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The 8th Commandment

8/2/2015

With a lot of these commandments there is an obvious way that the commandment can be broken and there is also a deeper, more subtle way that the commandment can be broken. So for example the fifth commandment is “You shall not murder.” Now the obvious way that this commandment is broken is when someone takes out a gun and literally shoots another person. But there is a deeper, more subtle way that the commandment can be broken. The Bible says that “anyone who hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.” (1 John 3:15) Another example is the sixth commandment. The sixth commandment is “You shall not commit adultery.” The obvious meaning is that God does not want you to literally have an affair. But there is also a deeper, more subtle meaning. Jesus himself said, “You heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ but I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. So there is the obvious meaning and the more subtle meaning. It’s the same thing with the commandment we have for today, the eight commandment. The eight commandment is “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” Now the obvious meaning of this commandment is that if you are in court and you are under oath, you shouldn’t lie: “You shall not give false testimony.” And you definitely shouldn’t lie about another person and say that he committed a crime that he actually didn’t commit: “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” That’s the obvious meaning of this commandment.

The deeper and more subtle meaning of this commandment is that we shouldn’t say anything that would destroy another person’s reputation. Proverbs 11:9 says, “With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbor.” With each of the commandments God is protecting something. With this commandment God is protecting a person’s good name or reputation.

A person’s reputation is a very important thing. Proverbs 22:1 says, “A good name is more desirable than great riches.” Sometimes people say, “I don’t care what other people think of me.” I wish I were like those people. I wish I could NOT care what other people think of me. I care a lot about what other people think of me and I have a hunch that most people do. Most people care a lot about their reputation, about what other people think of them. I brought along my blue catechism today and there was a line in the blue catechism that really struck me. It says, “A good reputation is important because it determines whether or not other people will respect us or trust us.”

So a person’s reputation is very important and so God gave the 8th commandment to protect a person’s reputation. How can we destroy a person’s reputation? Well, we could destroy a person’s reputation by lying about them. That’s kind of obvious. But what about things that are true? If something is true, does that mean that we can say it about the person? Well, I think Jesus’ rule helps us out here. Jesus said, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.” (Matthew 7:12) You can say to yourself, “There are some true things that other people could say about me, and even though they are true, I wouldn’t love to have other people saying them about me.”

The Bible also forbids gossip. The apostle Paul said that some people, “get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to” (1 Timothy 5:13). Gossip is talk that is often true or at least half-true. But it serves no good purpose. Paul says here that people who gossip are idlers, to be idle is to be not doing anything constructive,

their talk is not serving any good purpose. Gossip serves no good purpose and it often serves to tear people down.

But have you ever noticed that we love to gossip. If there is a juicy piece of gossip, that's what we can't wait to talk about. And it's not a gender thing. Both men and women love to gossip. There's something about gossip that we love.

You know 1 Corinthians 13? It's the chapter on love and it's often read at weddings. There's a line in 1 Corinthians 13 that I never understood how it fit into the chapter and now I think I do understand. 1 Corinthians 13 says, "Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It does not dishonor others. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth." You see that's the line that I never understood how it fit in. Love does not delight in evil. Of course it doesn't delight in evil. Doesn't that go without saying? But when we love to gossip. We are delighting in evil, We are delighting in tearing others down. And love doesn't do that. Love does not delight in evil.

Instead, the apostle Paul says, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about [and I would add: talk about] such things." (Philippians 4:8) If your speech is constructive and praiseworthy, that will maintain a healthy atmosphere in your personal life and in your home and in the congregation.

What do we do when we become convinced that we have offended God and hurt others by the thing that we have said? What do we do? We think about our baptisms. The Bible says that in baptism, the old you died with Jesus. The Bible says that "you were buried with him in baptism" (Colossians 2:12). "You died" (3:1). All of your sins died on the cross with Jesus. All of your sins were put in the tomb with Jesus. That's means they are forgiven and forgotten about. You can say, that was the old me, but the old me died with Jesus in baptism. The Bible says, "You died ... Therefore put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: anger, rage, malice, slander." That's was the old me, but I have been raised with Jesus and I a new life now. Baptism is not just about dying with Jesus but about being raised to new life with Jesus. In baptism, the new you springs up like a beautiful and vibrant flower. Through baptism you new life.

In baptism you put on the new self and say "The old me used to gossip but I live a new life now in which I talk about what is true and noble and wholesome and excellent. My assessments of other people are gracious and generous. I build others up because that's the new life I have in Jesus. Through baptism I've been raised with Jesus to live a new life: a life that is wholesome and positive and constructive: building up the body of Christ, to the praise of God's glorious grace.

The Bible says that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. You are a new creation who breathes health and life into other people. And in that way we will keep the 8th commandment. Amen.