

Identity Wars Series

No. 6 – Identity Defined

For many people to claim to keep the Ten Commandments is seen as legalism, for others not to keep the Ten Commandments is seen as anarchy or just a license to immorality. And somewhere in between, there's another group of people that is going, I don't understand, I don't know.

So we now want to move to the subject of the Ten Commandments. How does our understanding of the two kingdoms affect this subject of the Ten Commandments because it goes to the very core of our faith, of our belief, because we believe that in the last days that the hour of his judgment is come. And what is that judgment based upon? The Ten Commandments. So how we understand the Ten Commandments will affect the way we understand the judgment, and I can certainly say that within the last particularly 30 years within our church, we've had a real crisis of conscience on this issue and it's not resolved, and I'm hoping that with this presentation, we can go towards harmonizing or bringing some of these thoughts together from two different sides of our church.

If we have a look in a diagram form of God's kingdom, this is diagrammatically what I've been talking about in terms of God's kingdom being based on relationships. We know that in Matthew 22:37-38, that Jesus says to love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and all your strength is the first and greatest commandment. And that the second commandment is that we should love our neighbour as our self. And then He said on this hang all the law and the prophets. This is the centre.

And so when we look at God's kingdom, God is at the centre and protecting His relationships with his created beings is the first four commandments. To love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and then between humanity and also between the angels and between unfallen worlds, the created worlds and created beings that God has made, we are bound by the last six commandments to love your neighbour as yourself. And this is the structure of God's kingdom. They were designed and are designed to protect relationships.

We now want to look at the two sides of the law of God. In God's kingdom, which is a relationship based system, how do we see the Ten Commandments? In Satan's kingdom, a performance based system, how do we see the Ten Commandments? Both systems can accommodate the Ten Commandments. Both systems have a way of dealing with the Ten Commandments.

The question is, how do we relate to the Ten Commandments? How do we see the Ten Commandments? For instance, if you read in Psalms 119, I'm not going to pull out any particular verse, I pondered about the fact that David wrote about the law in relational terms. He said, Oh how I love your law. It is my meditation day and night. In your law I delight. These are emotional terms which are significant of a relationship rather than simply a list of rules and regulations that you understand in your head and you follow and if you follow them, then you're in; if you don't follow them, you're out. So he was expressing a relational concept of the law. I must say that I haven't heard too many people talk about their love for the law in a relational context. So these are some of the things that we will look at.

I have an illustration that I want to share with you that is significant: identity and communication. It's an interesting little story, some of you might know this. This is a transcript of radio communication between a group of Americans and a group of Canadians. The Canadians wire to the Americans,

“please divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision”. The Americans respond, “recommend you divert your course 15 degrees to the north to avoid a collision”. There’s an interesting scenario going to occur. Canadian's, “negative, you will have to divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision”. Now we start to see the position, the power and the performance start to come out. “This is the captain of the US Navy ship. I say again divert your course.” Canadians, “no I say again, you divert your course”. Americans now in lengthy discussion now, “this is the aircraft carrier USS Lincoln, the second largest ship in the United States Atlantic fleet. We are accompanied with three destroyers, three cruisers and numerous support vessels. I demand that you change your course 15 degrees north. I say again, that's one five degrees north or countermeasures will be undertaken to ensure the safety of this ship.” Very interesting, so what happens next? “This is the lighthouse, your call.”

Identity affects communication. How you understand the person you are talking to affects the way that you communicate, and I think that illustration really serves that well. Once that great naval destroyer understood that that was a lighthouse, it didn't matter what how big it was, or how great he was, he wasn't bigger than that big cliff face that he was about to run into. He had to alter his behaviour. He had to alter the way that he was moving and going because he understood the identity of the person he was talking to. And I think that that's a very, very important illustration. Identity affects communication and this happens on many levels.

