

"The Decalogue and Following Jesus in the Gospel of Mark."

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Introduction

Basic Assumptions

I am humbled and honored to give this lecture, especially in the wake of the high-quality lectures that we have already heard. These lectures have underscored the unique character of and important role played by the Ten Words. It is these Words alone that God spoke to all Israel from the mountain and inscribed on the two stone tablets kept in the Ark as the basic stipulations of his covenant with his people. Thus, they are fundamental to the account of God's relationship with Israel as narrated in the OT and it is for breach of them that Judah and Israel are sent into exile.

In accord with these earlier lectures, this presentation follows the traditional Reformed numbering of the Ten Words according to which the first four (Exod 20:1–11; Deut 5:6–15) describe obligations toward God and the last six (Exod 20:11–17, Deut 5:16–21) obligations that regulate the communal behavior and interpersonal relationships of the people of God.

This lecture also follows ancient Christian and Jewish tradition that identifies those commandments that describe obligations toward God as the “first table” of the Decalogue and those regulating obligations toward others as the “second table.”¹ That tradition also

¹ Philo, Josephus, and some other ancient Jewish sources included the fifth commandment, the commandment to honor father and mother, in the first table of the Decalogue though Philo also noted its affinity with the second. See Diane Hakala, “Jesus Said ‘Keep the Commandments’ and the Rich Man Asked, ‘Which Ones?’: The Decalogue as a Law Summary in the Story of the Rich Man,” in Craig A. Evans and Jeremiah J. Johnston, eds. *Searching the Scriptures: Studies in Context and Intertextuality* (Bloomsbury, 2015) 171–90, see especially 171–75. In references to the first and second tables throughout this study I include it in the second. In the discussion of Jesus and the rich man below I will address the possibility that it was considered part of the first table in Jesus' time and the implications of that for interpreting Mark 10:17–22.

recognizes the close relationship between the two tables of the Decalogue and the two commandments that Jesus identifies as the greatest commandments. The first and second tables expand, respectively, the command to love God (Deut 6:4–5) and the command to love neighbor (Lev 18:19). In the NT and other ancient sources these two greatest commandments can also be used as a summary of the Decalogue. Furthermore, the New Testament suggests that they articulate principles for the interpretation of the two tables of the Decalogue. Most if not all of the earlier lectures in this series have implicitly or explicitly affirmed these things about the Decalogue. I’ve made them explicit because the antiquity of this understanding of the Decalogue, the way in which Jesus lists the commandments when answering the rich man (10:17–22), and Jesus’ affirmation of the two greatest commandments in 12:28–34, suggest that this perspective on the Decalogue is relevant to understanding its place in Mark’s Gospel.²

The Question of Continuity

The on-going question, however, in the lectures that we have heard, has been the continuing relevance of these Ten Words. By showing the relationship between the Decalogue and Proverbs Michael O’Kelly not only dispelled the long-standing myth that separated Torah from Wisdom, but suggested the continual relevance of the Decalogue. Craig Bartholomew cast a vision of the Decalogue as the basis of the “good neighborhood.” John Witte described the way in which Protestants have seen the Decalogue as

² For this perspective on the Decalogue see Lidija Novakovic, “The Decalogue in the New Testament,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, Wint 2008, volume 35, issue 4): 373–386, especially 377, 386; and Dale C. Allison, Jr., Mark 12:18–31 and the Decalogue,” *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. Craig A. Evans and W. Richard Stegner (Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity 3; Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 104; Sheffield Academic Press): 270–78.

a particular expression of the natural law written by God on the human heart and therefore of universal significance. However, Desmond Alexander, in his lecture on whether the Decalogue was universal or particular, cautioned us about over-emphasizing the continuing relevance of these Ten Words. The Decalogue was part of the Old Covenant that has now been replaced by the New. He referred specifically to the way Hebrews claims that Jeremiah's New Covenant prophecy has been fulfilled by Jesus, thus making the Old Covenant obsolete (Heb 8:6–13).

As we turn to Mark, the continuing relevance of the Decalogue for Jesus and his followers assumes paramount importance. It is fitting therefore, to address the caution raised by Desmond Alexander before considering this Gospel. According to Hebrews the two covenants have the same purpose. The Old failed to achieve that purpose at least in part because of human sinfulness, but the New succeeds because Jesus, the Great High Priest, Son of God, Source of eternal Salvation seated at God's right hand is its *Guarantor*. Furthermore, one of the benefits of the New Covenant is that God will write his laws on the hearts of his people, that is, God will give them obedient hearts shaped by his laws (Heb 10:15–18). If we were to ask the author of Hebrews which laws he was talking about, he would, I believe, give us a blank stare: "Why, the same laws Jeremiah was talking about in his prophecy." Jeremiah's condemnation of Israel for breach of the Decalogue shows that it was these ten commandments that he had in mind. Thus, Jeremiah is saying that under the New Covenant God is going to use these Ten Words to shape his people's hearts.

