

**LESSON ONE: DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN.****I. THE QUEST FOR CHARACTER.**

- A. The people gather around the base of the mountain to hear the reading of the agreement and treaty that Moses brought down from Sinai. [p. 2]
- B. Clearing his throat, the ageing ambassador announced that the Sinai Summit had, indeed been an unprecedented success. The great Power over heaven and earth had formulated an everlasting Code of Ethics which would both guide the people and save them from destruction. This Code of Ethics contained ten principles which, if endorsed and accepted by each generation; would ensure a nation of pure character and, thus, leadership among men and favor with God. [p. 2]
- C. Then came the crowning announcement: Every person would be invited to come to the mountain peak to accept the Code of Ethics personally. And each person who accepted the covenant would be granted the supreme blessing of unwavering character and purity of life--moral excellence. [p. 3]

**II. THEIR RESPONSE.**

- A. For generation after generation, people have been responding to God's Code of Ethics. Some have responded positively; some have responded negatively. [p. 3]
- B. How will you respond?

**III. AMERICA'S CHARACTER CRISIS.**

- A. America has, as a whole, rejected the Code of Ethics presented at the Sinai Summit. This message will not be popular with most in our society. Many would scoff at anyone expressing much concern over or predicament. Indeed, as a society, we are like the guy; who jumped off a 100-story building. About 50 stories down, a lady stuck her head out a window and asked, "How's it going?" and the guy replied, "So far, so good!"
- B. Things may seem fine in the midst of the fall but that man is headed for a deadly crash. And so is America, if we don't somehow manage to stop the free-fall of our character. [p. 4]

**IV. ROLE MODELS.**

Where can we look today for models of character?

- A. To our statesmen and stateswomen? Politics is full of problems from an ethical and moral standpoint.
- B. To the heads of industry and business? Claims of sexual harassment, extortion, embezzlement, etc., abound.
- C. To the religious leaders? In too many cases those who are recognized for their ministries and also recognized as charlatans and crooks.

**V. THE FACTS.**

- A. You know the crime statistics, but here are a few:
  - 1. A serious crime is committed every two seconds (in the U.S.A.).
  - 2. A rape is committed every six minutes.
  - 3. A murder every 23 minutes. [p. 5]
- B. We see nothing wrong with working ourselves into an early grave in order to accumulate wealth and prestige. On the contrary, our materialistic society lauds workaholicism as a virtue. (p.6)
- C. It seems there are a lot of disillusioned people out there. We've seen the most prominent leaders in our country throw away the standards and principles we were brought up to accept, and we are raising a new generation of selfish young people that is not only very cynical, but is more morally indifferent than ever before. Not only do they not know if anything is wrong, they don't really care [p.6]

## VI. ABSOLUTE OR OBSOLETE?

- A. What do you think of when you hear the term "the Ten-Commandments"?
  - 1. For most of us, the "Ten Commandments" is a term we have heard and used since childhood. But a recent Newsweek survey found that only 49% of Protestants and 44% of Catholics in this country could name even four of those commandments.
  - 2. Why such ignorance in the face of seeming familiarity? Could it be we think we've outgrown the Ten Commandments? Are they merely simpler rules of simpler times? In other words, is God's Code of Ethics--His Ten Commandments--absolute or obsolete? (Gal. 5:13-23). [p. 7]
- B. The real need of America is the discovery, or perhaps I should say the recovery, of an ethical creed that can provide constant moral guidance. And that's how we come to the Ten Commandments-the Code of Ethics. They are not obsolete. [p. 7]
- C. For too long, our society has treated God's Code of Ethics like a president emeritus--like someone too old to be of practical use, but to be honored at ceremonies and other "big" events. [p.8]

