The First Four
Sermon given on 10/27/2012

Stephen Bauer: Each semester in my Christian Ethics class, I have a unit on the Ten Commandments. I used to assign a reaction paper in which each student would write on how Ellen White’s exposition of the Decalogue affected his or her understanding of any two out of the final six commandments. The results were predictable yet frustrating: The vast majority of students used Ellen White’s comments to conjure up a near-infinite number of ways a given commandment could be broken, would plead guilty to breaking the command in multiple manners, and then conclude that the commandments were impossible to keep. My assignment seemed to drive students to conclude that the Ten Commandments cannot be properly kept! This was not the result I wanted.

• How often do we treat the Ten Commandments as a list of rules that seem nearly impossible to keep?

• What did David think of the law? Ps. 119:97: “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long”

• Why? Verses 92-96 “If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have preserved my life. Save me, for I am yours; I have sought out your precepts. The wicked are waiting to destroy me, but I will ponder your statutes. To all perfection I see a limit, but your commands are boundless.”

• God’s Law is a hedge about us, it is a protecting shield. “To the obedient it is a wall of protection.” (OHC 137)

• God’s Law is limitless. It should influence every part of our life.
Commandment #1: (Protection from the hurt and loss that will come from worshipping the wrong “god.”)

- Exodus 20: 2-3
- The basis of the entire Great Controversy -- Isa. 14:13, “For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit.”
- It is a law of heaven – Ps. 148, Rev. 22:8-9
- Satan desires our worship:
  - Matt. 4:8-10, “Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”
  - Choice: (1 Peter 5:6-8)
    - Satan’s end is sure (Rev. 20:7-10)
    - God’s love never ends: Ps. 136
- Loron Wade (in The Ten Commandments) says it this way: “Don’t surrender your loyalty and devotion to “gods” who in reality are no gods, says the first commandment. Do not give a supreme place in your life to something or someone who, in the end, will only disappoint and hurt you.”
- God is saying,
  - I love you. Other gods don’t love you.
  - I have redeemed you. Other gods have deceived you.
  - I will love you forever. They want to devour you.

The first commandment, that #1 rule of the entire universe, is given to protect us from the hurt and loss that we will experience if we give our love to anyone other than our Creator, the one true God.
Commandment #2: (Protection from the pain and suffering that comes from focusing on other creatures instead of the Creator.)

- Exodus 20: 4-6

- “I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.” The close and sacred relation of God to His people is represented under the figure of marriage. Idolatry being spiritual adultery, the displeasure of God against it is fitly called jealousy. (PP 306.2)

- Idolatry: Analogy with Adultery
  - Hosea 3:1, “The Lord said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.”
  - James 4:4, “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”

- What is idolatry today?
  - Greed/covetousness (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5)
  - “The present age is one of idolatry, as verily as was that in which Elijah lived. No outward shrine may be visible; there may be no image for the eye to rest upon; yet thousands are following after the gods of this world—after riches, fame, pleasure, and the pleasing fables that permit man to follow the inclinations of the unregenerate heart. Multitudes have a wrong conception of God and His attributes, and are as truly serving a false god as were the worshipers of Baal” (PK 178)
  - “It is as easy to make an idol of false doctrines and theories as to fashion an idol of wood or stone.” (GC 583)
  - Idolaters are condemned by the Word of God. Their folly consists in trusting in self for salvation, in bowing down to the works of their own hands. God classes as idolaters those who trust in their own wisdom, their own devising, depending for success on their riches and power, striving to strengthen themselves by alliance with men whom the world calls great, but who fail to discern the binding claims of His law (The Review and Herald, March 15, 1906). {1BC 1105.7}

- Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 306: “The attempt to represent the Eternal One by material objects would lower man’s conception of God. The mind, turned away from the infinite perfection of Jehovah, would be attracted to the creature rather than to the Creator. And as his conceptions of God were lowered, so would man become degraded.”
• If our goal is lowered to the creature or the creature’s theories, then we will never attain anything higher than the creature.

• Ps. 115:4-8 “But their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.”

• Rom. 1:22-31

• Of the days of Noah, Gen 6:5 says “that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.” (“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man.” Luke 17:26)

• In the second commandment, God is saying, “I love you. I am jealous for you. I want to protect you from the pain and suffering that comes from setting your focus on fellow men and their creations.” “Lean not on your own understanding” but instead “trust in the Lord with all your heart” (Prov. 3:5)
Commandment #3: (Protection from Babylon)

- Exodus 20: 7
- Ps. 111:9, “He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever— holy and awesome is his name.”
- Isa 29:23 “When they see among them their children, the work of my hands, they will keep my name holy; they will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.”

