



The Greatest Commandment Pt. 13 - Canvas

Matt Chandler – February 13, 2005

I'm going to tell you some things that I know you're not going to be able to believe and there's going to be all this debate about it. And that's okay. Growing up, I had a little bit of a hyperactivity ADD problem. I had a hard time hanging on to thoughts. And one of the two most consistent rhetorical questions that were asked of me was, "Why are you talking so loudly?" And just in a move of irony, the thing I used to get spanked and grounded for, I now get paid for. It is just impossible for me to whisper. I do not have the makeup for it in my throat, so I just shout. And it got me in a lot of trouble. "PSST! WHAT DID YOU GET FOR NUMBER SEVEN?" I had the inability to do things covertly. And the other thing was, as hard as I tried, I couldn't get my mind around or on any subject for more than three to five seconds. I could not get my mind to hold on to things, to grab on to things, to think through things. It was just an impossibility. To make matters worse, in my day, they didn't medicate that. They beat the mess out of it. There wasn't any, "That kid needs some medicine." It was, "That kid needs some discipline." So I'm getting beat to death half of my life. And there were governmental sanctioned beatings back then too. Teachers could beat you to the praise of His glorious grace. It was just a tough time to walk with the inability to hold thoughts and capture thoughts and walk with thoughts. As I got older, I learned a little bit better how to control it. If you go into my office, you'll see a whole bunch of journals full of prayers. I have a hard time just getting on my knees, switching things off and just praying. Because to this day, I'll float. I'll go from, "God, move in this church...Save...Bring unto Yourself...Glorify Your name" to "How do we structure it?...If this system is in place, how can we get more people into leadership?..." And then I'll be all over there, and I won't be engaging God anymore but doing things on my own, which is the worst possible thing that could happen. And so I write, and if I write, I can hold it.

The Bible is going to say that we all have a place that we dwell in our mind, a place that we live in our mind, these patterns that we live in that cause us to think a certain way. And we've been talking about the redemption of the mind or the transformation of the soul through the mind the last couple of weeks. I want us to continually attack this for the next couple of weeks. And let me tell you why this is such a big deal. Let me tell you the weight that is in this subject this morning and why we've got to pay attention and why we've got to find our mind steadfast. Romans 8 is going to say that you can have your mind in one of two places. The mind that is set on the flesh (the temporal non-eternal things) is hostile towards God and on its way to death. But the mind set on the spirit (eternal things) is on its way to life and peace and intimacy with God. So if what we have here is a mind-set that either leads to death because of hostility towards God or life, peace and intimacy with God, we should probably pay attention pretty well this morning. If that's what is at stake, then there is a lot at stake of where your mind is.

Where are you living in the areas of thought and thinking? Where are you dwelling? Where have you pitched your tent in terms of thought processes and consistency in thinking? Now the Bible is not going to go, “Think on the spirit,” and then just leave that ambiguity for us to fight through. No, in true Pauline form, he’s going to be detailed. And just in case he leaves anything off at the end, there’s going to be this sweeping generalization at the bottom of the list. We’re going to read a list, because not only do we dwell in our mind in terms of the spirit, but there are some really specific things that the Bible is going to tell you to dwell on. Because if you’re not dwelling on these things, you are definitely dwelling on the opposite. And if you’re dwelling on the opposite of these things, you’re going to be in a lot of trouble.

So let’s go to Philippians 4:8, *“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”* Let’s talk about this word “dwell.” If you have a NIV, it’s not personal, but you have a horrible translation of the Bible. This is not the word “think,” this is the word “dwell” or actually “live” or “linger.” So he’s going to say, “Whatever is true, whatever is right, these things that are pure and beautiful, dwell on, live on, pitch your tent on, walk in these things. Don’t hurry by these things. Don’t just go, ‘Okay, that’s true,’ but live in these things, dwell on these things, pitch your tent and make the processes that your mind goes through function in this area, in this realm.”