Let's illustrate this in relationship between God and mankind and I've got humanity where Adam and Eve is a picture there. Adam says to God, “divert your course. I've eaten from this fruit now and I no longer will be what I am to you, we're going to change, divert your course”. God says, “it would be wise for you to divert your course”. Humanity responds, “I am man, intelligent, creative, determined, superior to all”. “I'm your creator, I hold your life in my hands, your call.” Identity, understanding who God is greatly affects the way we communicate with Him and I think that it's good that we bear that in mind.

Identity for God and man established by the Commandments, this is where the commandments become very important. And this is a view of looking at the commandments that I don't think many have seen before. It excites me as I look at this, because it opens up many opportunities. Many of the aspects of what I'm going to share with you, it's all in the inspiration. It's all in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, but it's just a matter of connecting it and seeing it this way.

God says through the commandments, He says, I am your God, I created you. That's what the commandments tell us. It says I am the God that brought you out of the house of bondage. I brought you to myself and in the fourth commandment particularly, it says, I made the heavens and the earth, the seas and the fountains of waters. That tells us who God is. And the Ten Commandments also say, you are mine, I created you, you belong to me. You remove the commandments, you remove the protocol for humanity and God to be able to understand each other and if you remove that protocol, communication becomes ineffective. And that's why it says in Isaiah 59, your sins have separated between you and your God. Our ability to communicate has vanished because the protocol, the law, the commandments has been negated. It's an interesting way of looking at things.

I want to now expand this concept. The commandments reveal God's identity. Some of you have probably seen this chart. If you go through the Bible and you look at all the things that refer to God on many of the things that refer to God in His person, those same descriptions are also used to describe His law which means that the law is a revelation of God. And so we have here, it says that God is spiritual, says the law is spiritual; God is love, the law is love; God is truth, the law is truth; God is

righteous, the law is righteous and on and on and on down the list. So the commandments reveal to us who God is. And down the bottom, 'Christ's Object Lessons', page 305 it says, "God's law is the transcript of His character." You've heard that before, haven't you? "God's law is the transcript of His character. It embodies the principles of His kingdom." And when I heard that I go ah, the principles of His kingdom. Identification. The commandments of God are the most succinct and the most accurate portrayal of who God is in terms of communication. You break the law, you break your ability to communicate. Does that make sense? It's very, very important.

So let's unpack this a little bit. I want to go through commandment by commandment. Some of this will be a little bit repetitive, but it will help make the point and hopefully you won't forget commandments reveal God's identity. The first commandment, I brought you out of bondage. You will have no other gods besides me. What does that commandment tell us about God? Let's just stand back. Why did God say this and what does it tell us about Him? It tells us that He is our redeemer. I have saved you from a bad situation; that tells us that He is a redeemer. It tells us that He's a saviour. And you are to have no other gods besides me, that He is the only God. And He's brought us out of it a difficult situation or a bad situation to be with Him, which means He brought us out of that situation so we can enter into a relationship with Him. So He's relational. That's what that first commandment tells us about God. Does that make sense? No. Yes, good.

All right, second commandment, you shall not make any carved image. Why did God say that? Or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, the earth beneath, the waters under the earth? You should not bow yourself down to them nor worship them, for I the Lord, your God, am I jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation, etc. What does that tell us about God? It says that God is relational. How? Well He wants to focus on the spiritual, not on the material. Don't make carved images of me because then you will worship the image of me rather than me. I want a spiritual connection with you, not a broken connection through a piece of dead stone or wood or a dead idea or a false philosophy. I don't want to be connected to you through that. I want to be connected directly to you. I want to speak to you mind to mind and heart to heart so don't make any graven images. That's what that commandment tells us about God, that He's spiritually focused and He's intent on having a spiritual relationship, a real relationship. Not a relationship where we go through beads or we kneel before statues or this kind of stuff. Just to talk to God. And that was the whole point of what Moses was supposed to do when he was taking the children of Israel out of Egypt. After he had struck the rock symbolizing the cross, he was then to speak to the rock symbolizing the relationship that God wants to bring us into, to speak, to talk directly, to communicate, that's what God wants.