The Direction of this Study

In a 2022 *Biblica* article Jerome H. Neyrey argued that according to Mark the Decalogue is the basis of Jesus' "legal system" and thus, as the expression of God's will, has continuing relevance for the people of God.³ I am not going to follow Neyrey's method, but his positive presentation of the Decalogue in Mark overlaps with my own thinking. I am grateful that he has highlighted Mark's presentation of Jesus as a teacher and pointed out that aside from the parables of chapter 4 and the Olivet Discourse, much of Jesus' teaching involves issues that relate to the Decalogue.

The most obviously relevant Markan passages are the conflict over the Sabbath in 2:23–3:6; Jesus' affirmation of the fifth commandment in 7:1–13 ; his reformulating the laws of purity in 7:14–23; his dispute with the Pharisees about divorce in 10:1–12; his dialogue with the rich man in 10:17–22; and his answer to the scribe's question about the greatest commandment in 12:28–34. We will reference other passages that provide the necessary context for our study.

Neyrey, like most scholars, is interested in the role that the Decalogue plays in the lives of Jesus' followers. However, the Person of Jesus determines the nature of discipleship. Therefore, we cannot adequately understand the relevance of the Decalogue for Jesus' followers without understanding its significance for Jesus' person. These two closely related themes converge and reach a climax in 10:17–22 when Jesus invites the rich man to follow him. This, then, is the order of our argument. (1) We begin with Mark's description of Jesus as the Lord of the Decalogue. (2) Then we will look at how Jesus' followers fulfill the Decalogue. (3) Then we will see how these two themes reach their climax in Mark 10:17–22. (4) Finally, we will

³ "Mark's 'Legal System': Contributions from the Anthropology of Law" (*Biblica*, 103.2, 2022): 227-253

ask if there is some way in which Jesus also fulfills the Decalogue. I write with the conviction that “beloved Son”/“Son of God” is the most comprehensive title for Jesus in Mark and that it encompasses both Jesus’ divine authority and his filial obedience. Jesus’ divine authority dominates the discussion in #1 above of Jesus as the Lord of the Decalogue. His filial obedience comes to the fore in #4 when we ask if he also fulfills the Decalogue.

Jesus the Lord of the Decalogue.

Jesus Speaks with the Authority of the One Who Spoke the Decalogue from the Mountain.

The first thing to note is that in Mark’s Gospel Jesus does not speak *for* God, but *AS* God. In the first of these lectures Craig pointed out so forcefully the importance of the fact that the “Decalogue” consists of the “Ten Words” that God himself spoke from the mountain in an audible voice in the presence of all Israel. When Jesus speaks, the God who spoke the Decalogue speaks. One could argue that Mark is the account of Jesus’ authoritative word.

The scene at the Capernaum Synagogue in 1:21–28 introduces the divine authority of Jesus’s speech. The people are amazed by the authority of his teaching because it is qualitatively different from the authority of the human teachers (the scribes) to whom they are accustomed. They are also amazed by his ability to cast out an evil spirit with *nothing more than a word*. He did not avail himself of the rituals, incantations, or prayers others used. As Mark’s Gospel progresses it becomes evident that Jesus’ ability to perform mighty deeds by speech alone parallels God’s performative word at

creation. His authoritative teaching parallels the words that God spoke from the mountain.

First, let's observe Jesus' performative word. Throughout Mark's Gospel Jesus continues to do what only God can do by a mere word of command. The scribes are correct in accusing Jesus of speaking as God when he forgives the paralytic's sins. Jesus does not justify his authority to forgive by some general ability to heal. He justifies his ability to effectively *say* "your sins are forgiven" by his ability to effectively *say* "arise, take up your bed, and walk" (2:1–12). As at creation, what God says comes to pass.

Jesus' ability to cast out unclean spirits with a word of command poses a serious problem for the Jerusalem scribes (3:22–30). They know that there are only two beings whom an evil spirit must immediately obey—God and the prince of demons. Since they refuse to acknowledge that Jesus speaks as God, they must make the absurd claim that he is possessed by the ruler of the demons. Thus, their accusation actually attests the divine character of Jesus' speech.

