We are back in our Fall sermon series today on the Ten Commandments, looking at these words that Yahweh—the God and King of Israel—gave to the Israelites upon their exodus from Egypt. They were once a people in slavery, and God redeemed them in part to be faithful to a promise that He had made to Abraham, and to create a people that would call on His name.

This is what the Lord wanted to communicate: that He was a God who desired to be in a covenant relationship with them, where He would be faithful to them as their God, and they would be faithful to him and call in *His* Name as His people.

And that reality is hugely important when we look at these commandments. More and more, as the Israelites grew in relationship and shared identity with Yahweh, they were being asked to see Him as a God who would not fit into any of their categories. He was a deliverer God, a provider God, a law-giving God, a covenant-making God, a Father-like God.

And these commandments, although they seem to be mostly about *Israel's* responsibility to Yahweh—that's how they come across—they are actually even more so indicative of who this God is. They reveal how He wants His people to know Him.

Which was essential if Israel was going to fulfill His mission and be a light to the nations. The nations would not care to know Him if Israel wasn't actually representing Him accurately.

So the questions when we approach the commandment for today are the same: What does it reveal about who Yahweh is, and how then should Israel represent Him? **Read Deuteronomy 5:1-18.**

This past week the mid-term elections happened in the States, and all the talk about Democrat versus Republican reminded me of a similar time when I was in college.

For those of you who don't know, I attended a private school in Iowa that is affiliated with the Chrisitan Reformed Church, and I happened to be studying there when the big election was coming up between a very experienced, veteran politician and a fresh-off-the-press, very charismatic politician—namely, John McCain and Barak Obama.

And at the time I was living in an on-campus apartment—a dingy, but cozy apartment—with five other girls. And it felt at the time like the line between red and blue went straight down the middle of our kitchen.

One of the girls—who is still one of my best friends to this day—was adamant that she needed to vote McCain. And another, who I did theatre with, was fiercely committed to—and even put signs on her window—of Obama.

But what I remember most about that time isn't the tension between roommates but the tension *within* one of my other roommates, Becky. Because although she was inclined to vote for Obama, her family was committed to the Republican party.

And I'm not sure how familiar you are with American political allegiances, but if your family votes one way, you run the risk of shaming them if you vote another way. It's probably the only sphere in America where an honor-shame culture seems to exist.

Becky was terrified about what her parents would say. Because for her dad, the biggest issue at the time was taxes. Her parents visited a couple weeks before the election, and I remember her dad sitting at our kitchen table and debating with the Obama-loving roommate about the insanity of high taxes in the country.

That was the key issue for him. Because in his mind, high taxes were bad, so you must vote Republican, and then you've done a service for the country. In other words, this is how to think about the issue; this is how you should act on the issue; and then you've achieved the 'good'.

A + B = C. Simple mathematics, right?

Now, I give you that example not because I want to critique Becky's dad, but because it's exemplary of a pattern that we all fall into. We want to identify an issue based on our own assessment of it, we then assume what the obvious response to that issue should be, and *that* then leads to the good way, the good of society, God's favour, etc.

We've done this, I would argue, with many of the commandments including this one: *"You shall not commit adultery,"* the Lord said to the Israelites.

Let's plug it into the equation. Committing adultery is clearly the issue, because the Lord has stated that His people are not to do it. So adultery is wrong; that's how we should think about it. And so as long as we know it's wrong and don't do it, then we will have God's favour. A + B = C.

Now, that way of thinking isn't wrong. There's a lot of truth to it. Listen to how our beloved Heidelberg Catechism puts it:

"What does the seventh commandment teach us? That God condemns all unchastity, and that therefore we should thoroughly detest it and live decent and chaste lives." This is the issue, this is how we should think about it, and this is how we should behave ourselves.

That is the most logical way to think about it *if we take this commandment at face value.*

However, as we've been discovering each week in this series, these five little words cannot simply be taken at face value. Because the commandments aren't just about behaving one way or the other. Again, it's not that the application is wrong. There's just something significant that's missing.

This is about shared identity, remember? So we need to understand what 'committing adultery' meant within the ancient context and within the context of the covenant.

Where else do we see this word "adultery" in the Biblical narrative?

