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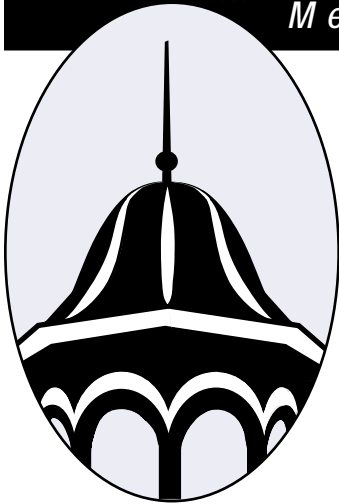
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The Ten Commandments Today

by Dr. Phil McMillion, professor of Old Testament

How should we understand the Ten Commandments? Are they simply a part of Israel's history that is no longer relevant for Christians, or are they still important for us today?

Perhaps we should begin by looking at the place of the commandments in the Old Testament. The Ten Commandments are referred to in Deuteronomy 4:13, where they are the basic element of the covenant which God made with his people. That is an important fact to keep in mind.

In both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, the Ten Commandments are the first part of the law given by God. This suggests that the Ten Commandments are the foundation upon which everything else is built. These are the basic principles, the foundation for Israelite society. Think about where Israel had been before the commandments were given — in Egyptian slavery for 400 years. As slaves, they did not have to think much about how to govern themselves. They had someone to tell them what to do every minute of the day. As a free nation, however, they needed some basic principles by which to organize their society.

That is where the Ten Commandments become so important. By principles, I do not mean general guidelines that

one can accept or ignore. The Ten Commandments are basic principles that form the cornerstone for the foundation of society. As such, this foundation must not be ignored.

It is significant that in both Exodus 20 and in Deuteronomy 5, the Ten Commandments begin with the statement, "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Many readers see this as merely an introduction to the commands. Jewish readers, however, see this statement as the first commandment.

That may appear strange at first glance, but there is an important point made in this opening statement. God does not simply begin giving commands without any preparation. God's deliverance is the basis for the commands. God has done something wonderful for Israel. The LORD delivers them from Egyptian slavery as an act of grace and mercy. Nothing they could do would earn that mercy since it had already been given. The commandments are a way to show their gratitude. God acts first on behalf of the people, and then Israel responds to what God has done for them.

This is a principle that one finds throughout scripture. Over and over again, God shows his love and mercy and then

asks people to respond in love, obedience and gratitude. Even in the New Testament, God acts first by sending Jesus Christ, and then people are asked to respond to what the Lord has done.

Notice the nature of the Ten Commandments. They simply state the laws. They do not give a penalty for those who break the laws; they give the basic principles that are to be followed. These are basic principles that Israelite society — and I would suggest any society — must recognize if they are to survive. When a society ignores these laws, what happens? Simply read the newspaper to answer that question for our modern context.

You sometimes hear that we are not under the Ten Commandments any longer, and that is certainly true in one sense. It is true that the Ten Commandments are not the basis for salvation. Salvation comes through the grace of God in Jesus Christ. It is also true, however, that there are principles in the Ten Commandments that are still important for us today. Are there things here that our young people need to hear? Are there principles important for all Christians to consider? There surely are! The Ten Commandments deserve careful

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Alumni Note

John Barton (M.Div., '94) was awarded the Ph.D. in African Philosophy from Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda. He and his wife, Sara, have lived in Jinja, Uganda, for eight years, helping plant churches and develop leadership. They will move to Michigan this summer to work at Rochester College, where John will be associate professor of interdisciplinary studies and philosophy, and Sara will be a campus minister.

Dean's List, Fall 2001

Dr. Evertt W. Huffard is proud to announce the fall 2001 Dean's List: Kelly Brown, Deanna Caswell, Hobby Chapin, Daniel Cherry, Nathan Daily, Lance Hawley, Julie Clapp Horne, Steven Hovater, Eon Yong Ko, George Kohlbacher, Bob Logsdon, James "Mack" McFarland, Joshua Patrick, Tami Rosoff, Foredy Supratman, Trevor Thompson and Douglas Vile.

To be on the Dean's List, a student must have earned a 3.50 GPA for nine or more semester hours for which a letter grade has been given.

Congratulations to these students!

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From the Dean



Focused Lives

A race takes less than four minutes, but the athletes at the Olympics have focused their lives on the race for months — with every intention of ending well. Paul approached ministry with a similar focus and intensity. In his own words, "I have fought the good fight, ... finished the race, ... kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). He did not say he fought well; he said ministry is good and is worth the battle. He did not say he won the gold medal; he just finished the race. He did not say he had superior faith; he just kept the faith. This theme of perseverance was dear to Paul. In the face of adversity, ministry stays focused on the power of the Gospel of Christ. He told Timothy to "fulfill" his ministry (2 Timothy 4:5) and Archippus to "complete the work" the Lord had given him (Colossians 4:17).

on daily training to finish the race. Training develops new skills, a deeper understanding of God, and the courage to develop new skills.