## VII. REASONS FOR THE SUMMIT.

- A. At Sinai, God wrote in stone this Code of Ethics--His guide for valued, empowered living. [p. 9]
- B. God didn't deliver these guidelines so that His people would be burdened or restricted. In fact, the first thing He said was "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." God did not bring Israel out of slavery so that He could make them slaves all over again; He brought them out of slavery so that they could be free. And He gave them these principles for living so that they would know how to live freely. And He gave them to us also so that we could know how to live freely--how to live lives of character. [p. 9]
- C. When we study God's Code of Ethics, we should look at them as though we are with our Heavenly Father, needing guidance about what to do or how to understand the world. And He puts His hand on our shoulder and says, "Listen, my child, life works better like this..." Every single instruction teaches us something of what is necessary to live as a community that pleases God and honors Him and the people in it. That is why God told His people, "Follow them so that you may live... Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations" (Deut. 4:1,6). [p.10]
- D. You never get too old, too sophisticated, too mature for God's instruction. Living God's way makes life full; it makes life complete; it brings wholeness to a people. [p. 11]
- E. The greatest problem in America today is the character deficit. And the greatest need is to find an ethical code that will guide, sustain, and enrich us in any and every circumstance--an absolute value system on which we can build our lives and our communities. [p. 11]

## LESSON TWO: FOR MOSES' TIME OR FOR ALL TIME?

### I. THE CHARACTER DEFICIT.

- A. John Steinbeck, in his book, *Of Mice and Men*, pointed out the decline in moral values when one of his characters commented, "There's nothing wrong anymore." And that seems to be the atmosphere today in America. Nothing is wrong anymore:
1. Adultery isn't wrong.
  2. Lying isn't wrong.
  3. Abortion isn't wrong.
  4. Homosexuality isn't wrong.
  5. Materialism isn't wrong.
  6. Idolatry toward money isn't wrong.
  7. Divorce and family abandonment aren't even wrong.
- [p.15]
- B. One moral slide led to another, and then to another, and now we're nearing the bottom of the pit. [p. 14]

### II. WHERE DID IT ALL START?

- A. To understand the roots of our character crisis, we must go all the way back to the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2,3. God had just finished the creation of the world, and the masterpieces among all creation are the beings called "man." [p. 15]
- B. The people lived in accordance with God's instruction, and, as He surveyed all His handiwork, He put His stamp of approval on it all: "It is very good." It was good because God was at the center of all creation; He is the definition of good, you see. God is good and anything that is not consistent with God is evil. God was the only standard of ethics available to Adam and Eve, but it was a flawless one [p. 15]
- C. Suddenly, into the scene comes Satan. From the first bite of that fruit, people began a moral decline that is continuing today, fueled by our stubborn determination to define good and evil by what is consistent with our will, not God's. [p. 16]

### III. EVERY PERSON FOR HIMSELF.

- A. What is truly alarming is that in modern times we are approaching the logical end of every-person-for-himself system of defining morality. We've almost completely lost a shared understanding of what is right. We're not just breaking laws in America anymore; we are denying that anybody has a right to make laws.
1. The only absolute is that everything, including ethics, is relative.
  2. And the result of this philosophical free-for-all is the wave of permissiveness in which our society is drowning. [p. 16]
- B. "What is right is what I want." Ernest Hemingway's statement quoted in a 1970's Newsweek article entitled "The Second Sexual Revolution" sums up this philosophy quite bluntly. Hemingway says, "What is moral is what I feel good after, and what is immoral is what I feel bad after." In other words, if I want it, if I like it, if it makes me feel good, it's right, because I am the moral center of my universe. Of course, what is good for me may not be good for you, but those are the breaks. Just don't impose your standards on me. [p. 17]
- C. Indeed the Bible says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death" [p. 18]
- D. God is the only eternal standard of good, the only source of real values. And in His instruction to Moses we find the ethic we need to become people of character. [p. 19]

### IV. THE RIGHT TO JUSTICE.

- A. God's Code of Ethics declares the right of an people to experience justice.
- B. God values all people equally (see Exo. 20:10b).

**V. THE WAY TO LOVE.**

- A. God Code of Ethics declares the way for all people to practice love. It is interesting that the apostle Paul said Rom. 13:9 [p. 20]
- B. When God says, "You shall not kill," He means for us to respect human life, to protect it. So, a person of character helps people who are homeless. And a person of character acts to protect victims of domestic 'abuse and 'violence. The principle is to love people preserving and bettering their lives [p. 20]
- C. But God's values stand in opposition to popular wisdom. He wants us to know that we can't find life by clawing and grabbing and cheating to get ahead. It's wrong to hurt people to get things (Mt. 22:35-40). [p. 21]