Interestingly, the first time that it shows up is in Exodus when God first gives these commandments to the people of Israel. So the commandments are where we first see evidence that adultery is an issue. And so how the Israelites behave in light of this problem *is essential* to their life in the land, living under His Name and behaving as His people.

Kind of like how understanding how an engine works is essential to being a mechanic. Or understanding how brain development happens in children is essential to being a teacher. To understand that adultery *was not of Yahweh* was essential to being His people.

There's then a reference to adulterers in Leviticus 20. And then the commandment is re-iterated again here in Deuteronomy 5.

That's it. Beyond this, this verb 'to commit adultery' only ever turns up when it's being used proverbially or—and most importantly—*as a metaphor for Israel's idolatry.*

Remember, Israel made a covenant bond with Yahweh. They were to be committed to His alone. But they weren't. They continuously chased after other gods. And so the Lord uses this concept of committing adultery as a way of explaining Israel's unfaithfulness. The prophet Jeremiah, in particular, grasps onto this metaphor.

Jer. 3:8 – *"I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries."*

Jer. 5:7 – *"Why should I forgive you? Your children have forsaken me and sworn by gods that are not gods. I supplied all their needs, yet they committed adultery…"*

Jer. 7:9 – *"Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and swear by false gods, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, 'We are safe?'…"*

Why would they think that they'd be safe? Because Yahweh had covenanted Himself to them and promised that—like a husband—He would protect them and keep them safe.

Wait. So Yahweh *also* wants to be known as a faithful husband? Yes, but again—not because this has anything to do with Him being male but because the bond that He had with Israel was to be like a marriage where the bride comes under the Name and protection of the husband.

That's how marriage worked in the ancient world. Those were the benefits. Marriage books today talk about the husband being the provider or leader of the home. But in ancient times, marriage was predominantly about protection for women and children *and carrying on the family name.*

For example, if you were a child born out of an adulterous situation, there would be questions about who the father was and therefore questions about your identity. This would cause a lot of problems, especially if there were a lot of adulterous situations.

Israel had come under the Name and protection of *Yahweh*. This is how He wanted them to think about their relationship with Him. And in *response* to this reality, they were tasked with ensuring that actual adultery did not happen in the land that God had given them.

If they were unfaithful—which they were—then it was *His Name* that was dishonored. Because *He* remained faithful.

Now, I'm guessing you've never associated God's faithfulness with this commandment before, but that's what it's all about. That's what *He's* all about. That's what He's in the business of proving to Israel over and over.

This commandment is highlighting the fact that the God who is giving this commandment is a God who *is* faithful and committed to His people. Israel was asked to then respond in obedience and be faithful in *their* covenant obligations *so that* they would mirror *Him*.

So, rather than this being an A + B = C equation, it's more accurately C > A + B. It's a totally different way of thinking. Because rather than focusing on how *we* think about the issue and how *we* should behave regarding the issue so that we gain God's favour, our thoughts and actions instead *flow out of* an understanding of *His* faithfulness. Our thoughts and actions flow from *who He is*.

And I'm going to argue, here, that *this* way of thinking—rather than A+B=C—is essential to living as His people today. Whether we're talking about Scripture or human rights or taxes or who to vote for, *His faithfulness* must govern what we say and do.

Because so much of the hatred and polarization that happens in the world today is because we're governed by the wrong equation.

Let me give you an example.

This past January, Philip Yancey—a well-known Christian author and speaker—initiated an email statement to the media magazine, Christianity Today, admitting to a long-term affair that he had been having for almost a decade.

In the letter he expressed deep remorse, stating that his actions contradicted his faith, his writings, and his beliefs about marriage. And he recognized the great devastation that his behaviour would cause to his readership, many of whom trusted him as a spiritual authority in their lives.

Many people have in fact cancelled him entirely or burned his books because this mistake is just too great. A + B = C, Philip. You knew that this was a problem. You did it anyways. And now you have to deal with the consequences.

If Philip's letter was all that we knew, then that's probably how most of us would be thinking.

However, what's different in this scenario is that his wife of 55 years reworked the equation. Because she also wrote a statement and provided it to Christianity Today.

"I, Janet Yancey, am speaking from a place of trauma and devastation that only people who have lived through betrayal can understand. Yet I made a sacred and binding marriage vow 55½ years ago, and I will not break that promise. I accept and understand that God through Jesus has paid for and forgiven the sins of the world, including Philip's. God grant me the grace to forgive also."

