

Aspects

I have this rather annoying habit. Whenever I get something new, I rarely discard the old. When my T-shirts have become so ratty and torn that more skin is exposed than concealed, and my good wife picks up a package of new shirts for me, I will put the old torn ones back in the drawer and continue to wear them.

The floor of my closet is littered with the bleached and dying bones of old shoes, because I can't bear the thought of throwing away anything that might possibly have even one more day's use left in it. After all, if I need something on my feet to step quickly out into the rain, I'll of course choose the tennies filled with holes over the brand new oxfords.

Suspended above the old shoes in my closet are rows of shirts and slacks and sport coats — all several sizes too small; who knows, I might lose some weight some day . . .

When I replace a part on the tractor, I tuck the old worn part away for the future; worn blades, after all, can be ground to a new edge, worth a few more trips around the lawn. When I break the handle of an old tool it's never discarded, but stashed away for some alternate use. When I get a new and larger toolbox for Christmas, the sad old tool box with bent hinges and rusted bottom it is replacing isn't thrown away, but simply assigned new duties.

We live in a throwaway society. Sitting in an auto dealership's showroom one day, awaiting the return of my twelve-year-old car in for repair, I overheard conversation between a woman and salesman. She had just arrived in a pickup truck which, by all appearances, seemed almost new. The paint was shiny and bright, the body was in immaculate condition, the model could not have been more than a couple years old. When asked why she wanted to trade it in for a newer model, she replied, "It's time."

Trying to repair something like a toaster, coffee maker, or flashlight, I invariably discover that these modern conveniences have been designed so as to be unrepairable; the manufacturer would rather you throw the old one away and purchase the very latest model — preferably from him — than fix the broken old one.

Jots & Tittles

Scattered throughout the Body of Christ today are those who would treat the Scriptures as they treat last year's apparently obsolete kitchen appliance. They rarely crack open their Bible to the more ancient texts, preferring instead to return again and again to the more familiar Gospels or epistles. Some churches have even institutionalized this preference, and the phrase "New Testament Church" erects an almost insurmountable barrier between Malachi 4:6 and Matthew 1:1, rendering what the Jews of Jesus' day would have called "the Law and the Prophets" now obsolete.

The Lord Jesus, however, was quite specific about this in His Sermon on the Mount.

X

"WE DO NOT THROW AWAY THE ALPHABET WHEN WE BEGIN TO READ SHAKESPEARE."

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."

Matthew 5:17-18

Though a young Christian might expect Him to be, Jesus did not come as the antithesis of the Law given by God to Moses and Israel. He came, instead, as its logical continuation. In the Law God was telling the people of Israel, "Here's what you would have to do to be acceptable to me — every one of you, man, woman, and child, every day of your lives." In Christ Jesus, God is saying to the world, "You see? You *can't* do it. I am still pleased by the behavior in the Law, but since you will never accomplish it to the point of salvation, I am sending My Son to accomplish it for you. That is the measure of My love for you."

Many Christians would like to throw away the Ten Commandments as ancient, obsolete text with no application for their lives. As regarding eternal salvation, they're correct; adherence to the ten rules (if it were possible) will never guarantee entrance into God's presence. But even within Christ's salvation by grace, the old rules still offer an outline for behavior pleasing to God the Father.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you

Inside

I

The Jealous Solitaire

II

Invisible Spirit

III

The Majesty of His Name

IV

A Holy Rest

V

Generations

VI

Taking Life

VII

Personally Responsible

VIII

Faith in the Unseen

IX

Dependable Honesty

X

The Deep Longing



have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. *2 Tim. 3:14-17*



The Jealous Solitaire

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me." *Exodus 20:2-3*



We live in a time of small gods. As man has reconstructed the universe to place himself at the center, he has lowered his deities to a station more comfortable for his own inadequacies. Today people seem to prefer gods who are as flawed as themselves. Indeed, the most prominent god of this age is *self*, the most flawed god of all.

It really doesn't matter whether one's god is wealth, possessions, sex, gambling, the latest NBA star, Minister Farrakhan, or Mickey Mouse; all objects of worship that are not the Lord are little more than stand-ins for the worship of self.

The worship of self is the fine art of self-destruction. When we become the most important thing in our universe, when we delude ourselves into thinking we alone are important, self-sustaining, self-pleasuring, the tragic implosion of such a life is inevitable. The worship of money feeds our greed; the worship of sex feeds our baser pleasures; the worship of celebrities feeds our desire to emulate their public persona. All represent the glorification of our lower, selfish desires.