Name = character/characteristics (think Abram/Abraham, Jacob/Esau, Jacob/Israel)

- God has 200 – 300 names in the Bible. One author calls the names of God “miniature portraits and promises.”
- If God’s name is a representation of His character, no wonder we are told to use it carefully.
- Pen of Inspiration: “Never should that name be spoken lightly or thoughtlessly. Even in prayer its frequent or needless repetition should be avoided.... Humility and reverence should characterize the deportment of all who come into the presence of God. In the name of Jesus we may come before Him with confidence, but we must not approach Him with the boldness of presumption, as though He were on a level with ourselves. There are those who address the great and all-powerful and holy God, who dwelleth in light unapproachable, as they would address an equal, or even an inferior. There are those who conduct themselves in His house as they would not presume to do in the audience chamber of an earthly ruler. These should remember that they are in His sight whom seraphim adore, before whom angels veil their faces. God is greatly to be reverenced; all who truly realize His presence will bow in humility before Him.” (My Life Today, p. 281-282)

Another even far reaching meaning:

- 2 Chron. 7:14, “if my people, who are called by my name...“
- 1 John 3:1, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!“
- What does it mean to take on the family name of God? Look down to verses 9-10
- Eze. 20:9 “But for the sake of my name, I brought them out of Egypt. I did it to keep my name from being profaned in the eyes of the nations among whom they lived and in whose sight I had revealed myself to the Israelites.”
- Rev. 16:8-9: “The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was allowed to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.”
In the third commandment, God is saying, “I love you. I want to place my name and seal on you. I want to protect you from joining those who curse the name of God.”

Commandment #4: (Protection from selfishness and a works-based religion.)

- Ex. 20:8:11

- In Deut. 5:12-15, ... 15 And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”

- Hebrews 3-4 further links the Sabbath rest with redemption. Heb. 4:9 (NASB) “So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.” What is Paul talking about here? From the context of the rest of the chapter, we see that God promised Israel a Sabbath rest if they would be faithful to Him. They failed to enter that “rest” in the wilderness. The promise was still available in David’s time as ref. in Ps. 95 (quoted in Heb. 3:15; 4:7). In Heb. 4:9, Paul makes it clear that this same promise of a “Sabbath rest” is available to us today. Heb. 4:16 “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

- Isa 58:13-14 "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." The mouth of the LORD has spoken.

- In both the OT and NT, the symbolism of the Sabbath is tied to God’s deliverance from physical bondage in the past, the deliverance from sin that He wants to give us today through His grace, and the ultimate redemption when He will come to deliver us from this world of sin in the future.

- Entering into the Sabbath rest each week is an act of faith in His redemption. ‘Six days I have worked, but Lord, I can’t work to earn salvation. I can only rest in faith that you will justify me.’

- Ex 31:13 “Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you.’”

- Refraining from doing as we please, letting hold of self on the Sabbath, allows God to work in us, “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). Heb. 12:1-2 “let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...”
• In the fourth commandment, God is saying, "I created you. I redeemed you. I want to sanctify you. All you have to do is rest – to set aside self. I want to protect you from the emptiness of selfishness and a works-based religion."

• Isn’t it interesting that the very institution God designated as a symbol of faith has so often been the focus of a works-oriented philosophy.

Summary:

Commandment #1: Protection from the hurt and loss that will come from loving the wrong “god.”

Commandment #2: Protection from the pain and suffering that comes from focusing on other creatures instead of the Creator, from looking down instead of up.

Commandment #3: Protection from the wrath that comes to those who curse God.

Commandment #4: Protection from ourselves, from looking for salvation in ourselves, in our own works instead of looking to Jesus as “the author and finisher of our faith…”

“The ten holy precepts spoken by Christ upon Sinai’s mount were the revelation of the character of God….That law of ten precepts of the greatest love that can be presented to man is the voice of God from heaven speaking to the soul in promise, “This do, and you will not come under the dominion and control of Satan.” There is not a negative in that law, although it may appear thus. It is DO, and Live” (Letter 89, 1898). (1BC 1105.2)