And then let me show you the things he breaks off. “If anything is true…” Now this takes us back two weeks ago. “Read and pray. Study and pray. Ransack and pray.” Do you remember where we were two weeks ago? We talked about aggressively attacking the Word of God and knowing truth. Because if you do not know truth, if you’re not camped out in truth, if you’re not dwelling on what is true, you will absolutely be seduced by lies. And I believe that we live in probably one of the most dangerous times in evangelical thought of ever because of how much false trash gets pumped through the internet and over the airwaves. And there are a billion preachers ready to tickle your ears and make much of you instead of making much of God. Men, can I talk to you. I’ve been reading a lot of books about the emerging church movement. I figure that if you boil all their stuff down, it’s just a big pile of poop. Let me tell you a couple of reasons why. There is a theology right now gaining popular support called Open Theism. It states that God doesn’t know the future, but that’s not a limit in the knowledge of God because it hasn’t happened. What about all the Old Testament prophecies where He does know the future? In a lot of the emerging church movement, there is a teaching that Christ is not the atonement but rather the example. On your way home today, turn on your radio and you can find at least two sermons that completely contradict each other. In Dallas, there’s probably more. Roll through your radio and you’ll find one man saying this, another man saying this, another man saying this, another man saying this, taking you in all matters to different theological belief systems. Men, whose job is it to protect your family from lies vs. the truth. That’s not my job. In fact, your job is to protect them from me even.

You see, if you don't camp out in the truth, you can't spot the lie, can you? If you don't dwell in the truth, then you will follow what seems right to you. What's the problem with following what seems right? Because there's a way that seems right to man, but in the end, it leads to death. There's a way that seems right, there's a theology that sounds good where in the end everybody's dead. If we're not camped out, if we're not living in truth, then the lie will most definitely seduce us. Because you can grow a church gigantic and you can become a rock star in Christianity by talking about how beautiful and wonderful and positive you are as human beings instead of the sinful, wicked, depraved scoundrels that you and I are. G.K. Chesterton is one of my favorite guys in Christian history. He says, "The depravity of man is the only doctrine we have with thousands of years of evidence." If you don't believe in the depravity of man, pick up a book. Pick up any book and there it is, the depravity of man, how far man will go when left outside the grace of God. If we're not dwelling there, if we're not living there, then we will absolutely be seduced by the lies. Every Tuesday, I meet with seminary guys and a couple other guys there. I can't tell you how often theology discussions start with the phrase, "Well I think..." No, tell me what the Word says. Is that not the authority? The authority isn't what we think; it's what the Word of God says. It's weighty, it's thick. Who protects our sons and daughters from being tossed about like mere infants by wind and unsound doctrine if we're not camped out in the truth, dwelling in the truth, seeking the truth?

He doesn't stop there. He goes on to say, "...*whatever is true, whatever is honorable,...*" The word "honorable" here means "reverent." Whatever is deep, whatever is thick, think upon these things. Live there and dwell there, not only in truth but in the deep things of God, His attributes, what He's like, His character, who He is. Dwell in and live in the deep things of God. Because if you don't, you'll be a forty year old man in a kiddie pool without a kid, and that's disturbing. Has anybody seen a forty-five year old man splashing about and laughing in two feet of water? Don't you call the cops if that happens? Let me promise you this. If you are not dwelling on the deepness of God, you will absolutely get sucked in to the frivolity of our culture. You have no other choice. If we're not going, "What is God like? Why does He respond like this? What do I do with so great of a grace?" and begin to revel in and love and dwell on the deep things of God, we will most definitely be seduced into the frivolity of *American Idol*, the frivolity of sports and all the trivial trash that dominates most of our thinking. I mean, I've never called the TV the "demon box." I've got one. But some of us need to slap some arms on it and some big lips on top and hug it, cuddle it and open-mouth kiss that thing. Because we love our televisions. And it's all under the guise of disengaging. It's always, "After a long day's work..." Translation: "After a long day of doing things that are not centered on Christ, after a long day of thinking through reports and strategic planning instead of the center of the universe, what I want to do is disengage even more." Huh? If we're not dwelling in, living in, fighting for the deep things of God, questions about His character, questions about His behavior, questions about His governance, His might, if we're not wrestling in the thickness that is God, we will almost always be seduced into frivolity. It's why a lot of us didn't know that Abram becomes Abraham, but we know who made it to the second round, right? It's why a lot of us don't know that Ruth was born of a family of incest. Read Genesis 19. Christ's bloodline redeems the most horrific of acts.

But we know who plays second string. We know who plays third string for goodness sake. We even know who we might acquire maybe. We even know the fourteen year old kid we hope to draft eventually. And if we aren't dwelling in, thinking through, walking in, the richness and depth of God, then our mental faculties will be wrapped around frivolity. Where else will they dwell? Where else can they dwell?

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right,..." Now this word "right" here has to do with duty or obligation. It means to think through your God-called roles. And he's saying here that not only should you dwell on truth, not only should you dwell and live on the thick, rich depth of God, but be always thinking, always dwelling on your duties and obligations.

