



SUNDAY READING

SERMON.

The Tenth Commandment.
By VEN. F. W. FARRAR, D. D.,
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"Thou shalt not covet."—Exodus xx. 17.

It would be difficult to treat of any one of the Commandments adequately in a single sermon, it is most of all difficult to deal adequately with this. We can only pray that God will enable us to learn some fragments of the Divine teaching which He meant it to convey to us.

Observe, first, that this is a unique commandment. Search all the laws of all the world and you will not find one which resembles it. The Sixth, the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth you will find in all codes, though only as prohibitions of crimes which are amenable to human justice, and not as heart-searching rules of self-examination which Christ meant them to be. The Tenth Commandment is the complement of all the rest; it shows that God requires of us not only outward virtue, but inward holiness, that He demands in us sacrifice of the will, from which wicked actions spring, that sinful imaginations are a crime against Him, as well as wicked acts.

Human laws can only prohibit crimes of which human eyes can take cognisance; the hearts of men are beyond their reach. The tyrant can only command the outward obedience of his slave, but he cannot subdue the fierce rebellion which rages in that slave's heart; he cannot hush the unspoken curses which blight him with the white lightning of their heat. He makes no attempt to order what he is impotent to enforce. The heart of fallen man is only the chamber of unclean imagery like that which horrified the prophet Ezekiel when in the house of God his eye surveyed the dark idolatries of alienated Judah, but it is shrouded in impenetrable darkness, it is the hidden knowledge, the mysterious depths of that individuality which in each of us is an island surrounded by an unvoyageable sea. None can enter, none can even approach the heart, but that Divine Legislator who would transform it from a haunt of devils into a sanctuary of God. The unique command which prohibits not only commissions but concupiscence can be uttered by God alone. And herein the ten commands on Sinai anticipated the eight beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. The law says, "Thou shalt not desire;" the gospel says, "Blessed are the pure in heart."

And from this divine statute we see one marked by divine wisdom and supreme tenderness, it is a commandment pre-eminently spiritual, it cuts at the root of all formalism and of hypocrisy, it shows us that each man is not what he seems to be to men, but what he is in the eyes of God. The lesson which the tenth commandment teaches us is that God must be obeyed not with eye service as men please but with singleness of heart. "As he thinks," says Solomon of the dissembler, "so he is." Priests often lead men to be content with the cleansing of the outside of the cup and the platter, yet the law with its demands for human sincerity might have taught them that all outward formalities are an abomination to God, if they be offered as substitutes for justice, humility and love. Even the heathen say that the God with whom we have to do is one with whom nothing avails except heart obedience. "Wickedness and injustice," says Aristotle, "lie in the intention." "He," says Juvenal, "who thinks in silent wickedness within himself incurs the guilt of the dead."

And this command is tender as well as unique for it is designed to save us from error; it is meant not to terrify us but to train; it reveals to us as with a flash out of God's eternity when and how the work of our life has to be done; it says to us as the prophet Jeremiah said to Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?" It says unto Solomon, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Ah, here is the difficulty. It is quite easy to be outwardly respectable, most of us are at least that; it is easy to keep the letter of the commandments, but to obey with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, with all our strength, to keep the law in its entirety without reservation for one darling idol, one besetting or bosom sin, to keep it always in willful boyhood, in fretful youth, in tempted manhood, and in disillusioned age—which of us is thus an upright man and perfect? Still, alas, is this possible when we have not been faithful in the past? Now this commandment shows us that there is no sound cure for any disease without the removal of the cause. Can a polluted fountain send forth sweet waters? Are good fruits borne from a corrupt tree? Ah, my brethren, the salt must be flung to the bubbling spring or the stream will be full of death, and the roots of the corrupt tree must be taken up, not merely its buds nipped or even its branches lopped. To leave off old sins is something, and even much, but it is not enough. We must not only stop sinning but stop desiring to sin. If we would still like to sin we are not regenerate; we must die to sin. This is what St. Paul meant when, haunted by the agonies of personal experience, he says over and over again that we must have the true circumcision of the heart, that we must crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, that we must mortify the deeds of the body, mortify our members that are upon the earth, evil desire and covetousness, which is idolatry; for because of these things the wrath of God is ever arising upon the sons of disobedience. It is thus concupiscence, this evil impulse, which must be hushed within us by the Spirit of Christ. The lust of the flesh, thoughts of our bodily appetites, the lust

