I think that's quite a good place at which to stop. I've given you the basic stuff as I see it. That's it.

I have overrun, once again, apologies. We have a quarter of an hour in which we can discuss, and then I hope we shall all go on our way stronger and more joyful than we have been at, I won't say when we came in, but I will say at times in the past.

[70 : 02] So, thank you for listening. Yes, please.

I got interested when you started to talk a bit about John Wesley and stuff that he said that was wrong. It had something to do with I didn't fully get it. It's something with God's forgiveness wrath, and Wesley was, I wasn't totally clear about what you said about him, but I'm interested.

Well, Wesley was, how shall I say, 100% articles and prayer book orthodox with regard to the meaning of the cross, the Lord Jesus taking our place under the judgment of our sins, and he was equally sound, solid, on repentance, what was involved, what is involved in turning from a life in which we are led by sinful desire, to start living a life in which our business is, out of gratitude, to please the Father and the Son through the Spirit.

And there's nothing about Wesley's teaching to distinguish him from the rest of us apart from the, quite, shall I say it, well, the strength and forthrightness of the way in which he taught those things.

But it's within the living of that life of repentance and obedience that Wesley thought that there would be, if we sought it from God, there would be a second work of grace that would root sin out of the heart, in the way, this is my illustration for what Wesley actually said, he didn't use it as an illustration but I think it does illustrate, root sin out of the heart in the way that a tooth is extracted when it's decayed or a dandelion is pulled up when it's growing in some place where it ought not to be.

[72 : 43] You simply get rid of the reality. Wesley thought in other words that there would be, should be Christians in this world whose hearts were already as perfect as they would be in heaven.

Whereas the rest of us believe that our hearts won't be perfect in that way until we've said goodbye to this physical body in which sin has its headquarters.

And that means until our dying day when we leave this world. In Hebrews chapter 12 the writer speaks of the inhabitants of heaven as including the spirits of just men made perfect.

And most of us I think, most Christians right from the start have taken that to imply that when we leave the body behind, then at last we leave behind this unwelcome nagging force of self-centeredness which operates as a twist in our moral life all the way through while we are in this world.

That was the issue. And Wesley thought he knew somebody who was living out of that life of what he called perfect love. And that was one of the he was very fond of this fellow and that was one of the factors I think which kept him holding onto this mistaken view.

[74 : 37] But that's what it's all about, John. Is that clear? So I think we have time for one or two more questions. Thank you for this talk and for the context that you put this in.

I realize that like Cranmer you can't cover everything in one hour, but I was wondering in terms of standards where have you placed the Sermon on the Mount. I would place it in the life of repentance.

I would say the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' proclamation of the ideal, the Christian ideal, the ideal for his disciples, to which we, who are his disciples, must ask him to enable us to live up.

And the point that he makes over and over that my standards are higher because my summons goes deeper than was the case in Old Testament times.

That is something which we need to take from him as a basic point and so we must be careful not to fall back into mere Old Testament formalism because that, Jesus is saying explicitly, that is no longer good enough.

[76 : 31] I'm dubious about some of the other contrasts between the Old and New Testament order of things which some people affirm but this it seems to me is a point beyond dispute.

the Christian way of focusing moral action is to look at the motive and the desire and the purpose and in general all that is going on in the sinful and imperfectly reclaimed human heart and not to suppose that anything less matches God's requirement the Father's requirement or the Son's requirement I know that Mennonites and such have behind them a strong suspicion which they carry that the Sermon on the Mount among other things is meant to be in some way the agenda for a new culture which only

Christians will be able to handle but I'm not sure that that is a solid point although I know that in some circles which have an anabaptist heritage it's a point very strongly embraced and people once they've embraced it don't let it go I'm not I'm not suspecting you of that although I know that you have a Mennonite background I'm simply trying to say how I think these things should be understood that's what you asked me and I'm telling you