In other words, C > A + B. God's goodness and favour are greater than the issue, and they are greater than Philip's thoughts and actions within it.

Does that statement not mirror the covenant faithfulness of God? Now, I know that not everyone can or should do as Janet has done here. But we have to recognize that her statement here is a completely otherworldly way of thinking.

Because what she's done here, what's reflected in her statement, is the same truth that is reflected in the 7th commandment. That our God is a God who values and embodies covenant commitment, unfailing devotion, and faithfulness.

And no matter *what* happens in our own personal lives, *His* faithfulness remains.

We know this. Because in the book of Hosea, the Lord commands the prophet to marry a 'promiscuous woman' and also to have children with her. Why? Because it reflected Yahweh's relationship with Israel.

So the tone at first is one of judgment. The Lord is obviously not thrilled about Israel's 'adultery.'

But then look at what Hosea says in chapter 3: *"The Lord said to me, 'Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her <u>as the Lord loves the Israelites</u>, though they turn to other gods.'"*

I'm sorry, what? <u>Keep loving her</u>, says the Lord, because *that's who I am.* C > A + B. Love her and keep loving her because that's what I've done.

In other words, God will uphold *His* faithfulness despite how dramatically unfaithful His people are to Him. Now, He's not willing to let them linger in their sinfulness and idolatry—that's very clear. But He will continue to be faithful no matter how often they reject Him.

And who among us doesn't need to hear that today? Because who among us hasn't at some point rejected Him?

Look at what Jesus says in Matthew 5 in His sermon on the mount: *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart,"* (Matt. 5:27-28).

Just think about that for a moment. To be clear, the point that Jesus is making here isn't to highlight male lust towards women—although that's certainly a fair conversation. What He's doing here is leveling the playing field.

Because who among us hasn't committed adultery in our minds and in our hearts? You commit adultery, says Jesus, just by looking at someone lustfully. Which of us hasn't sinned in this area, or objectified a man or a woman in some capacity? It's a rhetorical question; you don't have to put up your hands. But aren't we all just one big group of adulterers, based on this definition?

See, by the time that Jesus came onto the scene, Jewish teachers had developed a tradition where the commandments (and the Law in general) were strict laws that kept you in-or-out of the fold of God's people. Because perfect obedience to the law was needed in order to bring the Spirit of God back to His temple. That's how restoration would happen. A + B = C.

But Jesus takes that logic and flips it around. And He demonstrates this mostly clearly in John 8.

A woman is caught in the act of adultery. She alone is brought before the courts, and the Pharisees bring her to Jesus. *"Teacher,"* they say, *"this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"*

Jesus takes a moment to write something with his finger in the sand—a new equation, perhaps—and then He says to them, *"Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."*

And with faces of disbelief, the crowd slowly begins to disappear until only the women is left standing before Jesus. He asks her, *"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"*

"No one, sir," she says, clearly having no idea who Jesus is. I think she's one of the few—if not the only person—in the gospels to call Jesus 'sir.' She doesn't know who He is. But she soon finds out.

Because then He says to her: *"Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."*

Because C > A + B.

In closing, perhaps you are here today and you're someone who is struggling to accept the mistakes of someone else. Someone who has been unfaithful, who has hurt you or has abandoned you.

Or perhaps you're here today and are holding onto the shame of something that *you've* done. An addiction. Someone you've hurt. A mistake you made long ago or just recently.

I want you to hear this very clearly. You are not defined by your greatest mistake, or your greatest wound. By what you have done, or by what someone has done to you. Because Jesus showed us—in His suffering—how committed our God really is to us, how devoted He is to us, with a love that doesn't for a moment falter or change.

Let *that* faithfulness guide and define all that you think and do. Because nothing else is more transforming or comes close to the faithfulness of our God, to the devotion and fidelity of our God, to the loyalty and steadfastness of our God.

A God who, if you remember, is jealous for you. Who wants to be face-to-face with you.

Although we go by many other names in this life, in God's household it is *Jesus' Name* that we come under. His Name is the name that shields, protects, and identifies us.

There is no shame or mistake so deep that His Name cannot cover. You are safe in His faithfulness.