In the Old Testament, Yahweh (the LORD) declared to Israel that He was the one and only, that He was a jealous God who would countenance no pretenders. Jesus, in the New Testament, confirms this foundational command.

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'" *Mark 12:28-30*

From the beginning of God's covenant, He emphasized the good health of His people centering their adoration on Him rather than on themselves. Only the Lord God is capable of handling such worship. His command is not the result of an ever-expanding ego, but of a well-ordered universe with Himself — not man — at the center.

We are a people designed by God to look beyond and above ourselves for the object of our worship, and the Creator of the universe says that He is that one. When we lower our sights, we lower our expectations and, hence, the results. The commandments by God are issued out of love for His people, for their own good. Our adherence to — or rejection of — His sound counsel changes Him not one iota, but can have a dramatic impact on our much smaller lives.

God says, "I am the one who has saved you; based on that, I alone am worthy of your trust and devotion."

The Christian, like Israel at Sinai, faces the exclusive claim of the first commandment. He puts it to Israel as an issue not of theology but of loyalty; a matter not of the mind simply, but of the heart. Elsewhere in Scripture, notably in the Psalms and Isaiah, we find Him telling His people explicitly that to worship pagan gods is madness, because they are in fact no gods; but He is not making that point here. For the moment He leaves open the question whether other gods have any existence or not. He frames the first commandment not to settle that issue but to settle the question of loyalty. God does not say, "There are no other gods beside me for you to have"; He simply says, "You shall have no other gods but me." And He grounds His claim on the fact that He is their God who brought them out of Egypt. It is as if He said, "By saving you from Pharaoh and his hosts by my mighty hand and stretched-out arm, by signs and wonders, by the Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea, I gave you a sample of what I can do for you, and showed you clearly enough that anywhere, at any time, against any foe, under any privation whatsoever, I can protect you, provide for you, and give you all that makes up true life. You need no god but me; therefore you are not to be betrayed into looking for any god but me; you are to serve me, and me alone." If you are a Christian, you know that you, too, are being claimed in the same way.

J.I. Packer

"I am the LORD;
that is my name!
I will not give my
glory to another or
my praise to idols."
Isaiah 42:8



Invisible Spirit

"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

Exodus 20:4-6



You can't really blame them, those nations and individuals who, down through the millennia, have crafted physical representations of their otherwise invisible gods. It's a perfectly natural thing, after all, to hold some image of a far-off loved one.

In the Gulf of Tonkin during the Vietnam War, my most prized possessions were the few snapshots I had of my intended: the lovely teenager who would become my wife as soon as I

returned to the States. I taped the cherished images to the bottom of the overhead rack, so I could gaze upon the object of my affection the last thing before sleep, and the first thing upon awakening.

But colored photographs of a distant fiancé are a far cry from a graven image of an invisible god, and the deep longings I felt for the young woman in the picture were something very different from obeisant worship.

Our God is indeed invisible to those on earth, because He is spirit, not flesh. Jesus explained that, among men, only He had seen God.

No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. *John 6:46*

This is how He wants it. In fact there's a stiff penalty paid by anyone who sees Him.

But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." *Exodus 33:20*

The Christian doesn't need an image of God crafted from wood or stone or fired clay. The Father has already supplied us with the image of Himself in Christ Jesus.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Col. 1:13-15

In His Son, God has given us far more than a plaster statue that bears Him some resemblance. In Jesus we have the personality, the character, the love and grace and mercy of a loving, invisible Father. Yet, dwelling in His grace we cannot lighten our fear of idolatry, and the chance that we might be found by Him to have fallen into its clutches.

Let us beware lest we in our pride accept the erroneous notion that idolatry consists only in kneeling before visible objects of adoration, and that civilized peoples are therefore free from it. The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. *A.W. Tozer²*



There reigns the Eternal Father, in His lone prerogatives,
And, in the Father's Mind, the Son, all self-existing, lives,
With Him, their mutual Jubilee, that deepest depth of love,
Lifegiving Life of twofold source, the many gifted Dove!
O Bountiful! O Beautiful! can Power or Wisdom add
Fresh features to a life, so munificent and glad?
Can even uncreated Love, ye angels! give a hue
Which can ever make the Unchanging and Unchangeable
look new?

Frederick William Faber



The Majesty of His Name

"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name." *Exodus 20:7*



The Mosaic Covenant, handed down at Sinai after the exodus from Egypt, was essentially an agreement of *action*.

"Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." *Exodus 19:5-6a*

For Jehovah God to be held to His end of the contract, Israel had to "obey me fully and keep my covenant." They were given page after page of rules and regulations, dos and don'ts, specifically-ordered methods for conducting personal, community, and national activities. It was a tall order, and one which, not surprisingly, they were ultimately incapable of carrying out.

In contrast, the covenant established at the cross, when Jesus took upon Himself the full curse of the Sinai Law in order to redeem mankind,³ was an agreement of the *heart*.

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. *Romans 10:9-10*

The essential component of the New Covenant is *belief* — not the strict adherence to a list of regulations. Yet actions are not removed, but simply shifted to a different place. In Jesus, the agreement is established within the heart when we believe; our actions do not secure God's side of the bargain. Instead of their original place before the transaction, our actions have now been moved to a point after. Our actions now become a testimony to what has occurred within the confines of our heart and mind.

God's name is no less holy today. More than simply a manner of address or designation, God's name represents the entirety of His nature and personality; to use lightly or profane this holy Name is to profane the very One it describes.

This commandment primarily safeguards the sanctity of oaths; but it also condemns all forms of careless worship, jesting at holy things, mocking at sin, sneering at principle, affected zeal and hypocrisy, and forbids not only common profanity (which is always a proof of an impoverished vocabulary), but also invoking the Lord's sacred name for magical incantations.⁴

So can one, with Christ in his heart, then profane the Name of His Father?



O LORD, our Lord,
 how majestic is your name in all the earth!
 You have set your glory above the heavens.
 From the lips of children and infants
 you have ordained praise
 because of your enemies,
 to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens,
 the work of your fingers,
 the moon and the stars,
 which you have set in place,
 what is man that you are mindful of him,
 the son of man that you care for him?
 You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
 and crowned him with glory and honor.

You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
 you put everything under his feet:
 all flocks and herds,
 and the beasts of the field,
 the birds of the air,
 and the fish of the sea,
 all that swim the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Lord,
 how majestic is your name in all the earth! *Psalms 8:1-9*

IV

A Holy Rest

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” *Exodus 20:8-11*



From the perspective of the legalists of His day, Jesus had this really annoying habit of explaining God’s purpose in ways that made them look foolish. Here they had gone to all the trouble to outline and dissect the law, breaking it down, for example, into thirty-nine specific activities that were forbidden on the Sabbath, when this rogue Messiah comes along and stirs up their neat and tidy oligarchy. One kind of forbidden “work” from their list was reaping.

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.” *Matthew 12:1-2*

Jesus, in His own words, came to *fulfill* the Law, but He also came to explain it. In the more than 1,200 years since the Law had come down from God through Moses, Israel had sliced and diced it into mountainous volumes of rules and regulations. In the process, they had lost sight of the true spirit and purpose of the Law. Jesus gave them some help.

He answered, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?⁵ He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread — which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven’t you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” *Matthew 12:3-8*

But we must not mistake the means for the end. We must not think that the Sabbath is just for the sake of being able to attend meetings. There are some people who think they must spend the whole day at meetings or private devotions. The result is that at nightfall they are tired out and the day has brought them no rest. The number of church services attended ought to be measured by the person’s ability to enjoy them and get good from them without being wearied. Attending meetings is not the only way to observe the Sabbath. The Israelites were commanded to keep it in their dwellings as well as in holy convocation. The home, that centre of so great influence over the life and character of the people, ought to be made the scene of true Sabbath observance. *Dwight L. Moody⁶*

V

Generations

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.” *Exodus 20:12*



Isn’t it odd how, throughout the course of a son or daughter’s life, a parent passes in and out of a state of intellectual brilliance? When one is a baby, the parent is someone overpoweringly immense, omnipotent, all-wise, all-knowing, all-loving yet all-weary of two o’clock squalls. Not long after, the child learns that here is someone who can be manipulated by mere tantrums or googily eyes — a clear sign of lower intelligence.

During the younger teenage years, the child realizes that the parent is generally well meaning, but hopelessly inept and out of touch with the more important elements of living — such as current fashion, music, and vernacular. Yet during this same period the child taps into periodic moments of genius emanating from the parent when their counsel is reluctantly sought. This genius, the child understands, is simply the dwindling glimmer of brilliance before the parent slides hopelessly into irretrievable senility.

The later teenage years are the nadir of parent stupidity. At no time in a child’s life is the parent more infuriatingly ignorant

than at this time. Their brains turn to mashed potatoes, their good humor disappears, and the child wonders what he or she has done to deserve such a leaden weight upon their otherwise buoyant life.