I'm thirty years old, I'm the husband of Lauren, I have a two year old daughter. So for me to dwell on whatever is right means this. What does it mean for me to be a godly husband? What does it mean for me to be a godly father? What does it mean to be a patriarch to my home? What does it mean to be a godly pastor? What does it mean to submit myself to the Father in those roles? Those questions are ever before me, ever on my mind.

Single men, I think the question that should be rolling through your mind right now is, "Who should I marry?" Because if the bar is hotness, you're in trouble. Hotness gets you through day three, and then you'll have that kind of epiphany, that "Oh no!" The missing link in American Christianity is the absence of men. We have gone back to Genesis 3, and we're sitting around watching the thing unravel and saying nothing. You should be asking yourself, "What will it be like raising kids with this woman? Do we line up on what we believe about manhood and womanhood and the glory of Christ?" Ladies, single women: "Who should I marry?"

I'll never forget living in Abilene, Texas. God had exiled me out there for some sin in my life. I was being punished and scourged, and one of my roles was children's church. This woman who had twin boys came into my office one day and sat down. She was trying to confess something but was just sobbing. It was one of those things where she can't talk because she's sobbing so hard. Here was her situation. She was passionately in love with Christ, but she had a husband who just did church. And her boys who were hitting the sixth grade started following daddy. Because children grow up in the world their father creates, and she didn't know what to do. All she could do was pray. Ladies, be careful. Godliness is the bar. Men who understand how to love their daughters, cherish their sons, men who understand what a patriarch is, the head of a family who has taught the things of God to the next generation.

For you married people, it means, "What does it mean for you to be a godly husband? What does it mean for you to be a godly wife? What does it mean to be a godly father? A godly mother?" Right now for me to be a godly father means that God is the God of pink. That's the conversation we had yesterday afternoon. Because of my wife's doing, my daughter is a pink freak. If it's not pink, she doesn't want it. We almost have to dye her food. It's weird. It's pink blankets, pink pacifier, pink shoes. If you were to see her

last night, it was pink shoes, white and pink tights, pink skirt, a different color of pink shirt with a pink bow. It's out of control. It's like somebody threw a pink grenade in my house. So yesterday afternoon, I asked the question, "So, where does pink come from?" "Daddy!" "No, Jesus made pink. He made your pink shoes, your tights, your skirt..." "And my pigtails?" "And your pigtails." That's right, Jesus made pink. And that's what it looks like for my two year old right now. Because "whatever is right" is for everything that she identifies as lovely, I show her God's connection to. I'm not the morality police. I always want to clarify there. It's not, "God doesn't like this and He doesn't like that if you're not careful, but His grace will cover you." It's not that. No, God's the God of pink, He's the God of your shoes and He's the God of babies. That's what it means to be a godly father in our house right now.

To not dwell on these things means that you are not thinking through and engaging the most important part of your purpose on earth, and there will be a day of regret. I think for all of us, there's days of regret. I don't think anyone plays it in such a way that they look back and go, "100% Nailed it." I think everybody looks back and goes, "Ah, dang it. We missed it there." That's why grace is so lovely, isn't it? That's why grace is so perfect and beautiful. Because we can look back and go, "Ah, grace." But oh to wake up at 60 and find out that that marriage that has been so life-sucking and painful could have been so beautiful. Oh that we would dwell on what is right and not ignore the purpose of our existence.

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure,..." Purity is a hard one in this generation, isn't it? I live north of the bridge, and when I get in my car, I head down to the debacle that is FM 407/I-35. It looks like they just took a bunch of concrete in a dump truck and threw it out there, threw up some orange cones and hope you figure it out. As I go through that loop and turn north up I-35E, there is a giant picture of a woman in her bra and panties laying next to a pool. I mean, I'm not surfing the net, I don't have any magazines coming to my house. I've got a gigantic billboard up there wooing to me. Purity is a tough one. Our culture is overtly sensual and beckons constantly and consistently to the male mind and the female mind. The Bible is saying here, "...whatever is pure..." that there should be this recoiling away from all that is perverse and wicked.

I love the imagination. I could play with a stick outside for six hours. I'm not talking about when I was a child; I'm talking about this last weekend at the small group leader's retreat. I love the imagination. I love that God gave it to us. It, like every other part of your being, can be used for righteousness or unrighteousness. Just like your eyes, your hands or every other part of your makeup, it can be used for righteousness or unrighteousness. Let me tell you what you can't do. You can't turn it off. That's the myth. The myth is, "Oh, I'm struggling with lust." "Just shut it off." Who's learned to do that, and are you alive if you shut down your brain? No, I say when that stuff hits, you imagine even harder. You don't shut off the imagination; you make it work even harder.