What is the third commandment tell us about God? You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God in vain. Many people I talk to just think that that means to don't swear. Well, that's part of it. But to take the name of the Lord, your God in vain, is to take on His name and then live contrary to that name. Does that make sense? To take His name in vain as if it was worthless, it was no point in you taking His name because you don't live according to His name. And so the third commandment says, when I enter into a relationship with you, I want it to be honest; I want integrity in the relationship; I want transparency in the relationship. I don't want anything hidden. I want us to be together. And that's what the third commandment tells us about God and what He wants and how He is. It tells us that's what He is like. I will be transparent with you. I will have integrity with you. I will hide nothing from you in our relationship. That's what He says. And that's what He's like.

Fourth commandment, what does that tell us about God? Remember the Sabbath day for in six days, the Lord made the heavens and the Earth. That tells us He's the creator. He's the source of life. And of

course, He sets aside a day of rest so we can worship Him. It also means he is relationally focused. Comes back again and again and again that he wants a relationship with us. That's why the fourth commandment is so important, because it, more than any other, makes the distinction between the created and the creator. And that's what the fourth tells us.

Honour your father and your mother tells us that, God, why did He give us this commandment? Tells us that He is family focused, He's relationally focused, and He is paternal. That's what it tells me about God.

You shall not kill. That tells me that God believes that life is precious, that relationships are forever and that He is the source of life. You have no right to take somebody else's life. That life is My life given to them, you have no right to take that life because relationships are forever. I remember just a few days ago, one of my colleagues had to bury his son. Twenty-two years of age killed in a motorbike accident. Had everything going for him and as we sat there in that church, we felt the sting of death, the separation. Even though I had never met that young man, I could feel it. I felt the pain of these parents and the young people that knew this twenty-two year old young man. The sting of death; a relationship severed. Relationships were never meant to be severed but death has caused us great pain, many of us great pain, but of course, God is going to change that. But the commandment tells us that relationships are forever. That's the way God is. That's why He wants us to have eternal life with Him, because He wants to always be with us. And I get excited when I think about that. He always wants me to be with Him. And I'm learning this through the commandments. Through the commandments.

You shall not commit adultery, what does that tell me about God? He says that valid, intimate relationships are forever. There are some relationships that are illegitimate. There are some relationships that we should not enter into and that we should only enter into valid relationships intimately. That's what it tells me.

Number eight, you shall not steal. That tells me about God that be spiritually focused. I'm the one that provides everything. I'm the one that gives you everything. If you rest in me and in me, why would you want to steal anyway? Don't be materially focused, that's what that commandment tells me on this level.

You shall not lie. This is an extension of the third commandment. The third commandment and the ninth commandment are linked together. They say the same thing in essence. You shall not lie as in when you're in a relationship with someone, you cannot have intimacy with someone when they are lying to you. Can you? Is it possible? You're not sure. Can you really be close to someone and be confident with someone when they're lying to you? You can't, it destroys the relationship. God wants to protect relationships. That's why He says you shall not lie. He wants integrity. He wants transparency. He wants it to be relational. This is what protects relationships. When people feel at liberty to lie to one another and to not tell their partners about important things in their relationship, their relationship is on shaky ground. Oh, I don't want to say that to them it'll hurt their feelings. Well, it's not a good foundation to lay. When you marry a person, hopefully you marry a person that you want to share everything that is in your heart with them. That's what marriage was designed for. If you engage with a person, going out with the person that you can't share everything in your heart with then stop, get out of it. That's what marriage was designed for. And if you find that too hard, well ask God to give you the value and the worth to be able to share everything in your heart. That's what relationships are about.

Number ten, you shall not covet. Again, this is an extension of the fourth commandment that God is the creator. He's the source of life. Why would you covet something that belongs to someone else if God is supplying all your needs. If He is giving you everything, why would you covet those things. It just doesn't make sense.