When Jesus calms the storm with a word of command he does what only God can do. No wonder his disciples say, "Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (4:35–41). The deliverance of the Gadarene demoniac is a massive demonstration of the divine character of Jesus' words reminiscent of his power over the chaos of the sea (5:1–20). The uncontrollable demoniac runs and falls down before Jesus. He must answer Jesus' questions and the demons can do no more than beg permission to enter the pigs. The transformation of such a man in this godless environment, along with the destruction of the pigs, emphasizes the divine authority of Jesus' speech. To read this incident as revealing a limitation on Jesus' power is the opposite of Mark's intention. Although Jesus can

use other means when performing his mighty deeds, his word of command is the most common method throughout Mark.

The divine character of Jesus's words used to cast out evil spirits, forgive sin, heal the sick, and calm the storm underscores the divine character of his teaching. Indeed, Jesus' teaching throughout Mark bears witness to the testimony of the people in the Capernaum synagogue: he taught "as one having authority and not as the scribes" (1:22, NRSVUE). This divine character is evident in the parables with which he addresses the crowds in chapter 4, the way in which he defeats his foes in chapter 12, and the prophetic Olivet Discourse in chapter 13.

Jesus Defines the True Nature of Purity.

Before looking at what Jesus says in relation to the Decalogue or the various commandments that it contains, it will be helpful to look at the authority evidenced by his declaring all foods clean in 7:14–23. The food regulations were not a part of the Decalogue, but they *were* a part of the Mosaic Law.⁴ Thus this declaration is clearly an exercise in divine authority consistent with Jesus' other actions. As we shall see, it also helps to clarify Jesus' understanding of the Decalogue.

Before going further, we must address the objections of several scholars, including Joshua Stratham and Matthew Thiessen, who contend that Jesus did not reject the Mosaic food laws. Stratham glosses Mark 7:19b, as "Jesus declares all [*kosher*] foods clean [*whether eaten with washed hands or not*]."⁵ What Jesus says refers

⁴ Neyrey, 233, 244, fails to see that, though eating with unwashed hands was only a matter of tradition, the food laws, which, according to Mark, Jesus declares invalid, were part of the Mosaic Law.

⁵ Joshua Strahan, "Did Jesus Nullify the Torah and Declare Nonkosher Foods Clean? Toward a Better Reading of Mark 7:19b" (*BBR*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2023): 174. See also Matthew Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death: The Gospels' Portrayal of Ritual Impurity Within First-Century Judaism* (Baker, 2020), 187–95.

only to food eaten with unwashed hands forbidden by scribal tradition, and not to the foods forbidden by the Torah.⁶ On the basis of its supposed Semitic background those who take this position often gloss Jesus' earlier statement in 7:15 like this: "It is not so much what goes into a person but primarily what comes out of a person that truly defiles."

In response, it is correct to affirm that Jesus was an observant Jew who regularly ate kosher food, attended the synagogue, and followed other Jewish religious practices.⁷ Yet by recording Jesus' statement that "no one puts new wine into old wineskins" (2:22) Mark has already indicated that Jesus is going to stand out from other Jews and that his actions and teaching cannot be understood simply in traditional terms. What other Jew forgave sins, ate with tax collectors and sinners, or claimed to be the Lord of the Sabbath? Was the food in Levi's house kosher? Nor should we expect, as those who affirm the above position do, that Jesus' conflicts with the Pharisees would always reflect the normal way of scribal debate. We already know that "he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes" (1:22). Indeed, his claim to forgive sin and be Lord of the Sabbath did not fit the mold of scribal discourse.

Just because this passage begins with a scribal question about the tradition of hand washing does not prevent Jesus from using the

⁶ Matthew Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death: The Gospels' Portrayal of Ritual Impurity Within First-Century Judaism* (Baker, 2020), 187–95.

⁷ Thiessen, 187–95, has not convinced me that Jesus embraced the laws of purity relating to skin disease, bodily discharge, and corpses. Furthermore, whether or not Jesus ever ate non-kosher food is of little relevance. Mark has no interest in describing Jesus as one concerned with these things. Aside from references to "unclean" spirits, the only other place in Mark that actually uses the language of clean/unclean is Jesus' cleansing of the "leper" in 1:40–45. Mark's early readers may have thought about the issue of purity when the woman with a continual blood-flow touched Jesus (5:25–34) and when Jesus raised Jairus' daughter (5:35–43). Jesus had no fear of touching leper or corpse and no aversion to being touched by the bleeding woman. It is almost as if in his presence the uncleanness did not exist. He did not send the cleansed "leper" to the priests to complete the process of cleansing, but commissioned him as a "witness" to Jesus' person. One can hardly imagine Jesus telling the woman cured of blood flow to go perform the ritual washings as if her cleansing was not complete, or Jairus to cleanse the room where the corps had lain—what corps?

occasion to address the Law itself. Notice that he turns from the Pharisees and calls the people together before saying, ““There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him” (7:15). It is only when he goes into a house that he interprets this saying to his disciples in response to their question in a way that clearly implies the cleanliness of all foods (7:18–19).

