First UMC of Springboro

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Series: Big 10+

Message: It’s About Relationships

Scripture: Exodus 20:14-15

As we continue in our series on the commandments, the original Big 10+, today we’re looking at the next two commandments: “Do not commit adultery,” and “Do not steal.”

It might seem strange at least at first, to deal with these two commandments together. They seem to be different in their focus. One is about being faithful in relationships, especially in marriage, and one is about not taking things that are not yours.

So often we think of the 10 Commandments as cut and dry. Simple. So easy that we put them in the “I would never do that” box and close the lid.

But therein lies the problem. When we think it is something we would never do, we let our guard down. When we think it’s something we would never do, we don’t work to put safeguards in place to protect us. When we think it’s something we would never do, we haven’t really thought through the temptations and the consequences and so they sneak up on us.

Too often we can see others in the 10 Commandments, but we can’t always see ourselves.

And so, I think, putting these two commandments together and comparing them helps us to think about them in a deeper more personal way.

So where do we find similarities in these two commandments? One is the way that they are carried out. These are both acts that are done in secret, in the dark you might say. They both involve deceptions, lying to others and often to ourselves. They are not something that you are proud to tell everyone about. And when someone asks you, you squirm and are evasive or get into a tangled web of lies.

The problem isn’t in having a relationship with someone or in having a certain item. These are blessings that God gives to us and wants us to enjoy: the love of a life partner, the provisions of food, shelter and clothing. The problem is in the process of acquiring these.

There are ways to go about being in a relationship and there are ways to go about acquiring possessions that are healthy and holy. But there are also ways to go about this that are not, that destroy others and your soul.

Let’s think about football for a minute. You need a team to play football. You can’t play with one player, no matter how good they are. And to play effectively, the team has to work together for the good of the team, listening to the coach. If one or more players are only in it for themselves, always trying to steal the glory, demanding the prime playing positions, only putting in half as much work as others, the entire team suffers. The trust, the passion and dedication of everyone is undermined. It might be cliché but only because it is so true: “There is no I in team.”

Thinking about these commandments, we begin to run into problems when the ‘I’ takes over. When it becomes all about me and what I want and what’s best for me rather than thinking about the good of the team, of our family, our community, all of God’s children.

In both adultery and stealing, I begin to think and care more about what I want in this moment rather than giving any consideration to what the impact will be on others or even myself for the long haul. It’s all about me and the act becomes ok because I want it.

But from the outside we can so clearly see how these choices are harming the team—the marriage partnership based on trust and caring, the children who lose the stability of a united family, the community as some have more and others have less and everyone begins to protect their stuff and taken more than their share so that they can have enough.

When we make these choices, not caring about the well-being of others, putting ourselves first, we are again breaking the first two commandments. We have become our own god, taking for worship of ourselves, not noticing or caring about the path of destruction that follows us.

And we have made the object of our relationship and the material items of this world our idols. As we break these commandments, our soul suffers.

Have you ever noticed how self-centered a person becomes when they are having an affair or are greedily taking more than their share of something? It’s all about them and even in the moments they feel guilty, they often choose to justify it and play the victim rather than confess and repent.

The Greeks have a powerful story that teaches us about the danger of loving ourselves over God, family, and community. Remember the story of Narcissus? He was a hunter known for his good looks and his disdain for those who loved him. As he saw his own reflection in a pool of water, he fell in love with himself. He wouldn’t listen to those who tried to help him and drowned in the very water he saw his reflection in.

The Ten Commandments, especially these two about adultery and stealing warn us that when we worship ourselves by committing adultery and stealing, it destroys our own soul and deeply wounds those who love and trust us. The impact is much further reaching than we can imagine. Trust is undermined. Relationships and security are undermined. We all end up living in anxiety, fear, and selfish consumption.

Our culture is not helping. The more narcissistic we are, the better consumers we are. We grab for ourselves rather than share with others. Our fear and anxiety makes us consume and hoard so that we can have ‘security’ at the expense of others and the cycle continues. Joan Chittister puts it this way, “When life becomes, as it has in the United States, the limitless possession of things, stealing will naturally become a way of life. Only when we cultivate the dimensions of life that have something to do with life itself rather than with wealth can we ever become a truly honest people.”

God calls us to be about “we” rather than “me,” to be more concerned about how my actions impact others than my happiness in this moment.

God calls us to follow his example. He is not a God of selfish pleasures and self-love. No, he is the God we see in Jesus, humbling himself, taking human form, becoming a servant, pouring his life out for the good of all—giving, not taking.

God calls us to be grateful for what we have rather than taking more than our share, or wanting what others have, to be stewards rather than misers, to give rather than take, to share what we have to bless others—the team—those in need, the church, and the community through public resources and good works.

These commandments push us to ask, am I a team player? Am I doing my best to caring for the good of all, sharing what I have? Or do I only think about me and my own good, cheating and stealing and hurting others as I go?

May we be those who follow the commandments and the example of our God in Jesus Christ.