Miraculously, as soon as the child is old enough to be out on their own, the parent turns a corner and begins to wise up. Through the years of college and early adulthood the parent has grown slightly wiser, more sophisticated about the things of the world. The parent, while still, admittedly, mired in the traditions of the past, has refined the communicative skills, has become more tolerant and understanding. And except for, possibly, a brief period during the early years of the child's own children, the parent continues on the upward path toward sage wisdom, and enlightenment.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" — which is the first commandment with a promise — "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." *Ephes. 6:1-3*

It is likewise odd, at least to our contemporary senses, that Scripture — both Old and New — does not in any way modify this command based on age or personality. It does not say "Obey your parents" only while you are living in their house, or "Honor your father and your mother" whenever they agree with you.

As the child is God's gift to the parent, so is the parent — with all the mistakes, second tries, stumbling leaps of faith, inadequate answers and prying interrogations — God's gift to the child.

O give us homes built firm upon the Savior,
Where Christ is Head and Counsellor and Guide;
Where every child is taught His love and favor
And gives his heart to Christ, the crucified:
How sweet to know that though his footsteps waver
His faithful Lord is walking by his side!

O give us homes with godly fathers, mothers,
Who always place their hope and trust in Him;
Whose tender patience turmoil never bothers,
Whose calm and courage trouble cannot dim;
A home where each finds joy in serving others,
And love still shines, tho days be dark and grim.

O Lord, our God, our homes are Thine forever!
We trust to Thee their problems, toil, and care;
Their bonds of love no enemy can sever
If Thou art always Lord and Master there:
Be Thou the center of our least endeavor —
Be Thou our Guest, our hearts and homes to share.

Barbara B. Hart ⁷

VI

Taking Life

"You shall not murder." *Exodus 20:13*



To those who say the Ten Commandments have no application for the Christian, Jesus has something to say:

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,'⁸ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."

Matthew 5:21-22

In the course of human endeavor, considering mankind as a whole, there are only a handful who go so far as to murder. It may seem that today their numbers are on the increase, but they are, happily, still far in the minority.

Yet the world is increasingly populated by those who murder in other, less direct ways — people who suck out life and vitality, who invest themselves in pursuits dark and depressing. Our world — and, sadly, the church — is filled with them: cynics who receive and then pass along everything with a sour, sarcastic tinge; those who learn bad theology, then make it their life's goal to share it, uncensored, with a neighbor; critics whose ambition it is to be judge and jury on every hapless soul that crosses their path.

So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

Romans 14:12-13

Murder is an admittedly harsh word that is just as applicable to the spirit as the mortal life, and the weapon of choice is the human tongue.

Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. *James 3:5-10*

Spiritually, the opposite of murder is "edification" — to build up. We are called to be a positive, constructive influence within the community of God. The New Testament writers take the sixth commandment, turn it positive instead of negative, and express it for the benefit of the Kingdom:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for

works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
Ephes. 4:11-13

VII

Personally Responsible

"You shall not commit adultery." *Exodus 20:14*



Once again, God's rules for our best run counter to the rules of society. The U.S. military recently finalized a yearlong study, which resulted in its lowering standards for punishment of adultery.

Pentagon Has New Rules for Adultery

WASHINGTON (AP) - . . . The Pentagon also issued new guidelines for handling cases of adultery, telling commanders that although the behavior is "unacceptable conduct" they shouldn't seek criminal charges unless the activity disrupts or discredits the armed forces.

"In today's military environment, we owe it to our forces to eliminate as many differences in disciplinary standards as possible and to adopt uniform, clear and readily understandable policies," Cohen wrote to military leaders.

Adultery will remain a crime under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, but commanders are now instructed to pursue courts-martial only when adultery, defined as sex with a currently married person, hurts "the good order and discipline in the armed forces or was of a nature to bring discredit upon the armed forces."

Also to be considered is the marital status of both parties, including legal separation; whether the service member's lover is in the military; whether there is misuse of government time or resources; and whether the activity was flagrant, resulting in notoriety.

So now adultery is only deemed *really* bad when it's less than discreet. Falling in line with the established philosophy and behavior of its Commander-in-Chief, adultery is only wrong when you get caught.

But God's way is not so tolerant. If "You shall not murder" expresses corporate responsibility, then "You shall not commit adultery" expresses personal responsibility — to one's life-partner and to oneself.

The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. *1 Cor. 7:3-4*

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. *1 Cor. 6:18*

One only has to read today's paper, or listen to the calls into today's talk shows, to hear what a heavy toll is taken on a society that winks at such behavior.