Furthermore, what Jesus does is not inconsistent with his condemnation of the Pharisees for using human tradition to excuse disobedience of the fifth commandment. He makes no reference to human tradition nor is he justifying his own disobedience. On his own authority he declares all food clean in order to clarify the meaning of true purity. That is his goal. He continues to eat kosher food and has no interest in mounting a campaign to eat pork. Thus, it is not too surprising that the earliest Christians did not immediately recognize that his statement contrasting what comes out of the heart with what goes into the stomach implied that all foods were clean. When he writes his Gospel, Mark adds the interpretive statement, “Thus he declared all foods clean,” to make this significance clear. Indeed, Mark’s claim that by his statement Jesus declared *all* foods clean would have been gratuitous if it meant only food eaten with unwashed hands.

Only if Jesus spoke as God could he clarify the issue of purity by declaring food designated unclean by the Mosaic law to be clean. Furthermore, his list of the things that come out of the heart and defile a person includes the sins condemned by the last five words of the Decalogue: “theft, murder, adultery, coveting, . . . deceit”(7:21–22). Thus, this statement confirms these five commandments as the will of God and clarifies what God truly desires. The other words in this list—“evil thoughts, sexual immorality, . . . wickedness, . . . envy,

slander, pride, foolishness”—confirm that God is concerned with the moral imperative of the Ten Words sincerely kept from the heart.

Jesus Declares the True Meaning and Significance of the Decalogue

So, what does this one who declared the food laws null and void say about the Ten Words God spoke on the mountain? First, as we would expect, Jesus confirms them as expressing the will of God. He does this in regard to the fourth commandment in the controversy about the Sabbath (2:23–3:6); in regard to the fifth, when exposing the scribes’ circumvention of their responsibility to honor parents (7:1–13); with regard to the seventh when answering the Pharisees question about divorce (10:1–12) and in regard to these and others when conversing with the rich man (10:17–22). His affirmation of the two greatest commandments in Mark 12:28–34 suggests his approval of the Ten.

But Jesus does much more than simply affirm. By his life and teaching he reveals the true intention of the commandments with the authority of the one who gave them. Look at the way he interprets the Sabbath commandment in 2:23–3:6. First, he makes the stupendous claim that he is the Lord of the Sabbath and thus has the right to determine its keeping. Patrick Miller has demonstrated that the purpose of the Sabbath commandment was the liberation of all people from oppressive work so that they could participate in the rest of God. Miller claims that the humane and humanizing fourth commandment is foundational to the love of neighbor advocated by the commands of the second table.⁸ Thus, when Jesus declares that

⁸ Miller, Patrick D.. *The Ten Commandments: Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church*, 123–34.

the Sabbath was made for humanity and not humanity for the Sabbath he is in complete accord with the Old Testament. He sweeps away all rabbinic arguments by affirming the Sabbath as the most appropriate time for doing good rather than harm, for saving life rather than for killing. Then he demonstrates sabbath liberation by restoring the man's dead hand to life.⁹ Sabbath rest comes into its fullness with the coming of the Kingdom of God.

He also rips away the casuistry with which the scribes have circumvented the command to honor parents (7:1–13). By using God's commandment at creation to nullify the Mosaic provision for divorce, Jesus reveals the true scope of the seventh commandment (10:1–12).

Jesus' authoritative interpretation of the Ten Words reaches its climax with the call of the rich man in 10:17–22. As we will see, when speaking with this rich man Jesus identifies himself with the God to whom we owe our ultimate loyalty according to the first table of the Decalogue. Jesus' encounter with the rich man is, as noted above, also crucial for the role of the Decalogue in the lives of Jesus' followers. Thus, we will begin to discuss the way in which Jesus' followers fulfill the Decalogue before discussing Jesus' encounter with the rich man.

Jesus' Followers Fulfill the Decalogue

Any analysis of discipleship in Mark must grapple with the two descriptions of Jesus calling an individual—the call of Levi in 2:13–17 and the call of the rich man in 10:17–22. The first comes in the middle of Jesus' Galilean ministry; the second, just before he

⁹ Miller, 159–60.

completes his final journey to Jerusalem. One must also reckon with 3:35, the key description of a disciple in the first half of Mark: “whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” And with 8:34, the climactic description of discipleship with which Jesus inaugurates his final journey to Jerusalem: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.”