So can you see when you look at the Ten Commandments like this, it tells us a lot about God, it tells us about what His interests are. It tells us what He is like, tells us what He wants and what He wants for us. And that's why the commandments, as the Bible says, are life for us. If we could summarize the commandments in terms of what the commandments tell us about God: one, that He's the creator, that He's the redeemer, that He's the source of life, that He is relational, paternal, spiritual. That's what the commandments tell me. And through the commandments, I interact with God because I want to follow the commandments. I interact with God knowing that He is the creator, that He is the redeemer, that He is the source of life, that He is relational, paternal and spiritual. My recognition of that fact affects my behaviour. It affects my behaviour as to how I relate to Him. Does that make sense? No. Man, lunch must have been good.

It's like the lighthouse issue, isn't it, you are speaking to someone in a certain way and then the identity is revealed and the communication changes. When Satan said I will ascend to heaven, I will be like God, I will be like the most high, he had lost sight of the commandments. He had ceased to remember that God is the creator, the source of life. He had broken his connection with God, and therefore he had lost a sense of who God was, and consequently he lost a sense of who he was. When the commandments are broken, identity is lost. And if you remember nothing else this weekend, remember that: when the commandments are broken, identity is lost; and when identity is lost, communication is finished; when communication is finished, the relationship is over; and when the relationship is over, you and I are dead because God is life and we are nothing. That was a good line of reasoning but that's the fact, that's the way it is.

All right, God's law is a transcript of His character. How does the commandments reveal our identity? How does it tell us about who we are and how we are to relate to each other and to God? Well, firstly, I brought you out of bondage and this is very much similar to the last one but it's just in our context. The first commandment tells us that we are redeemed and we are to worship one God. The second commandment tells us that we should be relational and spiritual, not materially focused. That we will have integrity, transparency in our relationships, that we are created and that life comes from God and we should have a relational focus. That family relationships are critical. Number six, that life is precious, relationships are forever, and that God owns everyone. Number seven, that valid, intimate relationships are forever. Number eight, that spiritual relational, not material focus in reference to stealing, integrity, transparency, etc and number 10, God provides all your needs. That's what it tells us, who we are.

How many people think about when they're in a situation, say, for instance, where they are attempted to commit adultery, how many people think that when in committing this act, I'm destroying who I am and my concept of who God is. Do people ever think on that level? I'm destroying everything? Maybe people would think, is it worth it? I'm destroying who I am, I'm breaking my connection with God, I'm losing my identity, my worthlessness will be complete, my doom will be sealed. People don't think about that, but that's what happens. When you lose your identity, your worth is gone. And that's why God gives us these commandments. We think from where we come from that God wants to harm us with these commandments, but He desperately wants to protect us, wants to save us from oblivion, from being destroyed.

And so the commandments reveal that we are created, that we are redeemed, that God is our life source, that God provides all our needs, that we are to be relational, spiritual and children of God. That's what the commandments reveal to us in this context. And when we understand that, we don't need to have this discussion between the Canadians and the Americans, this miscommunication, this misunderstanding, so that we're talking to God in a way that's like the little horn power speaking blasphemous words, pompous words, sitting in the temple of God, claiming to be God. How can someone do that unless they have lost sight of who God is and who they are? You can't speak that way unless you lose your sense of identity, meaning the little horn power does not know who it is. It does not have a true sense of its own identity therefore it is worthless, therefore it is insecure and that is why it wants to dominate and control the whole world. Does that make sense? It all fits together, the pieces all fit together.