- (3) *"Hitting the wall" in ministry invokes the demons of fear and failure that can become large enough to convince the best of us to quit the race.* Don't conclude that "ministry is not for me" without considering that God may be using this time to shape you into his image and to help you build a ministry focused on God, not on self. Such transformation comes with a price, but we cannot afford to avoid it if we want to complete the race honorably.

Not Finishing Well

Few leaders finish well. A graduate professor of mine observed that only one in three of the leaders in the Old Testament finished well. My guess is the same could be said for leadership today. Those who do not finish well seem to have ignored these maxims:

- (1) *A confidence that one knows all that needs to be known with no need and "no time" for continued training leads to failure.* Like the husband who has been totally blind and deaf to the needs of his wife and clueless to the impending divorce, a preacher wakes up one day unprepared for the changes within the congregation and the community. The church dies, or good leaders may invite him to leave.
- (2) *Contentment with natural gifts can lead to greater reliance on self than on God.* If this is the ministry to which God called you, he equipped you with the ability to run — but he expects a life focused

Finishing Well

Few athletes arbitrarily pick a sport and say, "Next year I will be in the Olympics." Finishing well has something to do with starting well. Select your ministry wisely, based on your values and experience. Those who finish well do not take the easiest route. The coach may help the athlete focus on his or her strengths even though the athlete may not like that focus. We call that "led by God" in ministry! God's providence is active in our lives to give focus through good role models.

In *Focused Lives*, Robert Clinton concluded that those who finish well have these characteristics in common: enjoy a vibrant relationship with God to the end, maintain a learning posture throughout life, have a Christ-like character, live by biblical convictions, leave behind one or more ultimate contributions, and fulfill a sense of destiny. I hope these traits will encourage you to stay in the race and also to see how the Graduate School continues to play a vital role in keeping spiritual athletes in the race.

— Evertt W. Huffard (dean@hugsr.edu)

Focusing on Evangelistic Preaching *by Dave Phillips, Alumni Association president*

Who ever said that preaching would be simple? To appreciate the challenges of preaching, one must notice the multi-faceted issues: personal issues for the minister, textual issues with God's word, and practical issues of relating to the listeners. The task of wrestling with the truths of the scripture can often overwhelm the preacher, but coming to an understanding of the scriptures is not sufficient unless the minister himself is willing to yield his life to God. This in itself is not the end of the task for the preacher. The audience must be evaluated in order to fashion a message that is scriptural, relevant and understandable. These challenges have been the focus of the Graduate School this year, where chapel services have emphasized evangelistic preaching.

This year's Alumni Ministry Forum on April 4 will also focus

on evangelistic preaching. The day's schedule includes an alumni breakfast, a luncheon, and the presentation of the Alumnus of the Year award. We have invited men from a variety of backgrounds who will both instruct and challenge us.

Anthony Wood works in the Memphis inner city and will lead our devotional thoughts as we begin the day at breakfast. (We will also use this time to select additional officers, determine themes, make suggestions for future Alumnus of the Year awards, and pray for the day's efforts.)

Dr. James Thompson, professor of Bible at Abilene Christian University, will begin the lectures by addressing "The History of Evangelistic Preaching in the New Testament." He has taught New Testament at ACU for many years and has written several

volumes, including a commentary on Hebrews.

Following Dr. Thompson is Keith Parker, who preaches at the Goodlettsville Church of Christ near Nashville, Tenn. He has been active in conducting gospel meetings and will address means by which the Sunday sermon is evangelistic.

Dr. Chris Altrock recently completed his doctor of ministry dissertation on "Preaching to the Post-Modern World" and will discuss these implications for evangelistic preaching. He is a preaching minister with the Highland Street church in Memphis.

Don McLaughlin is a frequent speaker for youth rallies around the country and preaches for the North Atlanta Church of Christ. He will present a method for "Preparing a Plan for Evangelistic Preaching."

Jimmy Allen, professor of

Bible at Harding University for more than 40 years, is well known for his evangelistic work across the country. He will conclude the Forum and address "The Heart of Evangelism," both in the man and in the method.

Each presenter will speak for 30 minutes, then answer questions for 20 minutes. This allows specific questions to be addressed while the group is still assembled.

Preaching is not simple. It never has been. But the joy that comes from teaching the word of God to an individual who is desperately searching for answers is beyond compare. The apostle Paul referred to it as having a "treasure in earthen vessels." We trust that this Ministry Forum will be a time of inspiration to improve our skills in sharing this treasure.