Mark 3:13–6:5 clarifies the meaning of “whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (3:35). Being from Jesus’ hometown, being part of his extended family, even being his physical mother, sister, or brother, is not the mark of discipleship. Disciples are not identified by their physical relationship or social affinity to Jesus. A disciple is one who *does the will of God*. We have seen that Jesus affirms the Ten Words as expressing the will of God, thus this statement in Mark 3:35 suggests that his followers fulfill those words. But how do they fulfill them? The answer to this question begins with the call of Levi.

By not identifying Levi as one of the Twelve, Mark makes Levi’s call the paradigmatic call to discipleship (2:13–17). Jesus’ declaration, “I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (2:17), is the closest thing we have to a Markan purpose statement rivaled only by 10:45, “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” This call teaches not only that Jesus has come for the worst of sinners, but that everyone who comes to him must embrace their sinfulness and need for deliverance. It is only by confession and repentance that his followers become people who do the will of God. Thus, it is clear that Jesus does not want people to follow the Ten Words as the Pharisees do, whom we might describe as “those who think they are righteous” (2:17, NLT) or even as the “so called righteous.” Jesus

deconstructs their “obedience” when discussing Sabbath, Qorban, divorce, and unclean food. Mark would certainly agree with Matthew, “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:20).

So, how do Jesus’ disciples “do the will of God” and fulfill the Ten Words? Mark 1:35 finds its complement in 8:34: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Jesus uses every opportunity during his final journey to Jerusalem as recorded in 8:22–10:52 to help his disciples (and us, Mark’s readers) understand the meaning of this invitation.

Thus, Jesus’ encounter with the rich man in 10:17–22, strategically located near the climax of this final journey, is a powerful picture of what it means to deny oneself, take up one’s cross, and follow Jesus.¹⁰ To miss the strategic significance of the location of this event is to run the risk of misinterpretation. This encounter also completes what Mark has to say about Jesus as the Lord of the Decalogue and raises the question of Jesus’ fulfillment of the Decalogue. Thus, it is to engagement with this passage that we now turn.

Jesus, His Followers, and the Rich Man in 10:17–22

¹⁰ Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem is bounded by the healing of the two blind men (8:22–26; 10:45–52) and falls naturally into four sections—8:27–9:29; 9:30–49; 10:1–31; and 10:32–44. Each section begins with geographical progress (“to the villages of Caesarea Philippi,” 8:27; “through Galilee” and “came to Capernaum,” 9:30, 33; “to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan,” 10:1; “on the road, going up to Jerusalem,” 10:32). The first, second, and fourth begin with a passion prediction (8:27–33; 9:30–32; 10:32–34), because in these parts of the journey Jesus focuses on teaching his disciples about his passion. In the third section, 10:1–31, he travels through Perea and interacts once again with the public. Nevertheless, the interactions he has with the public continue to explain what it means to deny oneself, take up one’s cross, and follow Jesus to the cross. He engages in controversy with the scribes about divorce (10:1–12); blesses the children (10:13–16); and is accosted by the rich man (10:17–31). We might say that the first addresses the issue of sex, the second of status or power, and the third of money. The climactic third also has broad application.

We have not met anyone like this rich man in the first ten chapters of Mark's Gospel. He alone comes to Jesus enthusiastically, on his own initiative, with sincere respect, but without physical need. He alone appears to recognize his spiritual need, for he asks a vital question: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus gives an initial preliminary answer to this man's question in 8:18–19 and a final answer in 8:21. The first preliminary answer has two parts: (1) "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone"; and (2) "you know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'"

The first part of this answer, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone," directs the man's attention to Jesus's identity and may, in light of everything that has transpired in Mark, suggest Jesus' divine authority, but it also directs the man's attention away from his own goodness to the goodness of God—or to the goodness of Jesus—as the source of eternal life.

The second part of Jesus's preliminary answer continues this emphasis by exposing the insufficiency of this man's own goodness. Jesus lists the last six of the Ten Commandments, except that he replaces "you shall not covet" with "do not defraud." The first thing to note is that these six commands constitute the second table of the Decalogue (minus the prohibition against coveting) and indicate what we must do to fulfill our obligation to love our neighbors as ourselves (Exod 20:12–17; Lev 19:18). Jesus has omitted the first four commandments (Exod 20:1–11) that show us how we are to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength in accord with the greatest commandment (Deut 6:4–5). It is possible that the fifth commandment, the commandment to honor parents, was considered part of the first table in Jesus' day. If so, its presence only

underscores the absence of the first four commands that deal directly with obligations toward God.¹¹

The second thing to note is the effect of substituting “do not defraud” for “do not covet.” This substitution means that all the listed commands pertain to *outward, measurable conduct* rather than to heart attitude.¹² Thus it appears that Jesus has intentionally framed this question so that the man can affirm the respectable character of his outward conduct toward his neighbors. By so doing, Jesus has brought him to the place where Jesus can point beyond this outward conduct to the “one thing” that the man lacks.