**VI. THE NEED FOR CHANGE.**

- A. Certainly, God's ethics deal with external actions, but He has most concerned with the heart, because it is from there that our actions come (Mk. 7:21-23). [p. 22]
- B. God is certainly not concerned with merely regulating our outward behavior. His ethic is not a rigid code of rules which we can obey only with our bodies, but loving principles we can honor in our hearts.
- C. Indeed; this call for inner obedience that separates God's code from all others. Take the last instruction; for example; "You shall not covet." I don't have to physically do a thing to violate this part of God's plan. Coveting is an internal sin, but it leads to many external actions: stealing, lying, adultery, even murder. God wants us to see clearly that in reality all moral failure is an inner failure, for the heart is the battleground for Satan's spiritual assaults. [p. 22].

## **LESSON THREE: NO PLACE BUT FIRST PLACE.**

### **I. PUT GOD FIRST.**

- A. To put the first commandment in a positive way, one would state it, "Put Me first." There is to be no competition in the heart of the believer as to who rules their life. God is to be first and everything, else and distant second.

### **II. THE KEY TO CHARACTER.**

- A. The first key to building a life of character is this: Put God first! Now, most people today would probably be puzzled at our starting point. The world's prevailing attitude about character is that it has to do strictly with how a person handles his relationship with others, and that his religious beliefs are sort of an ethical side dish. [p. 26]
- B. Jesus Himself clarified that issue when He said that the most important principle is to love God completely, and second, to love our neighbors (Mt. 12:28-30). The reversal of priorities is further evidence of Satan's success in convincing us that we can be the moral centers of our universe. [p. 27]
- C. For example, we have tried to convince people to abstain from fornication. The reasons stated for abstaining are:
  - 1. If you don't, you might lose your reputation.
  - 2. If you don't, you might get a disease.
  - 3. If you don't, you might get a girl (or become) pregnant.Well, certainly all three problems can be consequences of sexual activity outside of marriage, but notice something very important. In all of those reasons for abstaining, God is nowhere to be found! Those arguments support the same case for purity that anyone in the world could make. [p. 27]
- D. If we expect our people to live lives of character, we'd better start giving them reasons based on allegiance to a God of character. Character begins with God!
- E. People of character realize that the only motivation sufficient to keep us living a life of character is a complete love for and allegiance to a God who values character. They acknowledge that God, not man, is the changeless center by which right and wrong are determined.

### **III. NO PLACE BUT FIRST PLACE.**

- A. A god is whatever has first place in your life. In every person's heart, there is a throne; and on every throne, there is a god. The only question, then, is whether that god is true or false. The God of the Bible declares that He will not accept any place in your life but first place. You shall have no other gods before Me (Ex. 20:3) [p. 29]
- B. In fact, without this fundamental declaration of His sovereign right to be the only one on our heart's throne, all the rest of the instructions make no difference. Until we commit to the first principle, it doesn't matter to us what God says about stealing, or adultery, because we haven't yet acknowledged His right to legislate those areas of our lives. We, not He, are still the moral center. [p. 29]

### **IV. THE "GODS" WHO WOULD BE KING.**

- A. A 'god' is anything in which we put our trust and focus. That can be a job, a relationship, a political system, money, even ourselves--anything we look to as our ultimate source of strength. Whether or not we call the object of our trust a "god" is not the point. [p. 30]
- B. The fourth principle says to set aside one day a week to rest, reflect, and honor God. The idea behind it is, "Don't let work be your god. Don't try to build your life on the foundation of your career." [p. 31]
- C. In the sixth instruction God says, "Do not kill." In other words, the sixth instruction says, 'Don't let your hatred be your god.' You can't live a life of character when hatred is on the throne in your heart [p. 31]

- D. God also says, "Don't commit adultery." God is not against sex. But God says we're heading for a fatal crash anytime we let sex become our god. [p. 31]
- E. We now come to the eighth instruction, "Don't steal" and the tenth, "Don't covet." Do you know what they are saying? "Don't let 'things' be your god." [p. 32]
- F. God's instructions to the Israelites to have "no other gods before me" was truly revolutionary in that time (and still is today). For God is not saying other gods should rank behind Him in importance. He is not calling for the Israelites to worship Him as the dominant god, but as the only One (Ex. 34:14). [p. 32]