W.B. West Lectures Address The Crux of the Matter

by Mark Parker, director of admissions

One of the best qualities of Harding University Graduate School of Religion is its commitment to addressing issues vital to the church. Part of that commitment is evidenced in the Student Association's annual W.B. West Lectureship, which highlights a recent scholarly publication in the churches of Christ.

This year's lectures on Feb. 7 brought together Dr. Jeff Childers, assistant professor of Bible at Abilene Christian University, and Dr. Stafford North, professor of Bible at Oklahoma Christian University. The dialogue centered upon issues discussed in *The Crux of the Matter*, Childers' latest book with co-authors Doug Foster and Jack Reese.

The format of the discussion was an hour-long presentation by Childers on issues in his

book, with an hour-long response by North. The two then asked each other questions and then turned to written questions submitted by the audience for the final hour.

The significance of the meeting was in the meeting itself. Childers and North represent two stands on current issues in churches of Christ. Exchanges of those with differing opinions can often turn caustic, a point admitted by both speakers. In this meeting, prolonged discussion of issues and perspectives took place in a cordial environment.

The open discussion on critical matters should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the Graduate School. This is a place to search scripture, to let it search us, and to engage each other in meaningful, respectful

dialogue. If you want to join this exciting community of searchers, please call me at 1-800-680-0809.

The Crux of the Matter is available at many brotherhood retailers and online booksellers. The complete text of Stafford North's presentation is available

at www.oc.edu/faculty/stafford.north. Tapes of the dialogue, including the question and answer period, are available by sending a \$15 check (shipping included) payable to Harding Graduate School Student Association, 1000 Cherry Road, Memphis, TN 38117.



Dr. Stafford North and Dr. Jeff Childers engaged in an open discussion at the W.B. West Lectures on Feb. 7.

Return Service Requested

Giving from the Heart

The story of the widow who gave two mites may be the greatest example of giving in the history of the world. We can learn at least two lessons from it. First, it is not the size of the gift that counts. In Mark 12:41, we read, "Jesus sat over against the treasury and beheld how people cast money." He said very little about the size of large gifts that were given, but had much to say about the widow's gift because, "she cast all she had, even all her living" (v. 42). Second, she gave from the heart.

The first example of biblical giving is recorded in Genesis 4 with the account of Cain and Abel's sacrifices to God. We know Cain was a farmer and Abel a shepherd. They both gave of their means to God, but Abel's gift was more acceptable, not because it was more valuable but because his gift

came from the heart.

Our hope is that those who send gifts to the Graduate School do so from the heart because they believe in our work. In the year 2001, we were blessed with 2,291 gifts. These gifts ranged from 97 cents to \$60,000. Of these gifts, 1,855 were \$100 or less; 370 gifts were from \$101 to \$1,000; 53 gifts from \$1,001 to \$5,000; and 11 gifts from \$5,001 to \$60,000. Gifts for the year 2001 totaled \$671,000. Of that amount, \$281,000 was designated for the general scholarship fund.

If you do the math, you see that more than 80 percent of our gifts are \$100 or less. Some people think their gift might not make a difference, but you see how they all add up.

Each month, we mail about 7,000 copies

of *The Bridge* to those we consider our partners in our mission, which is to prepare well those who will make a difference in the lives of people around the world. If you have never sent a gift to the Graduate School or have not in the last year or two, we hope you will consider sending a gift, even if it is just \$96 per year. Since we send *The Bridge* to you six times a year, you could use it as a reminder to send in your \$16.

May the Lord continue to bless you. You are a blessing to us.

— Larry Arick, director of advancement
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Ten Commandments *continued from page 1*

study as we look for important principles to guide our own lives today.

One example would be the law of the Sabbath. Someone might argue that this has no relevance for Christians. Romans 14:5 indicates that the keeping of days and festivals is not binding today. But is there a principle in the command concerning the Sabbath that is still important? The principle is that there should be times of rest. The law teaches that there is more to life than just work. Making a living and providing for family is important, but people need

times of rest and refreshment. In the crush of modern life and the drive to be busier and busier, isn't this a principle that is still important? In a world where people often work themselves into heart attacks and ulcers, isn't the need for times of rest a crucial message?

I believe that in each of the commandments there is an important point that is still relevant for the modern world. Perhaps we should take another look at these ancient laws. We may discover that they still have a great deal to say to us.

Corrections and Amplifications

In the last issue of *The Bridge*, the following names were inadvertently omitted from the list of military chaplains who attended or graduated from the Graduate School.

Col. James R. Cooke
(U.S. Air Force Reserve – Retired)

Capt. Terry Finley
(U.S. Army Reserve – Retired)

LTC John R. Wood
(U.S. Air Force – Retired)

The Bridge regrets the omission.