We turn to the second half of Jesus’ answer in 8:21 to discover the meaning of Jesus’ invitation and the identity of this “one thing.” First, the location of this incident at this place in Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem strongly suggests that what Jesus says to this rich man in 8:21 is a specific application of Jesus call to discipleship first issued in 8:34. Jesus tells this man: “Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” If the man had heeded Jesus’ invitation, he would indeed have fulfilled Jesus’ words: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” The parallel between these statements is confirmed by the way in which both end with “follow me.” Indeed, the “one thing” the man lacks can be nothing other than to “follow” Jesus.

¹¹ This is much more likely than Halaka’s thesis that Jesus includes the fifth commandment at the end of his list a summary of the entire first table (171–90). As noted above, Philo and others included the fifth commandment in the first table. It is also true that exhortations to honor God and to honor parents were often paired together, possibly at times as a summary of the first table of the Decalogue. Halaka, however, produces no example in which the fifth commandment was listed with the commandments of the second table as a summary and representative of the first table. The fifth commandment is listed with the second table because it is part of the second table. That is still the simplest explanation.

¹² There is no indication that Jesus is accusing this man of defrauding because the first-century rich were all corrupt. Everything in this passage paints this man in a very positive light until he turns away in v. 22. The fact that Jesus loves him strongly suggests that Jesus accepts his answer as it was meant—according to normally expected standard he had kept these commandments.

Second, the immediate context suggests that we should also understand this statement in the light of the Decalogue.¹³ Both those who heard Jesus and Mark's first readers would have been familiar with the Ten Words and thus acutely aware of those Jesus omitted. It is obvious that the "one thing" the man lacked is not to be found in the way he has kept the second table of the Decalogue—admirable thought it might have been in the eyes of his peers. It makes good sense of this passage if the "one thing" is the love and devotion to God required by the first table and by the greatest commandment. Thus, Jesus identifies the loyalty due to him with the love and loyalty due to God alone.¹⁴ This is confirmed by the way in which "proper obedience to the First Commandment is [often] expressed [in the OT] as '*following* the LORD' (e.g., Deut. 7:4; 1 Kgs. 9:6)."¹⁵ Furthermore, this identification of following Jesus with the first table and the greatest commandment suggests that Jesus' statement in 8:18, "Why do you call me good, there is no one good but God," is a veiled reference to his divine authority.

"Go, sell all you have and give to the poor" draws our attention almost irresistibly to the way Jesus substituted "do not defraud" for the tenth and final commandment, "you shall not covet." The relationship of this commandment to the first table of the law

¹³ This use of the missing first table is no mere argument from silence. Since both Jesus' audience and Mark's first readers were familiar with the Decalogue, the omission would have been glaringly obvious. Jesus' affirmation of the two greatest commandments in chapter 12 shows that he put supreme value on the loyalty to God taught by the omitted first table of the law. Furthermore, Jesus' words, "Go, sell all you have and give to the poor," recall the tenth commandment's prohibition of covetousness. Thus, this is one occasion when the context invites us to argue from an eloquent silence. Furthermore, Jesus' identification with the God whose love the first table of the Decalogue enjoins is in accord with the way Jesus speaks throughout Mark with the authority of the God who spoke on the mountain.

¹⁴ Novakovic, 386, has argued that "the first three commandments of the Decalogue are never quoted in the New Testament because they had to be qualified in light of Christian worship of Jesus Christ and the conviction that in him God has been fully revealed." This qualification may have begun with the way in which Jesus here identifies himself with the God of the first table of the Decalogue.

¹⁵ Miller, 20–21. See also Deut 13:4; 1 Kgs 18:21, etc. Also, breaking the first commandment is often referred to as "following" or "going after" other gods (Deut. 6:14; 8:19; 11:28; 13:2).

confirms the interpretation given above. Covetousness is the opposite of the loyalty to and love for God enjoined by the first table, and especially by the first commandment—"You shall have no other Gods before me" (Exod 20:3). Paul puts it succinctly in Col 3:5, "covetousness, which is idolatry." In both Matthew and Luke, Jesus concurs, "You cannot serve God and money" (Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13). Thus, Jesus tells the man to give away his wealth because his love of money, that is, his covetousness, was preventing him from following Jesus and giving Jesus the loyalty due to God alone. The first part of denying one's self-centeredness and taking up the cross is to rid oneself of anything that rivals one's love for God.