of the eyes, the vain desires and passions of the mind, the bragging vaunt of wealth, our inhuman worship, our selfishness, our arrogant vain ambition—these we must deracinate. It is at the root of all these that the axe of this commandment is uplifted, until they are hewn down and cast into the fire; Moses as well as Christ will teach us that we are not converted and we shall not be safe.

"Thou shalt not covet." The literal meaning of the commandment is, "Thou shalt not excessively or wrongfully, thou shalt not unlawfully or irregularly, desire anything which thou canst not innocently and uprightly possess." Perhaps you think, "What harm can a mere desire do when I have not even expressed it? What wrong can there be in such an airy nothing, that impalpable thought as you call it, is a very real thing; it is seen in heaven, it is heard in heaven, in heaven it needs forgiveness, and consequently that thought will, if dwelt upon, be certainly the prolific mother of all sins; it is the cockatrice's egg which brings forth the vapour of the flying serpent. Guilty longings are the avant-couriers of the performance of guilty lusts concealed in the guise of a harmless infant, the guilty curiosity, the guilty lingering on the confines of temptation; the guilty wish pushes open the wicket gate, and then when it has done so it springs into the menacing stature of a giant demon. What great harm you say is there in a mere guilty look, a mere guilty wish, a mere guilty longing if it stops there? Well, are they so harmless if they stop there? Do they stop there? The guilty look of David at Bathsheba from his palace roof, the guilty longing of Achan for the ingot of gold, the guilty desire of Ahab for Naboth's vineyard; did nothing come of them? In the first case the bad desire led to idolatry, in the second it led to theft, and in the third it led to murder. The sole way to keep ourselves from the infinite possibility of sin is only to follow the exhortation of St. James: "Cleanse your hearts, ye sinners, purify your hearts, ye double-minded." It is with the latter form of concupiscence, with the covetousness which is idolatry, that the extension of the commandment chiefly deals. It warns us against the greed of accumulation and the thirst for gold. Is it not an awful thought that beside all the other mass of sin which the desire for money is constantly causing among mankind, even the apostle could be perverted by the love of gain? And have we not the fearful proofs in every generation that the love of money is still the root of all men's evil? Does it not make the heart bleed to think of women rich in a good man's love, of men high in reputation, and besides, of students eminent in attainments, who even in these last few months have also been dragged by the lust of ill-gotten gain into the unspeakable misery and mire? And do not nations also find the lesson, does not England find it? Is there no fear that avarice, the counter selfishness of capital and of labor, should fall like the star wormwood of the Apocalypse and poison all her streams with deathful bitterness? Is there no fear of cut-throat competition from selfish luxury in one class and raging envy in another? Was not this the utter curse and the blighting ruin of medieval Spain? Did not Cortes say to Montezuma: "Send us gold, for we Spaniards have a disease of the heart that can only be cured by gold." "Since first the dominion of man was asserted over the ocean"—with these words a celebrated book begins—"three thrones beyond all others have been set upon its sands—the thrones of Tyre, of Venice, and of England. Of the first of these great powers only the memory remains, of the second ruin, the third, which inherits their greatness, if it forgets their example, may be led through brighter eminence to less pitied destruction." This commandment says to our England of today, "Which wilt thou be, the freeman of Christ or the bond slave of mammon? Which wilt thou be, the protector of the helpless or its destroyer? Which wilt thou be, an example to the world or its corrupter? Which wilt thou be, an evangelist of the world, or its beast of burden? Rich thou art beyond all nations and art ever becoming more and more rich. But wealth means weal, means well being, it does not mean riches and woe to thy weal, if the Pactolus of thy riches lose itself in the Phlegethon of drink or in the scum and sludge of selfish accumulations. If so, thy glory, as the great statesman said, 'shall fade like the Tyrian dye, and moulder like the Venetian palace.' And to myriads of Englishmen at this moment who, tossed with the mad intoxication of an insatiable greed, sell honor, honesty, uprightness, peace, to get rich, bartering with the Eternal God, to them the Tenth Commandment says: 'Try to be rich to God, godliness is a great gain, if a man be content with that he will be secure.' 'Take heed,' said Jesus, 'and beware, for man's life consisteth not in the multitude of the things that he possesseth.' But this commandment teaches us something more than contentment, lovely, indeed, and full of happiness as a virtue.