I always tell our guys in Celebrate Recovery who are struggling with this issue (even some ladies) that in my own mind, when old thoughts or old ways of living or things I've seen in the past try to play into my mind, I don't try to stop imagining, but I try to start imagining as hard as I can, with as much detail as I can, the crucifixion of Christ. I think about Him screaming in agony as they beat the flesh off His back and drove nails through His hands and His feet. Do you want to hear something amazing? Lust and the crucifixion don't like to hang out together. So we don't shut off the imagination; we use it for righteousness. We use it to grow in the understanding of the sacrifice that purchased the grace that you and I sit so beautifully under. "Whatever is pure, think on these things."

Now once again, men, there is much more at stake on this issue than most of us are thinking through. This is no guilty pleasure. Probably 80% of all the young men that we deal with who have sexual addictions and issues got them directly from their father. Now there are the weird ones who just out of nowhere stumble onto something, but the majority of them inherited it from their father. Not only that, but there are going to be some peculiar things that creep into your life via your daughter if you have been looking at 18-23 year old naked women for a long period of time. You're going to get older, but 18-23 year olds are going to stay the same age. And before you know it, you're fifty, your daughter is eighteen and her friends are sexually attractive or rather your daughter is. And if you don't think sin will take you that far, I'll encourage you to read Genesis 19. I know this is weighty, thick stuff. Men, if you feel trapped, grab any one of the Celebrate Recovery bulletins on your way out. This is a venue in which you can really come and be safe with a bunch of people who have struggled with similar things. It's a place that will help you get to the heart of the matter. Because lust isn't the heart; there's a deeper issue. Or you can roll the dice with the future of your family and hope you don't crap out. I'm a risk taker by nature, but I'm not rolling the dice with my girls.

"...whatever is pure, whatever is lovely..." This is what we were talking about just a minute ago. Everybody sees what is lovely and beautiful in different places. And the Bible is going to say, "Find the fingerprint of God on all that is. Whatever you see that is lovely that stirs your soul, that you find beautiful, praise God, the Author of that thing, the Creator of that thing and dwell on how spectacular and mighty God is.

I was flying back from Seattle earlier this week on the red eye. We could look out the window about an hour after takeoff and see the sun rising in front of us, and behind us we could still see stars. It was amazing. I wanted to dwell there. How mighty, how unreal, how powerful, how gorgeous is our beautiful and powerful God in heaven who could create speckles of light in darkness and this burning inferno to light the earth? How spectacular He is that we would see what is beauty and what is love and find the fingerprint of God in those things and dwell on those things? So listen, don't take this to its immediate conclusion, but it's not your wife who deserves praise for how pretty her eyes are. Now tomorrow is Valentine's Day. Don't go putting that into action tomorrow. No, you can say, "Oh, what beautiful eyes," but she didn't think that up. She didn't go, "I'm going to be lovely." No, it was God who formed, who shaped, who decided color, who put things together. It's God who deserves praise tomorrow on Valentine's Day.

It's God who deserves the glory and honor for the loveliness of your spouse or friend. It's not theirs alone. Blue is His, blonde is His, black is His, fair skin is His, black skin is His. "It's lovely, thank You." Whatever is lovely, think on these things.

So Paul, who has been so specific, is going to throw out here at the end, "...*whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.*" Now let me tell you why lovely, good repute, excellent and praiseworthy are so important for us to think on and dwell on. If you don't think on what is lovely and what is mighty, then your mind will drift and camp out in a place that is filled with fear and worst case scenarios. I play through in my mind my daughter's husband and her wedding day. I think about that punk kid and I have thought about my responsibility. Do you know why the father walks down with the bride and hands her off? Because it is his God-given responsibility to be the romance, the love, the protection, the speaker of truth and love into her life and then he hands her off. And I've thought about, "Okay, let me stay the course. Let me date my daughter, kiss my daughter, cuddle with my daughter and love my daughter. So when that punk fifteen year old rolls around, she knows what manhood is and what an imposter looks like. Find me faithful." And I dwell on that. I dwell on what a beautiful day that's going to be. I dwell on what it might be like to be a grandparent and pump that kid full of candy and have no recourse for what happens the rest of the evening. I've got a two year old, and I'm already looking forward to my day. I'm already storing up candy. I think about those things. And listen, everybody in this room either thinks this way or you're the worst case scenario types. If your mind is not dwelling on what is lovely, you will create these horrific tragedies that do not exist and dwell there. And the weight of that fear will crush your life. Instead of going, "Ah, my girl marries a godly man who loves her like Christ loved the church. And they'll have babies and teach them the things of God," instead of being there, we're thinking, "What if they die? What happens if they get sick?" And fear begins to dominate the heart and the mind. Do you know people who dwell there? Yeah, fear dominates and overcomes. Dwelling on what is lovely and of good repute, whatever is excellent and praiseworthy, if you begin to think on those things, it begins to combat the fear.