So, "you shall not covet" enables us to understand why Jesus told the man to dispose of his wealth. However, it also explains why Jesus told the man to give it to the poor. This fact becomes clear when we recall the relationship of the tenth commandment to the other commandments in the second table. Covetousness is an attitude of the heart that leads to the violation of these commandments—people murder, commit adultery, steal, deceive, and dishonor parents because they covet. This rich man has kept these laws in a respectable way admired by his peers. Nevertheless, by instructing him to give his wealth to the poor Jesus is calling him to a self-giving love of neighbor that fulfills the true intention of the second table of the Decalogue. This love for neighbor is the second part of denying oneself and taking up the cross. One cannot follow the one who "came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" without this kind of self-giving love. Thus, if this man had followed Jesus it would have transformed the way in which he fulfilled the second table of the Decalogue.¹⁶

¹⁶ Jon Van Maaren, "The Salvific Significance of Torah and Jesus's Death as a Ransom for Many in Mark's Narrative World," *JMJS* No. 11 (2024): (53–75) 58–59, argues that the "one thing" is love for his neighbor.

Jesus' affirmation of the two greatest commandments (12:28–34) within the context of the Temple conflict in 12:1–37 confirms this understanding of his dialogue with the rich man.¹⁷ First, this conflict begins with the Parable of the Vineyard. In this parable Jesus, the “beloved Son,” identifies himself with God and claims an authority over the “vineyard” that is appropriate for God alone. Second, in answer to the question posed by the Pharisees and the Herodians in 12:13–17, Jesus declares that we should “render to God the things that are Gods.” Then, third, when he answers the scribe’s question in 12:28–34, he tells us what the things are that belong to God—the love for God and neighbor enjoined by the two greatest commandments. This suggests that love for God is to be rendered to the one who identified himself as he “beloved Son” in the Parable of the Vineyard. The way in which Jesus interprets Ps 110:1 in Mark 12:35–37 reinforces the claim to divine authority that Jesus made in the Parable by showing that the Messiah is more than David’s son.

Jesus is accusing the man of defrauding and asks him to give his money to the poor to compensate. Maaren fails to see that Jesus accepts the man’s answer. Jesus accepts his answer that he has not defrauded. There is no indication in the text that this man had taken advantage of the poor. The entire description of him is positive until he turns away from Jesus at the very end. However, as noted above, when we see that the “one thing” is following Jesus we discover that following him transforms the way in which Jesus’ follower fulfills the second table of the Decalogue by loving his neighbor.

¹⁷ Joel Marcus, “Authority to Forgive Sins upon the Earth: The *Shema* in the Gospel of Mark,” *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. Craig A. Evans and W. Richard Stegner (Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity 3; Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 104; Sheffield Academic Press): 196–211, acknowledges that Jesus exercises the authority of God but insists that by affirming the *Shema* in 12:29 Jesus distinguishes himself from the “one” God of Israel. Thus, Marcus argues that Jesus is not actually divine but is modeled on the Son of Man to whom God delegates authority in Daniel 7 and perhaps on other angelic mediators. Of course, the human being Jesus is distinguished from God throughout Mark and indeed throughout the entire New Testament. However, there is nothing in Mark that suggests God has delegated authority to Jesus. As we have argued, Jesus acts throughout Mark in his own person with the authority of God. This is indeed the mystery of Jesus’ identity with which everyone is struggling throughout Mark—how can a human being do these things that only God can do. See note # 12 above.

Does Jesus by His Obedience unto Death Fulfill the Decalogue?

We turn now to the question of whether Jesus' obedience unto death fulfills the Decalogue. However, before addressing this question it will be helpful to summarize what we have discovered so far. According to Mark Jesus speaks with the authority of the God who spoke the Ten Words on the Mountain and identifies himself with the God to whom these words direct our loyalty and love. By this identification and by his teaching Jesus authoritatively reveals the deepest meaning of the Decalogue and its continuing significance for his followers. Those who deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus (8:34) fulfill the Ten Words and the two greatest commandments by truly loving God and neighbor and can thus be said to be those who "do the will of God" (3:35). Thus, Mark's understanding of the significance of the Ten Words for discipleship accords well with Hebrews' understanding of the Ten Words as God's laws that shape the hearts of those who participate in the New Covenant.