VIII

Faith in the Unseen

"You shall not steal" *Exodus 20:15*



Jesus never made it easy. He was a pretty hard sell.

A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good — except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'" "All these I

have kept since I was a boy," he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. *Luke 18:18-23*

Here again the Savior took the essentials of the old, and instead of removing the burden of integrity, added to it. It wasn't enough for people to keep

the old commandments, he told the wealthy man. It wasn't enough for them to be honest and forthright, not cheating or stealing from their neighbors.

Jesus said to the man that he must shift his priority to things eternal. The treasures of this earth are nothing compared to the untold wealth of heaven, but he must first turn his heart away from temporal gain. More than that, to acquire these eternal riches he must, in fact, renounce all *desire* for wealth. Alas, the shortsighted ruler wasn't willing to take a chance on the unseen.

Earthly riches are called thorns, as well they may; for as thorns, they pierce both head and heart; the head with cares in getting them, and the heart with grief in parting with them.

Thomas Brooks

There is no one more intently focused on earthly riches than the thief. He is profoundly shortsighted, since he has no patience to support himself by more honorable means. And as such, he sets himself a far distance from heaven.



Dependable Honesty

"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." *Exodus 20:16*



Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Romans 13:8-10

There is an exquisite horizontal dimension to the Christian life. Yes, we are commanded to first look up, to concentrate our adoration and devotion upon the Lord God. But there is more that comes after the worship and praise: in the dependable honesty that flows from neighbor to neighbor, sister to sister, friend to friend.

The one who loves his neighbor as himself will not lie about, or to, him. Motivated less by human will than by the gentle counsel of the Spirit, the believer sees the reflection of Christ in the one across the way.

Where cross the crowded ways of life,
Where sound the cries of race and clan,
Above the noise of selfish strife,
We hear Thy voice, O Son of man!

The cup of water given for Thee
Still holds the freshness of Thy grace;
Yet long these multitudes to see
The sweet compassion of Thy face.

O Master, from the mountain side,
Make haste to heal these hearts of pain,
Among these restless throngs abide,
O tread the city's streets again;

Till sons of men shall learn Thy love
And follow where Thy feet have trod:
Till glorious from Thy heaven above
Shall come the city of our God.

W. Russell Bowie

Our words are the evidence of the state of our hearts as surely as the taste of the water is an evidence of the state of the spring. *J.C. Ryle*



The Deep Longing

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." *Exodus 20:17*



Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." *Matthew 8:20*

The longing for things belonging to others is not the exclusive purview of the unsaved, unrepentant, greed-consumed wealthy. Some believers have said they wish to follow Christ to the full extent of His poverty and homelessness. To that end they swear a life of poverty, or at least modest income. As a result they go without many of the glittering niceties that their neighbors seem to enjoy. But searching for peace within holy simplicity, they find instead only consuming jealousy, and resentment toward those they consider less pious.

God still pays more attention to the heart, and in this final commandment He emphasizes again the heart condition. In civil law no offense has been committed where no action has yet taken place. There is no crime in *thinking* about robbing a bank; the crime is only committed when the bank has been robbed.

But God says that in His Kingdom that's not enough. Thoughts matter, intentions matter. The longing alone — the desire for those things in the possession of others — is sufficiently wrong.

Covetousness is idolatry, because it replaces our longing for God with a longing for something or someone other than Him.



But none honors God like the thirst of desire,
Nor possesses the heart so completely with Him;
For it burns the world out with the swift ease of fire,
And fills life with good works till it runs o'er the brim.

Then pray for desire, for love's wistfullest yearning,
For the beautiful pining of holy desire;
Yes, pray for a soul that is ceaselessly burning
With the soft fragrant flames of this thrice happy fire.

For the heart only dwells, truly dwells with its treasure,
And the languor of love captive hearts can unfetter;
And they who love God cannot love Him by measure,
For their love is but hunger to love Him still better.

Frederick William Faber

Notes:

1. *Knowing God* (InterVarsity Press, 1993), p266ff.
2. *The Knowledge of the Holy* (HarperCollins, 1992), p5.
3. F.C. Fensham in the *New Bible Dictionary* (Tyndale House, 1984), p242.
4. Encyclopedia to the *Master Study Bible*, NASB (Holman, 1981), p1734.
5. 1 Samuel 21:1-6.
6. As quoted by Arthur W. Pink in his book, *Gleanings in Exodus* (Moody Press, 1981), p162f.
7. Copyright 1965 by *Singspiration*. All rights reserved.
8. An Aramaic term of contempt.

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