All right, let's have a look at something important here. The law reveals God's identity. The law defines our identity. The law establishes a protocol for relationship, how we relate to each other. Our value is defined by our relationship to God therefore our value is protected by the law, therefore our life is protected by the law. Can you follow that sequence? The law establishes a protocol for relationship, and our value is defined by our relationship with God therefore our value is protected by the law, therefore our life is protected by the law. Is this how you've understood the law? Is this how you see the law of God? Do you think this is what David might have said, oh how I love your law? It is my meditation day and night because it protects my value. It allows me to continue to communicate with you in a transparent way, in an unbroken relationship. If I break this law, I lose my ability to communicate with you, I lose my sense of worth and value. I'm dead. That is why the wages of sin is death. The wages, the act of violating this 10 commandment law seals you doom. Your worthlessness, it's not God pulling out the big stick and saying, oh, naughty, naughty. That's the way we see it. It's God going, no, you've destroyed yourself, why are you doing this? You need to be connected to me.

Now, taking all these things we're going to move a little bit quicker. Listen carefully to this statement. When people say, I can't keep the commandments, they are saying, I can't identify or know God or really know who I am and I'm destined to remain worthless. Now, if anyone here knows anything about the controversy going on within our church over the last 30 years, that's a big statement. That's a huge statement. When someone says you can't keep the Ten Commandments, you can't keep the law of God, they are saying in God's kingdom, in God's context, they are saying, I can't really know God. And they say I'm destined to remain worthless. That's what we're saying when we say we can't keep the commandments of God and Satan is very happy for us to believe that. Because when we reject the law of God and remember, James says we only have to reject one, we don't have to reject all of them. We only have to reject one but if we reject one, we reject all. When we reject one or more, we reject God as the creator. We reject God as the Redeemer, the source of life, even though on our lips we are saying, oh, I believe God is the creator, I believe He's the source of life. But if we reject His law, we are living a lie. We don't believe. We do not believe. Whether we say it or whether we not, they are just empty words that mean nothing. And we reject that we are created, that we are redeemed, that God is our life source, that He provides for our needs and that we are children of God, relational, spiritually focused. That's a too high a price to pay for me. What about you?

We have had within this church this ongoing statement, can we keep the commandments, can we not keep the commandments? And I would like to suggest to you this is why we are struggling with this issue, because we haven't recognized two ways of looking at the law of God. And as I've got written here, the point is, this is the main point of this presentation. How do you see the law? How do you see the law? Do you see it in God's kingdom, in a relationship based system, or do you see it in Satan's kingdom? A performance thing on the one side in Satan's kingdom? If you see the law as a

performance thing, you will hear statements like it's a yoke of bondage. That it is legalism. But it can't be kept. Or conversely, it's a means to appease God when I keep the commandments, I am acceptable to God. All of this is not God's way of looking at the commandments. And my suggestion today is that this is where we've been looking at the law, we've been looking at it through Satan's lens, not through God's lens, otherwise we wouldn't have this confusion that we're having today over this issue. Because it cannot be legalism. To have your identity and your value and your life source protected, that's not legalism, that's just smart. That's just what you have to do. It's not legalism. And on God's side, in God's kingdom, when we see the law, we see that it defines identity. It protects relationship. It protects value. And it's central to effective communication. The law of God. And I hope you can see that this is huge. If we start to look at a law like this, it has massive implications for us in terms of how we present our message. The hour of His judgment has come and our relationship to the law, it has massive implications, and as I said, I'm going to try and intersect what I'm presenting into Adventist theology. So I'm using a few words here that may be a bit long, but it has a massive implication for how we understand justification, sanctification, how we understand the sanctuary message, how we understand all of these teachings are massively impacted by how we view the law of God.

And so, the question is, how do you view the law? What did Jesus say to the lawyer that came to him? He says, What shall I do to be saved? What does it say in Luke 10:25, "And behold a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And He said unto him, What is written in the law? what is your reading of it?" or as it says in the King James, "how do you read?" He doesn't say so much what do you read? This man knew the law. He could recite it more than most of us. But He says, how do you interpret it, how do you see it? Do you see it in the lens of God's kingdom or do you see it in the lens of Satan's kingdom? That's the question you have to answer. How do you read and once you answer that question, all these other issues that we wrestle and fight about and write reams and reams and destroy heaps of trees writing stuff down about will all find its proper place once we get the foundation set.