## V. THE GOD WHO SHOULD BE KING.

### A. The Unchanging God.

- 1. When Moses said to God that the people would want to know the name of the one who had sent him, God told Moses to tell the people that God's name--His personal covenant name--is "I AM." Another way of translating the word is "I AM WHO I AM," or "I WILL BE that I WILL BE." This strange name is indicative of God's unchanging character. [p. 33]
- 2. "I deserve first place in your life simply because I am the I AM." He always is the same. That's why we can talk about the permanent relevance of God's values [p. 34]
- 3. In the same way, someone may say, "I know God said a long time ago not to commit adultery, but these are different times." Yes, times have changed, but God has not. He is who He is. He's always been who He is, and he's always going to be who He is. Stealing will always be wrong. Lying will always be wrong. Harming your neighbor will always be wrong because the I AM is still I AM. He will never be He Was. [p. 35]

### B. The Personal God.

- 1. An interesting thing to note about that word 'your' in the phrase "your God" in Ex. 20:2 is actually singular rather than plural. God is saying, 'I'm the personal God of each Israelite. I'm the God of Abraham, the God of Moses, the God of Aaron, the God of Joshua, and the God of Miriam.'
- 2. "Your God" implies that this eternal I AM knows you and me, and even more incredibly perhaps, wants to be known by you and me. He wants a relationship with us. [p. 35]

### C. The Delivering God.

- 1. God tells the Israelites in the first instruction:
  - a. "I want your allegiance because of who I am. (I am the eternal God).
  - b. " I want your allegiance because of where I am. (I am close to you).
  - c. And I want your allegiance because of what I do. (I am your deliverer) [p. 36]
- 2. Just as He delivered the Israelites out of bondage to the Egyptians, he is still delivering His children today out of the bondage of Satan (Col. 1:13).

## VI. A TEST TO SEE WHO IS KING.

- A. I suppose the \$20,000 question then, is, "How do I put God on that throne?" Here's my advice: begin by identifying what's in second place. Find out what's in second place in your heart, and closely monitor whatever that is. For most of us, it will probably be a good thing--a career, a family, maybe even a ministry. [p. 37]
- B. Considerations:
  - 1. **Focus.**  
What is your focus? Most of the unfaithful I know are not people who deny the existence of God, but are people who over time have simply lost sight of Him. It's amazing how easy it is to go through the routine of life, even going to church, and still rarely think about God.  
What do you think about in your free-thought time? When you're taking a shower, mowing the yard, riding your bike, out for a jog, commuting to work? Every day you have some time just

to think. What do you think about? Whatever it is that occupies your thoughts, it is probably something very close to your heart. Do you think about God? [p. 38]

The focus of our thoughts is important because it's an indicator of the purpose of our lives. We should focus on the bull's eye. Is God in the middle of your target? Jesus of Nazareth never let anyone or anything compete with His allegiance to the LORD God. And He never said, "I'm empty." He never wondered if He were building His life on the wrong foundation. [p.39]

2. **Income.**

There might be no better indicator in modern America of what a person values than what he does with his money. See Mt. 6:21,24b. The Living Bible translates Deut. 14:23 like this, "The purpose of tithing is to teach you always to put God first in your lives." [p. 40]

3. **Relationships.**

Our relationships with other people tell us much about our love for God. See 1Jn. 4:20. All the parts of God's plan are interrelated. Any time we violate our neighbor by lying, any time we hurt our neighbor through injury, murder, or adultery, we've broken the first commandment. [p. 40]

4. **Security.**

The last time you needed some support, the last time you needed something or someone to lean on, where did you turn first? It seems to me we often turn to God last.

Remember in Matthew 6, Jesus said that whether or not we worry is a sign of whether or not we are putting God first. How much do you worry? If you are worried about many things you're having trouble with the throne room in your heart. See Mt. 6:33; (p.41)

5. **Time.**

How a person makes appointments reveals a lot about that person. What do we schedule in; what do we schedule out? If I am to give more to my relationship with God, I have to do it on purpose, so I need to make appointments with God. I schedule time that I'm going to keep totally reserved for Him just like I schedule all the vents I plan that are important to me. [p. 41]

Today's English Version states Col. 1:18 like this; "[Christ] was raised from death, in order that He alone might have the first place in all things." [p. 41]