Utter content is but the passive form of the most fruitful of all virtues, it is self-sacrifice, but he who has ceased to desire will rejoice also to abstain; he who desires to cease that selfish greediness for what does not belong to him, or what he ought largely to share with others will be eager to give with wise generosity, he will find that herein is happiness. St. Edmund of Canterbury, one of our sweet English saints, used to leave his money on the sill of the window of his staircase for any one to take who would, and sometimes he would sprinkle dust over it saying, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust." Another great man said, "We have no time to get rich, the expulsive power of good expressions leaves no time for meaner passions. The lives of such saints poured silent contempt on gold, and how great is their reward! They are uplifted above the base temptations which surround the toiling, moiling multitude. St. Paul calls the fifth commandment the first com-

mandment that promises, but though the promise is unexpected every commandment is a commandment with the richest promise, every obedience is accompanied by its immense beatitude. Love taught us by the sixth has bliss; purity taught us by the seventh has heavenliness; honesty taught us by the eighth has confidence; the mastery of the tongue taught us by the ninth has perfection; and this tenth commandment, whilst being the root of all the others, combines all the others' blessedness. Self-abnegation, the subduing of concupiscence, means that the soul is satisfied with God. Dissatisfaction is the necessary curse of worldly life. 'Vanity of vanity,' says one of the best known novels of the century, 'which of us has what he desires, and having it is satisfied? Answer me, children of the world, votaries of self-indulgence, slaves of gold, answer me and confess your misery. Can you have your souls in this heap of mud, are you such poor mean beings that it is a sufficient end of life for you to have a good balance at your banker's? Or have you not too heard the sound of harpy wings over your ledgers and your gold? Those harpies are the ghosts of vicious, fretful lawless passions, the vain, meagre spirits of wasted energy and the unappeased flames of unsatisfied hope.' Contrast with this the peace of those whose passions are subdued, and whose heart is given to God. God gives him exactly what the world cannot give—perfect satisfaction. The picture of the world is 'wickedness shall burn like fire, no man shall spare his brother, he shall snatch on the right hand, and be hungry, and he shall eat on the left hand and not be satisfied; but the good man is satisfied from himself, the meek shall eat and be satisfied, they shall be satisfied with the goodness of God's house, God shall give them drink of his pleasure as out of a river. Covetousness means a curse, but he who gives all to Christ gains all from Christ; he who will lose his life for Christ's sake will always find it. Can you imagine a more struggling and apparently miserable lot than that of some poor harmless missionary in the depths of Africa? Not long ago a dying missionary wrote home from the wilds of Africa: 'Tell my family and all my friends that I rejoice to have left all for Christ. Were my sacrifice to make again, I think as I lie here dying in a strange land I would make it again a thousand times. I would not change my lot for all the happiness of the world.'