If Jesus' disciples fulfill the Decalogue by denying themselves, taking up their cross, and following him, then it seems natural that in some way the one they follow fulfills the Decalogue by embracing his cross. Yet it is difficult to determine the relationship of Jesus' obedience/death to the Ten Words because Mark says very little about the meaning of Jesus' death. Mark is very insistent on the importance and even the necessity of Jesus' death. We know that it is in accord with Scripture and has been repeatedly predicted by Jesus. It is, in fact, the fulfillment of the will of God. His death is foreshadowed almost from the beginning by the charge of blasphemy in 2:7, by Jesus' "bridegroom" statement in 2:20, by the

plot of the Pharisees and Herodians in 3:1–6, and by the charges of the Jerusalem scribes in 3:22. But what is its significance?

Jesus' declaration in 10:45 is the most direct statement about the meaning of his death: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 14:23 is also important: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." To these references we might add Jesus' assertion that he came to call sinners (2:17) and his claim to forgive sin (2:5). Jesus' forgiving the paralytic's sin is his first unambiguous claim to divine authority in a Gospel that marches inexorably toward his death. His forgiving sin is also linked to his death by the charge of blasphemy which becomes the basis for his condemnation.¹⁸

Jesus' direct statement in 10:45 is, of course, the key. The words "ransom" and "many" recall the way in which the OT often speaks of an eschatological new exodus in which God will restore the twelve tribes of Israel.¹⁹ Rikki Watts laid a foundation for this understanding of 10:45 in his influential book *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*.²⁰ Brian Pitre has argued that the dialogue between James, John, and Jesus in 10:35–45 depicts Jesus as the suffering Son of Man/Messiah of Daniel 7 and 9 whose death will bring about this new exodus. New exodus fits well with Jesus' establishing a new covenant at a new Passover (14:23). The "many," then, for whom

¹⁸ There is a parallelism between the role that Jesus' forgiving sins (2:1–12) plays in Jesus' initial Galilean ministry [1:16–3:6 (13)] and the role played by the Parable of the Vineyard (12:1–12) in Jesus' "Jerusalem" ministry. In both Jesus makes a unique claim. Both lead to controversy over Jesus' identity. The first ends in a plot to kill Jesus (3:1–6); the second, in his crucifixion.

¹⁹ Brian Pitre, "The 'Ransom for Many,' the New Exodus, and the End of the Exile: Redemption as the Restoration of All Israel (Mark 10:35–45)," *Letter and Spirit: A Journal of Catholic Biblical Theology* 1 (2005): 56–61. See also the texts listed by Van Maaren, on page 67, and especially in note 43. Note Pitre's comment on page 61: "Perhaps the most direct parallel to Jesus' words in Mark 10:45 is Zechariah's prophecy that those whom the Lord 'shall ransom' from exile shall be 'as many as of old'—that is, as many as in the days of the first exodus (Zech. 10:8)."

²⁰ Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Baker Academic) 2000. See especially 284–87.

Jesus gives himself as a “ransom” and for whom the blood of the Covenant is “poured out” are the sinners whom he came to call and for whom his ransom will provide forgiveness and release. It would, however, be a mistake to limit the “sinners” ransomed by this new exodus to the twelve tribes of Israel. Near the beginning of this Gospel Jesus himself declares that his followers are not defined by family or social ties but by obedience to the will of God (3:35). The first person that Jesus sends to preach is the gentile former demoniac (4:18–20). The only person in Mark’s Gospel who truly grasps the meaning of a parable is the Syrophenician woman (7:24–30). The ultimate witness to Jesus is a Roman centurion (15:39). In fact, the prophets themselves saw this ultimate ingathering as including the salvation of the nations.²¹

Mark nowhere connects the Decalogue with Jesus’ giving himself a “ransom for many” (10:45) or with the “blood of the covenant” (14:23). Since, however, Israel went into exile for breach of the Decalogue, we might suggest that by his death Jesus “ransomed” the “many” from the sins condemned by the Decalogue in order to gather them as the people of God. It is those so ransomed who fulfill the Decalogue by denying themselves, taking up their cross, and following Jesus.

Thank you for allowing me to give this presentation. Preparing such a study always leads to new insight and deeper understanding. I hope this material has stimulated your own thinking as much as it

²¹ Note Pitre’s comment on page 65: “Moreover, this new exodus, unlike the first, will somehow be universal in scope, for it will include the ingathering not only of Israel, but of the Gentile nations (see Isa. 66).” See also Isa 49:6: The Lord says, “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

has mine and has provoked questions that will lead to profitable discussion.