And then he's going to move on in the next verse and say this isn't just a mere mental exercise either. Look at verse 9, "*The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*" So we dwell, live and camp in the truth, the depth and the rightness, we live in what is lovely and pure and then we practice those things. It's not just a mere mental exercise, but as we think through what it means to be a godly father, what it means to be a godly husband, what it means to be a godly wife, we then begin to apply them.

Do you know what else comes out of minds that have begun to dwell on the things of God like this? There was a time in history where the church of Jesus Christ set the bar in terms of the arts. Has anyone heard of a young fellow named J.S. Bach? A fellow named Michelangelo? They set the bar in terms of art, fiction, playwright and sculpting. They set the bar. Do you know what's horrible about us? That seems to be all but gone out of Christianity. And instead, we steal from the world, tweak it and make it ours. "Tommy Hellfighter...Standing in the Gap...Abreadcrumb & Fish..." Don't we? Don't

we go, “Oh, this has been so successful in the world, so let’s take it, tweak it and claim it for Christ?” Who should be a better wordsmith than the one who knows deeply the Author of communication? Who should be a better understander of colors, depth and pictures than the one who intimately knows and has thought through and has dwelled upon the perfections of the Center of the Universe? Who should play better music and write deeper love songs than the ones who intimately know the Creator of sex, love, relationships, goodness, all that is? Who should write better acts of fiction than the one who intimately knows the writer of the greatest drama in the universe? But I think that births out of dwelling...not attending church. That comes out of dwelling . What is true, what is right, what is honorable, what is lovely, what is pure, what is praiseworthy, what is excellent, we dwell in those things, and then we can communicate better what we’ve seen.

Can I tell you why I love this text? The reason I love this is because you don’t have to do a lot of thinking. You should be able to answer these questions right now. I don’t think you have to go and meditate for a couple of hours to answer where your tent is pitched. I don’t think it’s complex. I think I can ask the question, and you should immediately be able to answer it. Are you dwelling, have you pitched your tent beside the river of truth? Are you in the Word of God? Are you seeking out the character of God? Are you studying, reading, reflecting, thinking, teaching, talking, working through truth or are you not? You should be able to answer right now. You don’t have to go out and go, “Oh, let me ponder that.” You should know right now. Where are you camped? It says, “Whatever is reverent, whatever is deep, whatever is thick about God,” are you camped out there? You should be able to do it right now and go, “I think about the deep things of God. I dwell on God. What is He like? Do I please Him? What did the cross purchase for me? What is grace? I think about those things. I fight about those things.” Or are you completely indifferent? Right now, in your seat, as an individual, you should be able to know whether you are chasing the deep realities of this universe or if you are caught in the frivolities of it. If you know more about some sports team than you know about the character of God, you have been sucked into the frivolity of our age. There’s no ambiguity to this text. You don’t need to look up any Greek words. It’s as simple as taking your life and laying it up against the Word of God, seeing where you fall and then repenting or deciding to walk on in your sin. Keep in mind what’s at stake. Hostility and death or, as this text says, life and peace. The war for the heart starts in the mind. Where are you camped? Where are you living? Where are you lingering?

Let’s pray, “Father, I thank You so much for these men and these women. Help us love the truth, God. Let us hunger for it like a man dying of starvation. Let us see what is lovely and dwell on it. I pray that You take us to deeper waters. I pray specifically for young men and young women who have purity issues. I pray for older men and women who have purity issues. Father, may we see that enemy for what it is and what it might cost us, and may we repent and confess whenever we have to in order to find ourselves under the waterfall of Your grace. You’re so good and so beautiful. Help us see that and revel in that. I pray that we might think deeply about the kind of thinking that is required for transformation. And I pray that we might find our hearts being transformed by You. It’s for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen.”