And lastly, since this Commandment is thus deep and broad, it is not strange that it should have wrought most memorable effects in the spiritual history of mankind. It brought to two men convictions which have changed the conditions of the world and of the church. It made St. Paul the Apostle of the Gentiles, it made Luther the herald of the Reformation. You heard what St. Paul says in the lesson which was read to you. He tells us there that the day had been when he felt no sense of sin. Sin was dormant in him; it lay like a torpid snake amid the flowers of his self-satisfaction; he was unconscious of resistance to God and alienation from God, but this commandment: "Thou shalt not covet, thou shalt not desire" detected and evoked the sin within him. He saw that his accurate legality was the whitewash of the grave; he saw even his persecuting zeal was nothing better than arrogant and passionate selfishness, and thus in the death of sin Christ found him and made him alive unto God. Paul, the furious persecutor, was changed by the conviction brought by this commandment into the Paul the loving evangelist; Saul, the hated Pharisee, was changed into Paul the holy apostle. No less mightily was the work it wrought for Martin Luther. It has been sometimes the case that the church, the visible church, has sunk into concupiscence and covetousness. Multitudes of priests in Luther's day had turned atheists as did Elias' sons, who filled the house of God with lust and violence. The Inquisition, founded in Spain by the most execrable of popes, made heaven black with the smoke of burning saints. Their pomp, their pride, their lies, their lecheries, their murders, their arrogant self-assertion, their insatiable thirst for gold stank in the nostrils of mankind, whilst all the time they professed to hold in their exclusive polluted hands the keys of even hell. In the city of Rome dwelt a man who called himself the Vicar of Christ. From this man it went forth to all the people of Europe that remission of sins could be bought as the price of money to be used for the building of a church. To Pope Leo X., that liveliest of jokers, this seemed as reasonable a way of raising funds for the church as any other. To one man, however, this was not a jest, but an abomination and a blasphemy. One man, when the offer of absolution was being sold by the priests, thundered in their ears, and in the ears of the nations of Europe, "Thy money perish with thee." The concupiscence, the covetousness, the evil desire of his own heart, had been revealed to him by God, who condemns it. He had found that, alike for peasants, such had become, there is deliverance from concupiscence in union with God, in Him who gave Himself up for the world. The covetousness of the church witnessed by Christ's self-sacrifice utterly appalled Martin Luther. It meant to him nothing but this, that the church was denying Christ, was selling herself to His enemy, and this voice, coming from a monk knowing only the cloister and the college produced such a national movement as neither kings nor priests could quell, for men knew in their inmost hearts that covetousness was eating up Christendom, that kings were enslaved to it, and that priests were cherishing under a diverse title, and that no maxim of ethics, no ridicule of wits and no insurrection of peasants could put it down, and that only in the name of God could it be encountered, only God could raise His church out of the pit that his ministers had been digging for it. The law which forbids concupiscence led Luther as St. Paul to Christ. "This German beast," said Leo X., "cares nothing for gold," a strange phenomenon when all the priests and all the world cared so much for gold; but because Luther did not care for gold, and lived and died a very poor man, it raised the hearts of myriads of men to seek their treasure, where he had done, in things above where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Ah! may we learn the lesson as a nation and a church, and in our individual hearts, say only "Can we be delivered from the self-will, which in a nation shows itself in social godlessness, in deep-seated corruption, in idolatry, in lies, and fraud." In a

church self-will is manifested by partisanship and subterranean intrigues, in a society it creates an atmosphere of gossip, scandal, and spite; in each individual heart this self-will is a source of overflowing egotism, of claims of exaggerated self-importance, an abject passion or admiration of self. Only Christ can deliver us; and the end of all commandments, and this commandment most of all, is Christ. The commandments in our English service are most happily linked with the communion. We cannot have the joy of the one without obedience to the other. If we lose the commandment to the nation we lose the gospel to mankind. When the law has taught us to embrace the gospel, the gospel enables us to fulfill the law. It turns the fire of Sinai into the dew of Hermon, and Moses and Elias are side by side with our transfigured Lord. Covetousness springs from perverted self—the death of self is the life of Christ within us. But we cannot by our own power slay self. The law first evokes in us the resistance to a holy will, and then convicts us of our guilt; then shows us our own utter helplessness, and last of all, drives us helpless and self-condemned to the feet of Christ our Lord, to ask there with tears of penitence for His freely-given grace, and to find our sole hope and help, to find our very life and light in Him first, Him last, Him most, and without end.

Religions in India.

The recent census gives the following figures about religions in India: Hindus, 207,654,407; Mohammedans, 57,365,204; Animal worshippers, 9,302,083; Buddhists, 7,101,057; Christians, 2,284,191; Sikhs, 1,997,836; Jains, 1,416,109; Parsees, 89,877; Jews, 17,180; Atheists and Agnostics, 289.

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